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Opening extract from

The Earthsea Quartet

Written by

Ursula Le Guin

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1. *Warriors in the Mist*

THE island of Gont, a single mountain that lifts its peak a mile above the storm-racked Northeast Sea, is a land famous for wizards. From the towns in its high valleys and the ports on its dark narrow bays many a Gontishman has gone forth to serve the Lords of the Archipelago in their cities as wizard or mage, or, looking for adventure, to wander working magic from isle to isle of all Earthsea.

Of these some say the greatest, and surely the greatest voyager, was the man called Sparrowhawk, who in his day became both dragonlord and Archmage. His life is told of in the *Deed of Ged* and in many songs, but this is a tale of the time before his fame, before the songs were made.

He was born in a lonely village called Ten Alders, high on the mountain at the head of the Northward Vale. Below the village the pastures and ploughlands of the Vale slope downward level below level towards the sea, and other towns lie on the bends of the River Ar; above the village only forest rises ridge behind ridge to the stone and snow of the heights.

The name he bore as a child, Duny, was given him by his mother, and that and his life were all she could give him, for she died before he was a year old. His father, the bronze-smith of the village, was a grim unspeaking man, and since Duny's six brothers were older than he by many years and went one by one from home to farm the land or sail the sea or work as smith in other towns of the Northward Vale, there was no one to bring the child up in tenderness.

He grew wild, a thriving weed, a tall, quick boy, loud and proud and full of temper. With the few other children of the village he herded goats on the steep meadows above the river-springs; and when he was strong enough to push and pull the long bellows-sleeves, his father made him work as smith's boy, at a high cost in blows and whippings.

There was not much work to be got out of Duny. He was always off and away; roaming deep in the forest, swimming in the pools of the River Ar that like all Gontish rivers ran very quick and cold, or climbing by cliff and scarp to the heights above the forest, from which he could see the sea, that broad northern ocean where, past Perregal, no islands are.

A sister of his dead mother lived in the village. She had done what was needful for him as a baby, but she had business of her own and once he could look after himself at all she paid no more heed to him. But one day when the boy was seven years old, untaught and knowing nothing of the arts and powers that are in the world, he heard his aunt crying out words to a goat which had jumped up on to the thatch of a hut and would not come down: but it came jumping when she cried a certain rhyme to it.

Next day herding the longhaired goats on the meadows of High Fall, Duny shouted to them the words he had heard, not knowing their use or meaning or what kind of words they were:

Noth hierth malk man
hiolk han merth han!

He yelled the rhyme aloud, and the goats came to him. They came very quickly, all of them together, not making any sound. They looked at him out of the dark slot in their yellow eyes.

Duny laughed and shouted it out again, the rhyme that gave him power over the goats. They came closer, crowding and pushing round him.

All at once he felt afraid of their thick, ridged horns and their strange eyes and their strange silence. He tried to get free of them and to run away. The goats ran with him keeping in a knot around him, and so they came charging down into the village at last, all the goats going huddled together as if a rope were pulled tight round them, and the boy in the midst of them weeping and bellowing. Villagers ran from their houses to swear at the goats and laugh at the boy. Among them came the boy's aunt, who did not laugh. She said a word to the goats, and the beasts began to bleat and browse and wander, freed from the spell.

'Come with me,' she said to Duny.

She took him into her hut where she lived alone. She let no child enter there usually, and the children feared the place.

It was low and dusky, windowless, fragrant with herbs that hung drying from the crosspole of the roof, mint and moly and thyme, yarrow and rushwash and paramal, kingsfoil, clovenfoot, tansy and bay. There his aunt sat cross-legged by the firepit, and looking sidelong at the boy through the tangles of her black hair she asked him what he had said to the goats, and if he knew what the rhyme was. When she found that he knew nothing, and yet had spellbound the goats to come to him and follow him, then she saw that he must have in him the makings of power.

As her sister's son he had been nothing to her, but now she looked at him with a new eye. She praised him, and told him she might teach him rhymes he would like better, such as the word that makes a snail look out of its shell, or the name that calls a falcon down from the sky.

'Aye, teach me that name!' he said, being clear over the fright the goats had given him, and puffed up with her praise of his cleverness.

The witch said to him, 'You will not ever tell that word to the other children, if I teach it to you.'

'I promise.'

She smiled at his ready ignorance. 'Well and good. But I will bind your promise. Your tongue will be stilled until I choose to unbind it, and even then, though you can speak, you will not be able to speak the word I teach you where another person can hear it. We must keep the secrets of our craft.'

'Good,' said the boy, for he had no wish to tell the secret to his playmates, liking to know and do what they knew not and could not.

He sat still while his aunt bound back her uncombed hair, and knotted the belt of her dress, and again sat cross-legged throwing handfuls of leaves into the firepit, so that a smoke spread and filled the darkness of the hut. She began to sing. Her voice changed sometimes to low or high as if another voice sang through her, and the

singing went on and on until the boy did not know if he waked or slept, and all the while the witch's old black dog that never barked sat by him with eyes red from the smoke. Then the witch spoke to Duny in a tongue he did not understand, and made him say with her certain rhymes and words until the enchantment came on him and held him still.

'Speak!' she said to test the spell.

The boy could not speak, but he laughed.

Then his aunt was a little afraid of his strength, for this was as strong a spell as she knew how to weave: she had tried not only to gain control of his speech and silence, but to bind him at the same time to her service in the craft of sorcery. Yet even as the spell bound him, he had laughed. She said nothing. She threw clear water on the fire till the smoke cleared away, and gave the boy water to drink, and when the air was clear and he could speak again she taught him the true name of the falcon, to which the falcon must come.

This was Duny's first step on the way he was to follow all his life, the way of magery, the way that led him at last to hunt a shadow over land and sea to the lightless coasts of death's kingdom. But in those first steps along the way, it seemed a broad, bright road.

When he found that the wild falcons stooped down to him from the wind when he summoned them by name, lighting with a thunder of wings on his wrist like the hunting-birds of a prince, then he hungered to know more such names and came to his aunt begging to learn the name of the sparrowhawk and the osprey and the eagle. To earn the words of power he did all the witch asked of him and learned of her all she taught, though not all of it was pleasant to do or know.

There is a saying on Gont, *Weak as woman's magic*, and there is another saying, *Wicked as woman's magic*. Now the witch of Ten Alders was no black sorceress, nor did she ever meddle with the high arts of traffic with Old Powers; but being an ignorant woman among ignorant folk, she often used her crafts to foolish and dubious ends. She knew nothing of the Balance and the Pattern which the true wizard knows and serves, and which keep him from

using his spells unless real need demands. She had a spell for every circumstance, and was forever weaving charms. Much of her lore was mere rubbish and humbug, nor did she know the true spells from the false. She knew many curses, and was better at causing sickness, perhaps, than at curing it. Like any village witch she could brew up a love-potion, but there were other, uglier brews she made to serve men's jealousy and hate. Such practices, however, she kept from her young prentice, and as far as she was able she taught him honest craft.

At first all his pleasure in the art-magic was, childlike, the power it gave him over bird and beast, and the knowledge of these. And indeed that pleasure stayed with him all his life. Seeing him in the high pastures often with a bird of prey about him, the other children called him Sparrowhawk, and so he came by the name that he kept in later life as his use-name, when his true-name was not known.

As the witch kept talking of the glory and the riches and the great power over men that a sorcerer could gain, he set himself to learn more useful lore. He was very quick at it. The witch praised him and the children of the village began to fear him, and he himself was sure that very soon he would become great among men. So he went on from word to word and from spell to spell with the witch till he was twelve years old and had learned from her a great part of what she knew: not much, but enough for the witchwife of a small village, and more than enough for a boy of twelve. She had taught him all her lore in herbals and healing, and all she knew of the crafts of finding, binding, mending, unsealing and revealing. What she knew of chanters' tales and the great Deeds she had sung to him, and all the words of the True Speech that she had learned from the sorcerer that taught her, she taught again to Duny. And from weather-workers and wandering jugglers who went from town to town of the Northward Vale and the East Forest he had learned various tricks and pleasantries, spells of Illusion. It was with one of these light spells that he first proved the great power that was in him.

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In those days the Kargad Empire was strong. Those are four great lands that lie between the Northern and the Eastern Reaches: Karego-At, Atuan, Hur-at-Hur, Atnini. The tongue they speak there is not like any spoken in the Archipelago or the other Reaches, and they are a savage people, white-skinned, yellow-haired, and fierce, liking the sight of blood and the smell of burning towns. Last year they had attacked the Torikles and the strong island Torheven, raiding in great force in fleets of red-sailed ships. News of this came north to Gont, but the Lords of Gont were busy with their piracy and paid small heed to the woes of other lands. Then Spevy fell to the Kargs and was looted and laid waste, its people taken as slaves, so that even now it is an isle of ruins. In lust of conquest the Kargs sailed next to Gont, coming in a host, thirty great longships, to East Port. They fought through that town, took it, burned it: leaving their ships under guard at the mouth of the River Ar they went up the Vale wrecking and looting, slaughtering cattle and men. As they went they split into bands, and each of these bands plundered where it chose. Fugitives brought warning to the villages of the heights. Soon the people of Ten Alders saw smoke darken the eastern sky, and that night those who climbed the High Fall looked down on the Vale all hazed and red-streaked with fires where fields ready for harvest had been set ablaze, and orchards burned, the fruit roasting on the blazing boughs, and barns and farmhouses smouldered in ruin.

Some of the villagers fled up the ravines and hid in the forest, and some made ready to fight for their lives, and some did neither but stood about lamenting. The witch was one who fled, hiding alone in a cave up on the Kapperding Scarp and sealing the cave-mouth with spells. Duny's father the bronze-smith was one who stayed, for he would not leave his smelting-pit and forge where he had worked for fifty years. All that night he laboured beating up what ready metal he had there into spearpoints, and others worked with him binding these to the handles of hoes and rakes, there being no time to make sockets and shaft them properly. There had been no weapons in the village but hunting bows and short knives, for the mountain folk of Gont are not warlike; it is not warriors they are famous for, but goat-thieves, sea-pirates, and wizards.

With sunrise came a thick white fog, as on many autumn mornings in the heights of the island. Among their huts and houses down the straggling street of Ten Alders the villagers stood waiting with their hunting bows and new-forged spears, not knowing whether the Kargs might be far off or very near, all silent, all peering into the fog that hid shapes and distances and dangers from their eyes.

With them was Duny. He had worked all night at the forge-bellows, pushing and pulling the two long sleeves of goathide that fed the fire with a blast of air. Now his arms so ached and trembled from that work that he could not hold out the spear he had chosen. He did not see how he could fight or be of any good to himself or the villagers. It rankled at his heart that he should die, spitted on a Kargish lance, while still a boy; that he should go into the dark land without ever having known his own name, his true name as a man. He looked down at his thin arms, wet with cold fogdew, and raged at his weakness, for he knew his strength. There was power in him, if he knew how to use it, and he sought among all the spells he knew for some device that might give him and his companions an advantage, or at least a chance. But need alone is not enough to set power free: there must be knowledge.

The fog was thinning now under the heat of the sun that shone bare above on the peak in a bright sky. As the mists moved and parted in great drifts and smoky wisps, the villagers saw a band of warriors coming up the mountain. They were armoured with bronze helmets and greaves and breast-plates of heavy leather and shields of wood and bronze, and armed with swords and the long Kargish lance. Winding up along the steep bank of the Ar they came in a plumed, clanking, straggling line, near enough already that their white faces could be seen, and the words of their jargon heard as they shouted to one another. In this band of the invading horde there were about a hundred men, which is not many; but in the village were only eighteen men and boys.

Now need called knowledge out: Duny, seeing the fog blow and thin across the path before the Kargs, saw a spell that might avail him. An old weatherworker of the Vale, seeking to win the boy as prentice, had taught him several charms. One of these tricks was called fogweaving, a binding-spell that gathers the mists together

for a while in one place; with it one skilled in illusion can shape the mist into fair ghostly seemings, which last a little and fade away. The boy had no such skill, but his intent was different, and he had the strength to turn the spell to his own ends. Rapidly and aloud he named the places and the boundaries of the village, and then spoke the fogweaving charm, but in among its words he enlaced the words of a spell of concealment, and last he cried the word that set the magic going.

Even as he did so his father coming up behind him struck him hard on the side of the head knocking him right down. 'Be still fool! keep your blattering mouth shut, and hide if you can't fight!'

Duny got to his feet. He could hear the Kargs now at the end of the village, as near as the great yew-tree by the tanner's yard. Their voices were clear, and the clink and creak of their harness and arms, but they could not be seen. The fog had closed and thickened all over the village, greying the light, blurring the world till a man could hardly see his own hands before him.

'I've hidden us all,' Duny said, sullenly, for his head hurt from his father's blow, and the working of the doubled incantation had drained his strength. 'I'll keep up this fog as long as I can. Get the others to lead them up to High Fall.'

The smith stared at his son who stood wraithlike in that weird, dank mist. It took him a minute to see Duny's meaning, but when he did he ran at once, noiselessly, knowing every fence and corner of the village, to find the others and tell them what to do. Now through the grey fog bloomed a blur of red, as the Kargs set fire to the thatch of a house. Still they did not come up into the village, but waited at the lower end till the mist should lift and lay bare their loot and prey.

The tanner, whose house it was that burned, sent a couple of boys skipping right under the Kargs' noses, taunting and yelling and vanishing again like smoke into smoke. Meantime the older men, creeping behind fences and running from house to house, came close on the other side and sent a volley of arrows and spears at the warriors, who stood all in a bunch. One Karg fell writhing

with a spear, still warm from its forging, right through his body. Others were arrow-bitten, and all enraged. They charged forward then to hew down their puny attackers, but they found only the fog about them, full of voices. They followed the voices, stabbing ahead into the mist with their great, plumed, blood-stained lances. Up the length of the street they came shouting, and never knew they had run right through the village, as the empty huts and houses loomed and disappeared again in the writhing grey fog. The villagers ran scattering, most of them keeping well ahead since they knew the ground; but some, boys or old men, were slow. The Kargs stumbling on them drove their lances or hacked with their swords, yelling their war-cry, the names of the White God-brothers of Atuan:

'Wuluah! Atwah!'

Some of the band stopped when they felt the land grow rough underfoot, but others pressed right on, seeking the phantom village, following dim wavering shapes that fled just out of reach before them. All the mist had come alive with these fleeing forms, dodging, flickering, fading on every side. One group of the Kargs chased the wraiths straight to the High Fall, the cliff's edge above the springs of Ar, and the shapes they pursued ran out on to the air and there vanished in thinning mist, while the pursuers fell screaming through fog and sudden sunlight a hundred feet sheer to the shallow pools among the rocks. And those that came behind and did not fall stood at the cliff's edge, listening.

Now dread came into the Kargs' hearts and they began to seek one another, not the villagers, in the uncanny mist. They gathered on the hillside, and yet always there were wraiths and ghost-shapes among them, and other shapes that ran and stabbed from behind with spear or knife and vanished again. The Kargs began to run, all of them, downhill, stumbling, silent, until all at once they ran out from the grey blind mist and saw the river and the ravines below the village all bare and bright in morning sunlight. Then they stopped, gathering together, and looked back. A wall of wavering, writhing grey lay blank across the path, hiding all that lay behind it. Out from it burst two or three stragglers, lunging and

stumbling along, their long lances rocking on their shoulders. Not one Karg looked back more than that once. All went down, in haste, away from the enchanted place.

Farther down the Northward Vale those warriors got their fill of fighting. The towns of East Forest, from Ovark to the coast, had gathered their men and sent them against the invaders of Gont. Band after band they came down from the hills, and that day and the next the Kargs were harried back down to the beaches above East Port, where they found their ships burnt; so they fought with their backs to the sea till every man of them was killed, and the sands of Armouth were brown with blood until the tide came in.

But on that morning in Ten Alders village and up on the High Fall, the dank grey fog had clung a while, and then suddenly it blew and drifted and melted away. This man and that stood up in the windy brightness of the morning, and looked about him wondering. Here lay a dead Karg with yellow hair long, loose, and bloody; there lay the village tanner, killed in battle like a king.

Down in the village the house that had been set afire still blazed. They ran to put the fire out, since their battle had been won. In the street, near the great yew, they found Duny the bronze-smith's son standing by himself, bearing no hurt, but speechless and stupid like one stunned. They were well aware of what he had done, and they led him into his father's house and went calling for the witch to come down out of her cave and heal the lad who had saved their lives and their property, all but four who were killed by the Kargs, and the one house that was burnt.

No weapon-hurt had come to the boy, but he would not speak nor eat nor sleep; he seemed not to hear what was said to him, not to see those who came to see him. There was none in those parts wizard enough to cure what ailed him. His aunt said, 'He has overspent his power,' but she had no art to help him.

While he lay thus dark and dumb, the story of the lad who wove the fog and scared off Kargish swordsmen with a mess of shadows was told all down the Northward Vale, and in the East Forest, and high on the mountain and over the mountain even in the Great Port of Gont. So it happened that on the fifth day after

the slaughter at Armouth a stranger came into Ten Alders village, a man neither young nor old, who came cloaked and bareheaded lightly carrying a great staff of oak that was as tall as himself. He did not come up the course of the Ar like most people, but down, out of the forests of the higher mountainside. The village goodwives saw well that he was a wizard, and when he told them that he was a healall, they brought him straight to the smith's house. Sending away all but the boy's father and aunt the stranger stooped above the cot where Duny lay staring into the dark, and did no more than lay his hand on the boy's forehead and touch his lips once.

Duny sat up slowly looking about him. In a little while he spoke, and strength and hunger began to come back into him. They gave him a little to drink and eat, and he lay back again, always watching the stranger with dark wondering eyes.

The bronze-smith said to that stranger, 'You are no common man.'

'Nor will this boy be a common man,' the other answered. 'The tale of his deed with the fog has come to Re Albi, which is my home. I have come here to give him his name, if as they say he has not yet made his passage into manhood.'

The witch whispered to the smith, 'Brother, this must surely be the Mage of Re Albi, Ogion the Silent, that one who tamed the earthquake –'

'Sir,' said the bronze-smith who would not let a great name daunt him, 'my son will be thirteen this month coming, but we thought to hold his Passage at the feast of Sunreturn this winter.'

'Let him be named as soon as may be,' said the mage, 'for he needs his name. I have other business now, but I will come back here for the day you choose. If you see fit I will take him with me when I go thereafter. And if he prove apt I will keep him as prentice, or see to it that he is schooled as fits his gifts. For to keep dark the mind of the mageborn, that is a dangerous thing.'

Very gently Ogion spoke, but with certainty, and even the hard-headed smith assented to all he said.

On the day the boy was thirteen years old, a day in the early splendour of autumn while still the bright leaves are on the trees, Ogion returned to the village from his rovings over Gont Moun-

tain, and the ceremony of Passage was held. The witch took from the boy his name Duny, the name his mother had given him as a baby. Nameless and naked he walked into the cold springs of the Ar where it rises among rocks under the high cliffs. As he entered the water clouds crossed the sun's face and great shadows slid and mingled over the water of the pool about him. He crossed to the far bank, shuddering with cold but walking slow and erect as he should through that icy, living water. As he came to the bank Ogion, waiting, reached out his hand and clasping the boy's arm whispered to him his true name: Ged.

Thus was he given his name by one very wise in the uses of power.

The feasting was far from over, and all the villagers were making merry with plenty to eat and beer to drink and a chanter from down the Vale singing the *Deed of the Dragonlords*, when the mage spoke in his quiet voice to Ged: 'Come, lad. Bid your people farewell and leave them feasting.'

Ged fetched what he had to carry, which was the good bronze knife his father had forged for him, and a leather coat the tanner's widow had cut down to his size, and an alder-stick his aunt had becharmed for him: that was all he owned beside his shirt and breeches. He said farewell to them, all the people he knew in all the world, and looked about once at the village that straggled and huddled there under the cliffs, over the river-springs. Then he set off with his new master through the steep slanting forests of the mountain isle, through the leaves and shadows of bright autumn.

2. *The Shadow*

GED had thought that as the prentice of a great mage he would enter at once into the mystery and mastery of power. He would understand the language of the beasts and the speech of the leaves of the forest, he thought, and sway the winds with his word, and learn to change himself into any shape he wished. Maybe he and his master would run together as stags, or fly to Re Albi over the mountain on the wings of eagles.

But it was not so at all. They wandered, first down into the Vale and then gradually south and westward around the mountain, given lodging in little villages or spending the night out in the wilderness, like poor journeyman-sorcerers, or tinkers, or beggars. They entered no mysterious domain. Nothing happened. The mage's oaken staff that Ged had watched at first with eager dread was nothing but a stout staff to walk with. Three days went by and four days went by and still Ogion had not spoken a single charm in Ged's hearing, and had not taught him a single name or rune or spell.

Though a very silent man he was so mild and calm that Ged soon lost his awe of him, and in a day or two more he was bold enough to ask his master, 'When will my apprenticeship begin, Sir?'

'It has begun,' said Ogion.

There was a silence, as if Ged was keeping back something he had to say. Then he said it: 'But I haven't learned anything yet!'

'Because you haven't found out what I am teaching,' replied the mage, going on at his steady, long-legged pace along their road, which was the high pass between Ovark and Wiss. He was a dark man, like most Gontishmen, dark copper-brown; grey-haired, lean and tough as a hound, tireless. He spoke seldom, ate little, slept less. His eyes and ears were very keen, and often there was a listening look on his face.

Ged did not answer him. It is not always easy to answer a mage.

'You want to work spells,' Ogion said presently, striding along. 'You've drawn too much water from that well. Wait. Manhood is patience. Mastery is nine times patience. What is that herb by the path?'

'Strawflower.'

'And that?'

'I don't know.'

'Fourfoil, they call it.' Ogion had halted, the copper-shod foot of his staff near the little weed, so Ged looked closely at the plant, and plucked a dry seedpod from it, and finally asked, since Ogion said nothing more, 'What is its use, Master?'

'None I know of.'

Ged kept the seedpod a while as they went on, then tossed it away.

'When you know the fourfoil in all its seasons root and leaf and flower, by sight and scent and seed, then you may learn its true name, knowing its being: which is more than its use. What, after all, is the use of you? or of myself? Is Gont Mountain useful, or the Open Sea?' Ogion went on a halfmile or so, and said at last, 'To hear, one must be silent.'

The boy frowned. He did not like to be made to feel a fool. He kept back his resentment and impatience, and tried to be obedient, so that Ogion would consent at last to teach him something. For he hungered to learn, to gain power. It began to seem to him, though, that he could have learned more walking with any herb-gatherer or village sorcerer, and as they went round the mountain westward into the lonely forests past Wiss he wondered more and more what was the greatness and the magic of this great Mage Ogion. For when it rained Ogion would not even say the spell that every weatherworker knows, to send the storm aside. In a land where sorcerers come thick, like Gont or the Enlades, you may see a rain-cloud blundering slowly from side to side and place to place as one spell shunts it on to the next, till at last it is buffeted out over the sea where it can rain in peace. But Ogion let the rain fall where it would. He found a thick fir-tree and lay down beneath it. Ged

crouched among the dripping bushes wet and sullen, and wondered what was the good of having power if you were too wise to use it, and wished he had gone as prentice to that old weatherworker of the Vale, where at least he would have slept dry. He did not speak any of his thoughts aloud. He said not a word. His master smiled, and fell asleep in the rain.

Along towards Sunreturn when the first heavy snows began to fall in the heights of Gont they came to Re Albi, Ogion's home. It is a town on the edge of the high rocks of Overfell, and its name means Falcon's Nest. From it one can see far below the deep harbour and the towers of the Port of Gont, and the ships that go in and out the gate of the bay between the Armed Cliffs, and far to the west across the sea one may make out the blue hills of Oranéa, easternmost of the Inward Isles.

The mage's house, though large and soundly built of timber, with hearth and chimney rather than a firepit, was like the huts of Ten Alders village: all one room, with a goatshed built on to one side. There was a kind of alcove in the west wall of the room, where Ged slept. Over his pallet was a window that looked out on the sea, but most often the shutters must be closed against the great winds that blew all winter from the west and north. In the dark warmth of that house Ged spent the winter, hearing the rush of rain and wind outside or the silence of snowfall, learning to write and read the Six Hundred Runes of Hardic. Very glad he was to learn this lore, for without it no mere rote-learning of charms and spells will give a man true mastery. The Hardic tongue of the Archipelago, though it has no more magic power in it than any other tongue of men, has its roots in the Old Speech, that language in which things are named with their true names: and the way to the understanding of this speech starts with the Runes that were written when the islands of the world first were raised up from the sea.

Still no marvels and enchantments occurred. All winter there was nothing but the heavy pages of the Runebook turning, and the rain and the snow falling: and Ogion would come in from roaming the icy forests or from looking after his goats, and stamp the snow off his boots, and sit down in silence by the fire. And the

mage's long, listening silence would fill the room, and fill Ged's mind, until sometimes it seemed he had forgotten what words sounded like: and when Ogion spoke at last it was as if he had, just then and for the first time, invented speech. Yet the words he spoke were no great matters but had to do only with simple things, bread and water and weather and sleep.

As the spring came on, quick and bright, Ogion often sent Ged forth to gather herbs on the meadows above Re Albi, and told him to take as long as he liked about it, giving him freedom to spend all day wandering by rainfilled streams and through the woods and over wet green fields in the sun. Ged went with delight each time, and stayed out till night; but he did not entirely forget the herbs. He kept an eye out for them, while he climbed and roamed and waded and explored, and always brought some home. He came on a meadow between two streams where the flower called white hallows grew thick, and as these blossoms are rare and prized by healers, he came back again next day. Someone else was there before him, a girl, whom he knew by sight as the daughter of the old Lord of Re Albi. He would not have spoken to her, but she came to him and greeted him pleasantly: 'I know you, you are the Sparrowhawk, our mage's adept. I wish you would tell me about sorcery!'

He looked down at the white flowers that brushed against her white skirt, and at first he was shy and glum and hardly answered. But she went on talking, in an open, careless, wilful way that little by little set him at ease. She was a tall girl of about his own age, very sallow, almost white-skinned; her mother, they said in the village, was from Osskil or some such foreign land. Her hair fell long and straight like a fall of black water. Ged thought her very ugly, but he had a desire to please her, to win her admiration, that grew on him as they talked. She made him tell all the story of his tricks with the mist that had defeated the Kargish warriors, and she listened as if she wondered and admired, but she spoke no praise. And soon she was off on another tack: 'Can you call the birds and beasts to you?' she asked.

'I can,' said Ged.

He knew there was a falcon's nest in the cliffs above the meadow,

and he summoned the bird by its name. It came, but it would not light on his wrist, being put off no doubt by the girl's presence. It screamed and struck the air with broad barred wings, and rose up on the wind.

'What do you call that kind of charm, that made the falcon come?'

'A spell of Summoning.'

'Can you call the spirits of the dead to come to you, too?'

He thought she was mocking him with this question, because the falcon had not fully obeyed his summons. He would not let her mock him. 'I might if I chose,' he said in a calm voice.

'Is it not very difficult, very dangerous, to summon a spirit?'

'Difficult, yes. Dangerous?' He shrugged.

This time he was almost certain there was admiration in her eyes.

'Can you make a love-charm?'

'That is no mastery.'

'True,' says she, 'any village witch can do it. Can you do Changing spells? Can you change your own shape, as wizards do, they say?'

Again he was not quite sure that she did not ask the question mockingly, and so again he replied, 'I might if I chose.'

She began to beg him to transform himself into anything he wished – a hawk, a bull, a fire, a tree. He put her off with short secretive words such as his master used, but he did not know how to refuse flatly when she coaxed him; and besides he did not know whether he himself believed his boast, or not. He left her, saying that his master the mage expected him at home, and he did not come back to the meadow the next day. But the day after he came again, saying to himself that he should gather more of the flowers while they bloomed. She was there, and together they waded barefoot in the boggy grass, pulling the heavy white hallow-blooms. The sun of spring shone, and she talked with him as merrily as any goatherd lass of his own village. She asked him again about sorcery, and listened wide-eyed to all he told her, so that he fell to boasting again. Then she asked him if he would not work a Changing spell,

and when he put her off, she looked at him, putting back the black hair from her face, and said, 'Are you afraid to do it?'

'No, I am not afraid.'

She smiled a little disdainfully and said, 'Maybe you are too young.'

That he would not endure. He did not say much, but he resolved that he would prove himself to her. He told her to come again to the meadow tomorrow, if she liked, and so took leave of her, and came back to the house while his master was still out. He went straight to the shelf and took down the two Lore-Books, which Ogion had never yet opened in his presence.

He looked for a spell of self-transformation, but being slow to read the runes yet and understanding little of what he read, he could not find out what he sought. These books were very ancient, Ogion having them from his own master Heleth Farseer, and Heleth from his master the Mage of Perregal, and so back into the times of myth. Small and strange was the writing, overwritten and interlined by many hands, and all those hands were dust now. Yet here and there Ged understood something of what he tried to read, and with the girl's questions and her mockery always in his mind, he stopped on a page that bore a spell of summoning up the spirits of the dead.

As he read it, puzzling out the runes and symbols one by one, a horror came over him. His eyes were fixed, and he could not lift them till he had finished reading all the spell.

Then raising his head he saw it was dark in the house. He had been reading without any light, in the darkness. He could not now make out the runes when he looked down at the book. Yet the horror grew in him, seeming to hold him bound in his chair. He was cold. Looking over his shoulder he saw that something was crouching beside the closed door, a shapeless clot of shadow darker than the darkness. It seemed to reach out towards him, and to whisper, and to call to him in a whisper: but he could not understand the words.

The door was flung wide. A man entered with a white light flaming about him, a great bright figure who spoke aloud, fiercely

and suddenly. The darkness and the whispering ceased and were dispelled.

The horror went out of Ged, but still he was mortally afraid, for it was Ogion the Mage who stood there in the doorway with a brightness all about him, and the oaken staff in his hand burned with a white radiance.

Saying no word the mage came past Ged, and lighted the lamp, and put the books away on their shelf. Then he turned to the boy and said, 'You will never work that spell but in peril of your power and your life. Was it for that spell you opened the books?'

'No, Master,' the boy murmured, and shamefully he told Ogion what he had sought, and why.

'You do not remember what I told you, that that girl's mother, the Lord's wife, is an enchantress?'

Indeed Ogion had once said this, but Ged had not paid much attention, though he knew by now that Ogion never told him anything that he had not good reason to tell him.

'The girl herself is half a witch already. It may be the mother who sent the girl to talk to you. It may be she who opened the book to the page you read. The powers she serves are not the powers I serve: I do not know her will, but I know she does not will me well. Ged, listen to me now. Have you never thought how danger must surround power as shadow does light? This sorcery is not a game we play for pleasure or for praise. Think of this: that every word, every act of our Art is said and is done either for good, or for evil. Before you speak or do you must know the price that is to pay!'

Driven by his shame Ged cried, 'How am I to know these things, when you teach me nothing? Since I lived with you I have done nothing, seen nothing –'

'Now you have seen something,' said the mage. 'By the door, in the darkness, when I came in.'

Ged was silent.

Ogion knelt down and built the fire on the hearth and lit it, for the house was cold. Then still kneeling he said in his quiet voice, 'Ged, my young falcon, you are not bound to me or to my service.

You did not come to me, but I to you. You are very young to make this choice, but I cannot make it for you. If you wish, I will send you to Roke Island, where all high arts are taught. Any craft you undertake to learn you will learn, for your power is great. Greater even than your pride, I hope. I would keep you here with me, for what I have is what you lack, but I will not keep you against your will. Now choose between Re Albi and Roke.'

Ged stood dumb, his heart bewildered. He had come to love this man Ogion who had healed him with a touch, and who had no anger: he loved him, and had not known it until now. He looked at the oaken staff leaning in the chimney-corner, remembering the radiance of it that had burned out evil from the dark, and he yearned to stay with Ogion, to go wandering through the forests with him, long and far, learning how to be silent. Yet other cravings were in him that would not be stilled, the wish for glory, the will to act. Ogion's seemed a long road towards mastery, a slow bypath to follow, when he might go sailing before the seawinds straight to the Inmost Sea, to the Isle of the Wise, where the air was bright with enchantments and the Archmage walked amidst wonders.

'Master,' he said, 'I will go to Roke.'

So a few days later on a sunny morning of spring Ogion strode beside him down the steep road from the Overfell, fifteen miles to the Great Port of Gont. There at the landgate between carven dragons the guards of the City of Gont, seeing the mage, knelt with bared swords and welcomed him. They knew him and did him honour by the Prince's order and their own will, for ten years ago Ogion had saved the city from earthquake that would have shaken the towers of the rich down to the ground and closed the channel of the Armed Cliffs with avalanche. He had spoken to the Mountain of Gont, calming it, and had stilled the trembling precipices of the Overfell as one soothes a frightened beast. Ged had heard some talk of this, and now, wondering to see the armed guardsmen kneel to his quiet master, he remembered it. He glanced up almost in fear at this man who had stopped an earthquake; but Ogion's face was quiet as always.

They went down to the quays, where the Harbourmaster came

hastening to welcome Ogion and asked what service he might do. The mage told him, and at once he named a ship bound for the Inmost Sea aboard which Ged might go as passenger. 'Or they will take him as windbringer,' he said, 'if he has the craft. They have no weatherworker aboard.'

'He has some skill with mist and fog, but none with seawinds,' the mage said, putting his hand lightly on Ged's shoulder. 'Do not try any tricks with the sea and the winds of the sea, Sparrowhawk; you are a landsman still. Harbourmaster, what is the ship's name?'

'*Shadow*, from the Andrades, bound to Hort Town with furs and ivories. A good ship, Master Ogion.'

The mage's face darkened at the name of the ship, but he said, 'So be it. Give this writing to the Warder of the School on Roke, Sparrowhawk. Go with a fair wind. Farewell!'

That was all his parting. He turned away, and went striding up the street away from the quays. Ged stood forlorn and watched his master go.

'Come along, lad,' said the Harbourmaster, and took him down the waterfront to the pier where *Shadow* was making ready to sail.

It might seem strange that on an island fifty miles wide, in a village under cliffs that stare out forever on the sea, a child may grow to manhood never having stepped in a boat or dipped his finger in salt water, but so it is. Farmer, goatherd, cattleherd, hunter or artisan, the landsman looks at the ocean as at a salt unsteady realm that has nothing to do with him at all. The village two days' walk from his village is a foreign land, and the island a day's sail from his island is a mere rumour, misty hills seen across the water, not solid ground like that he walks on.

So to Ged who had never been down from the heights of the mountain, the Port of Gont was an awesome and marvellous place, the great houses and towers of cut stone and waterfront of piers and docks and basins and moorages, the seaport where half a hundred boats and galleys rocked at quayside or lay hauled up and overturned for repairs or stood out at anchor in the roadstead with furled sails and closed oarports, the sailors shouting in strange

dialects and the longshoremen running heavy-laden amongst barrels and boxes and coils of rope and stacks of oars, the bearded merchants in furred robes conversing quietly as they picked their way along the slimy stones above the water, the fishermen unloading their catch, coopers pounding and shipmakers hammering and clam-sellers singing and shipmasters bellowing, and beyond all the silent, shining bay. With eyes and ears and mind bewildered he followed the Harbourmaster to the broad dock where *Shadow* was tied up, and the Harbourmaster brought him to the master of the ship.

With few words spoken the ship's master agreed to take Ged as passenger to Roke, since it was a mage that asked it; and the Harbourmaster left the boy with him. The master of the *Shadow* was a big man, and fat, in a red cloak trimmed with pellawi-fur such as Andradean merchants wear. He never looked at Ged but asked him in a mighty voice, 'Can you work weather, boy?'

'I can.'

'Can you bring the wind?'

He had to say he could not, and with that the master told him to find a place out of the way and stay in it.

The oarsmen were coming aboard now, for the ship was to go out into the roadstead before night fell, and sail with the ebb-tide near dawn. There was no place out of the way, but Ged climbed up as well as he could on to the bundled, lashed, and hide-covered cargo in the stern of the ship, and clinging there watched all that passed. The oarsmen came leaping aboard, sturdy men with great arms, while longshoremen rolled water barrels thundering out the dock and stowed them under the rowers' benches. The well-built ship rode low with her burden, yet danced a little on the lapping shore-waves, ready to be gone. Then the steersman took his place at the right of the sternpost, looking forward to the ship's master, who stood on a plank let in at the jointure of the keel with the stem, which was carved as the Old Serpent of Andrad. The master roared his orders hugely, and *Shadow* was untied and towed clear of the docks by two labouring rowboats. Then the master's roar was 'Open ports!' and the great oars shot rattling out, fifteen to a side. The rowers bent their strong backs while a lad up beside the master

beat the stroke on a drum. Easy as a gull oared by her wings the ship went now, and the noise and hurlyburly of the City fell away suddenly behind. They came out in the silence of the waters of the bay, and over them rose the high peak of the Mountain, seeming to hang above the sea. In a shallow creek in the lee of the southern Armed Cliff the anchor was thrown over, and there they rode the night.

Of the seventy crewmen of the ship some were like Ged very young in years, though all had made their passage into manhood. These lads called him over to share food and drink with them, and were friendly though rough and full of jokes and jibes. They called him Goatherd, of course, because he was Gontish, but they did not go further than that. He was as tall and strong as the fifteen-year-olds, and quick to return either a good word or a jeer; so he made his way among them and even that first night began to live as one of them and learn their work. This suited the ship's officers, for there was no room aboard for idle passengers.

There was little enough room for the crew, and no comfort at all, in an undecked galley crowded with men and gear and cargo; but what was comfort to Ged? He lay that night among corded rolls of pelts from the northern isles and watched the stars of spring above the harbour waters and the little yellow lights of the City astern, and he slept and waked again full of delight. Before dawn the tide turned. They raised anchor and rowed softly out between the Armed Cliffs. As sunrise reddened the Mountain of Gont behind them they raised the high sail and ran south-westward over the Gontish Sea.

Between Barnisk and Torheven they sailed with a light wind, and on the second day came in sight of Havnor, the Great Island, heart and hearth of the Archipelago. For three days they were in sight of the green hills of Havnor as they worked along its eastern coast, but they did not come to shore. Not for many years did Ged set foot on that land or see the white towers of Havnor Great Port at the centre of the world.

They lay over one night at Kembermouth, the northern port of Way Island, and the next at a little town on the entrance of Felk-

way Bay, and the next day passed the northern cape of O and entered the Ebavnor Straits. There they dropped sail and rowed, always with land on either side and always within hail of other ships, great and small, merchants and traders, some bound in from the Outer Reaches with strange cargo after a voyage of years and others that hopped like sparrows from isle to isle of the Inmost Sea. Turning southward out of the crowded Straits they left Havnor astern and sailed between the two fair islands Ark and Ilien, towered and terraced with cities, and then through rain and rising wind began to beat their way across the Inmost Sea to Roke Island.

In the night as the wind freshened to a gale they took down both sail and mast, and the next day, all day, they rowed. The long ship lay steady on the waves and went gallantly, but the steersman at the long steering-sweep in the stern looked into the rain that beat the sea and saw nothing but the rain. They went southwest by the pointing of the magnet, knowing how they went, but not through what waters. Ged heard men speak of the shoal waters north of Roke, and of the Borilous Rocks to the east; others argued that they might be far out of course by now, in the empty waters south of Kamery. Still the wind grew stronger, tearing the edges of the great waves into flying tatters of foam, and still they rowed southwest with the wind behind them. The stints at the oars were shortened, for the labour was very hard; the younger lads were set two to an oar, and Ged took his turn with the others as he had since they left Gont. When they did not row they bailed, for the seas broke heavy on the ship. So they laboured among the waves that ran like smoking mountains under the wind, while the rain beat hard and cold on their backs, and the drum thumped through the noise of the storm like a heart thumping.

A man came to take Ged's place at the oar, sending him to the ship's master in the bow. Rainwater dripped from the hem of the master's cloak, but he stood stout as a winebarrel on his bit of decking and looking down at Ged he asked, 'Can you abate this wind, lad?'

'No, sir.'

'Have you craft with iron?'

He meant, could Ged make the compass-needle point their way to Roke making the magnet follow not its north but their need. That skill is a secret of the Seamasters, and again Ged must say no.

'Well then,' the master bellowed through the wind and rain, 'you must find some ship to take you back to Roke from Hort Town. Roke must be west of us now, and only wizardry could bring us there through this sea. We must keep south.'

Ged did not like this, for he had heard the sailors talk of Hort Town, how it was a lawless place, full of evil traffic, where men were often taken and sold into slavery in the South Reach. Returning to his labour at the oar he pulled away with his companion, a sturdy Andradean lad, and heard the drum beat the stroke and saw the lantern hung on the stern bob and flicker as the wind plucked it about, a tormented fleck of light in the rain-lashed dusk. He kept looking to westward, as often as he could in the heavy rhythm of pulling the oar. And as the ship rose on a high swell he saw for a moment over the dark smoking water a light between clouds, as it might be the last gleam of sunset: but this was a clear light, not red.

His oar-mate had not seen it, but he called it out. The steersman watched for it on each rise of the great waves, and saw it as Ged saw it again, but shouted back that it was only the setting sun. Then Ged called to one of the lads that was bailing to take his place on the bench a minute, and made his way forward again along the encumbered aisle between the benches, and catching hold of the carved prow to keep from being pitched overboard he shouted up to the master, 'Sir! that light to the west is Roke Island!'

'I saw no light,' the master roared, but even as he spoke Ged flung out his arm pointing, and all saw the light gleam clear in the west over the heaving scud and tumult of the sea.

Not for his passenger's sake, but to save his ship from the peril of the storm, the master shouted at once to the steersman to head westward toward the light. But he said to Ged, 'Boy, you speak like a Seamaster, but I tell you if you lead us wrong in this weather I will throw you over to swim to Roke!'

Now instead of running before the storm they must row across the wind's way, and it was hard; waves striking the ship abeam pushed her always south of their new course, and rolled her, and filled her with water so that bailing must be ceaseless, and the oarsmen must watch lest the ship rolling should lift their oars out of water as they pulled and so pitch them down among the benches. It was nearly dark under the stormclouds, but now and again they made out the light to the west, enough to set course by, and so struggled on. At last the wind dropped a little, and the light grew broad before them. They rowed on, and they came as it were through a curtain, between one oarstroke and the next running out of the storm into a clear air, where the light of after-sunset glowed in the sky and on the sea. Over the foam-crested waves they saw not far off a high, round, green hill, and beneath it a town built on a small bay where boats lay at anchor, all in peace.

The steersman leaning on his long sweep turned his head and called, 'Sir! is this true land or witchery?'

'Keep her as she goes, you witless woodenhead! Row, you spineless slave-sons! That's Thwil Bay and the Knoll of Roke, as any fool could see! Row!'

So to the beat of the drum they rowed wearily into the bay. There it was still, so that they could hear the voices of people up in the town, and a bell ringing, and only far off the hiss and roaring of the storm. Clouds hung dark to north and east and south a mile off all about the island. But over Roke stars were coming out one by one in a clear and quiet sky.