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WINDHAVEN

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—JANE YOLEN



*George R. R. Martin
and
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*Bantam Books
New York Toronto London Sydney Auckland*

A Bantam Spectra Book

PUBLISHING HISTORY

Simon and Schuster edition published 1981

Bantam Spectra hardcover edition published June 2001

Bantam Spectra mass market edition / May 2003

Published by Bantam Dell

A Division of Random House, Inc.

New York, New York

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Maps by James Sinclair

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 80-28177

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The section entitled “Storms” was originally published in slightly different form in Analog in May 1975 under the title The Storms Windhaven copyright © 1975 by The Condé Nast Publications, Inc.

The section entitled “One-Wing” was originally published in slightly different form in Analog in January and February 1980 copyright © 1980 by The Condé Nast Publications, Inc.

eISBN: 978-0-553-89719-7

Cover design by David Stevenson
Cover illustration: © Stephen Youll

v3.1

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*For once you have tasted flight you will
walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward;
for there you have been,
and there you long to return.*

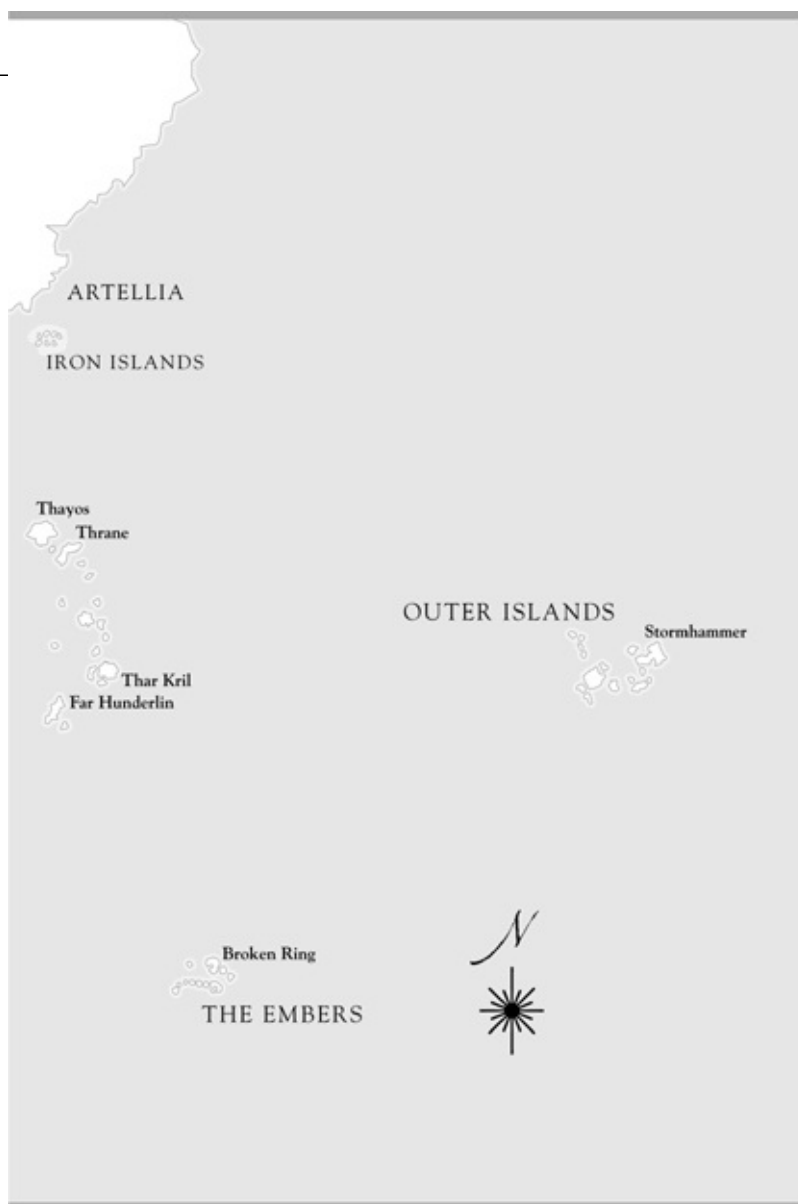
—LEONARDO DA VINCI



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The Known Lands of Windhaven





Prologue

THE STORM HAD RAGED through most of the night.

In the wide bed she shared with her mother, the child lay awake beneath the scratch woolweed blanket, listening. The sound of the rain against the thin lemonwood planks of the cabin was steady and insistent, and sometimes she heard the far-off boom of thunderclap and when the lightning flashed thin lines of light leaked in between the shutters to illuminate the tiny room. When they faded, it was dark again.

The child could hear the patter of water against the floor, and she knew that the roof had sprung another leak. It would turn the hard-packed earth to mud, and her mother would be furious, but there was nothing to be done. Her mother was not good at patching roofs, and they could not afford to hire anyone. Someday, her mother told her, the tired cabin would collapse in the violence of the storms. "Then we will go and see your father again," she would say. The girl did not remember her father very well, but her mother spoke of him often.

The shutters shook beneath a terrible blast of wind, and the child listened to the frightening sound of creaking wood, and the thrumming of the greased paper that served them for a window, and briefly she was afraid. Her mother slept on, unaware. The storms were frequent, but her mother slept through all of them. The girl was afraid to wake her. Her mother had a fierce temper, and she did not like being awakened for something as small as a child's fear.

The walls creaked and shifted once again; lightning and thunder came almost together, and the child shivered underneath her blanket and wondered whether this would be the night that they went to see her father.

But it was not.

Finally the storm subsided, and even the rain stopped. The room was dark and quiet.

The girl shook her mother into wakefulness.

"What?" she said. "What?"

“The storm is over, Mother,” the child said.

At that the woman nodded and rose. “Get dressed,” she told the girl, as she hunted for her own clothing in the darkness. Dawn was still an hour away, at least, but it was important to get to the beach quickly. The storms smashed ships, the child knew; little fishing boats that had stayed out too late or ventured too far, and sometimes even the great trading ships. If you went out after a storm, you might find things washed up on the beach, all kinds of things. Once they had found a knife with a beaten metal edge; when they had sold it they had eaten well for two weeks. If you wanted to find good things, though, you could not afford to be lazy. A lazy person would wait till dawn, and find nothing.

Her mother hung an empty canvas sack over her shoulder, for carrying things. The girl's dress had big pockets. They both wore boots. The woman took down a long pole with a carved wooden hook on its end, in case they saw something in the water, floating just out of reach. “Come on, child,” she said. “Don't dawdle.”

The beach was cold and dark, with a chill wind blowing steadily from the west. They were not alone. Three or four others were already there, prowling up and down the wet sand, leaving boot-marks that quickly filled with water. Occasionally one would stoop and examine something. One of them was carrying a lantern. They had owned a good lantern once, when her father was alive, but they had to sell it later. Her mother complained of that often. She did not have her daughter's night vision, and sometimes she stumbled in the darkness, and often she missed things she ought to have seen.

They split up, as they always did. The child went north along the beach, while her mother searched to the south. “Turn back at dawn,” her mother said. “You have chores to do. Nothing will last past dawn.” The child nodded, and hurried off to search.

The findings were lean that night. The girl walked for a long time, following the water's edge, eyes on the ground, looking, always looking. She liked to find things. If she came home with a scrap of metal, or perhaps a scylla's tooth, long as her arm, curved and yellow and as terrible, then her mother might smile at her and tell her what a good girl she was. That did not happen often. Mostly her mother scolded her for being too dreamy, and asking foolish questions.

When the vague predawn light first began to swallow up the stars, she had nothing in her pockets but two pieces of milky sea-glass and a clam. It was a big heavy clam, large as her hand, with the rough pebbly shell that meant it was the best kind for eating, the kind whose meat was black and buttery. But she had only been able to find one. Everything else that had washed up was worthless driftwood.

The child was about to turn back, as her mother had told her to, when she saw the flash of metal in the sky—a sudden silver gleam, as if a new star had come to life, outshining all the others.

It was north of her, out above the sea. She watched where it had been, and a moment later

it flashed again, a little to the left. She knew what it was: a flyer's wings had caught the first rays of the rising sun, before they quite touched the rest of the world.

The child wanted to follow, to run and see. She loved to watch the flight of birds, the little rainbirds and the fierce nighthawks and the scavenger kites; and the flyers with their great silver wings were better than any birds. But it was almost dawn, and her mother had told her to turn back at dawn.

She ran. If she hurried, she thought, if she ran all the way there and all the way back, she might have time to watch for a while, before her mother could miss her. So she ran and ran past the lazy late-risers who were just coming out to wander on the beach. The clam bounced in her pocket.

The eastern sky was all pale orange by the time she reached the flyers' place, a wide expanse of sandy beach where they often landed, beneath the high cliff from which they were launched. The child liked to climb the cliff and watch from up there, with the wind in her hair and her little legs dangling over the edge and the sky all around her. But today there was no time. She had to go back soon, or her mother would be angry.

She had come too late, anyway. The flyer was landing.

He made a last graceful pass over the sand, his wings sweeping by thirty feet above her head. She stood and watched with wide eyes. Then, out above the water, he tilted himself. One silver wing went down and one went up, and all at once he came around in a wide circle. And then he straightened and came on ahead, descending gracefully, so he barely touched the sand as he came skimming in.

There were other people on the beach—a young man and an older woman. They ran alongside the flyer as he came in, and helped to stop him, and afterward they did something to his wings that made them collapse. The two of them folded up the wings, slowly and with care, while the flyer undid the straps that bound them to his body.

Watching, the girl saw that he was the one she liked. There were lots of flyers, she knew, and she had seen many of them and even learned to recognize some, but there were only three that came often, the three who lived on her own island. The child imagined that they must live high on the cliffs, in houses that looked something like the nests of birds, but with walls of priceless silver metal. One of the three was a stern, gray-haired woman with a serious face. The second was only a boy, dark-haired and achingly handsome, with a pleasant voice; she liked him better. But her favorite was the man on the beach, a man as tall and lean and wide of shoulder as her father had been, clean-shaven, with brown eyes and curling reddish-brown hair. He smiled a lot, and seemed to fly more than any of them.

"You," he said.

The child looked up, terrified, and found him smiling at her.

“Don’t be frightened,” he said. “I won’t hurt you.”

She took a step backward. She had often watched the flyers, but none of them had ever noticed her before.

“Who is she?” the flyer asked his helper, who was standing behind him holding his folded wings.

The young man shrugged. “Some clam digger. I don’t know. I’ve seen her hanging around before. Do you want me to chase her off?”

“No,” the man said. He smiled at her again. “Why are you so afraid?” he asked. “It’s all right. I don’t mind your coming here, little girl.”

“My mother told me not to bother the flyers,” the child said.

The man laughed. “Oh,” he said. “Well, you don’t bother me. Maybe someday you can grow up and help the flyers, like my friends here. Would you like that?”

The girl shook her head. “No.”

“No?” He shrugged, still smiling. “What would you like to do, then? Fly?”

Timidly, the child managed to nod.

The older woman sniggered, but the flyer glanced at her and frowned. Then he walked toward the child and stooped and took her by the hand. “Well,” he said, “if you’re going to fly, you have to practice, you know. Would you like to practice?”

“Yes.”

“You’re too little for wings just now,” the flyer said. “Here.” He wrapped strong hands about her, and hoisted her up to his shoulders, so she sat with her legs dangling on his chest and her hands fumbling uncertain in his hair. “No,” he said, “you can’t hold on if you’re going to be a flyer. Your arms have to be your wings. Can you hold out your arms straight?”

“Yes,” she said. She raised her arms up and held them out like a pair of wings.

“Your arms are going to get tired,” the flyer warned, “but you can’t lower them. Not if you want to fly. A flyer has to have strong arms that never get tired.”

“I’m strong,” the girl insisted.

“Good. Are you ready to fly?”

“Yes.” She began to flap her arms.

“No, no, *no*,” he said. “Don’t flap. We’re not like the birds, you know. I thought you watched us.”

The child tried to remember. “Kites,” she said suddenly, “you’re like kites.”

“Sometimes,” the flyer said, pleased. “And nighthawks, and other soaring birds. We don’t really fly, you know. We glide like the kites do. We ride on the wind. So you can’t flap; you have to hold your arms stiff, and try to feel the wind. Can you feel the wind now?”

“Yes.” It was a warmer wind, sharp with the smell of the sea.

“Well, catch it with your arms, let it blow you.”

She closed her eyes, and tried to feel the wind on her arms.

And she began to move.

The flyer had begun to trot across the sand, as if blown by the wind. When it shifted, he shifted as well, changing directions suddenly. She kept her arms stiff, and the wind seemed to grow stronger, and now he was running, and she bounced up and down on his shoulder, going faster and faster.

“You’ll fly me into the water!” he called. “Turn, turn!”

And she tilted her wings, the way she had watched them turn so often, one hand going up and one down, and the flyer turned to the right and began to run in a circle, until finally she straightened her arms again, and then he was off the way he had come.

He ran and ran, and she flew, until both were breathless and laughing.

Finally he stopped. “Enough,” he said, “a beginning flyer shouldn’t stay up too long.” He lifted her off his back and set her on the sand again, smiling. “There now,” he said.

Her arms were sore from holding them up so long, but she was excited almost to bursting, though she knew a spanking was waiting at home. The sun was well above the horizon. “Thank you,” she said, still breathless from her flight.

“My name is Russ,” he said. “If you want another flight, come see me sometime. I don’t have any little flyers of my own.”

The child nodded eagerly.

“And you,” he said, brushing sand from his clothes. “Who are you?”

“Maris,” she replied.

“A pretty name,” the flyer replied pleasantly. “Well, I must be off, Maris. But maybe we’ll

go flying again sometime, eh?" He smiled at her and turned away, and began walking o
down the beach. The two helpers joined him, one carrying his folded wings. They began
talk as they receded from her, and she heard the sound of his laughter.

And suddenly she was running after him, churning up the sand in her wake, straining
match his long strides.

He heard her coming and turned back to her. "Yes?"

"Here," she said. She reached into her pocket, and handed him the clam.

Astonishment broke over his face, then vanished in the warmth of his smile. He accepte
the clam gravely.

She threw her arms around him, hugged him with a fierce intensity, and fled. She ran wit
her arms held out to either side, so fast that she almost seemed to fly.

PART ONE

Storms

MARIS RODE THE STORM ten feet above the sea, taming the winds on wide cloth-of-metal wings. She flew fiercely, recklessly, delighting in the danger and the feel of the spray, not bothered by the cold. The sky was an ominous cobalt blue, the winds were building, and she had wings; that was enough. She could die now, and die happy, flying.

She flew better than she ever had before, twisting and gliding between the air currents without thought, catching each time the updraft or downwind that would carry her farther and faster. She made no wrong choices, was forced into no hasty scrambles above the leaping ocean; the tacking she did was all for joy. It would have been safer to fly high, like a child up above the waves as far as she could climb, safe from her own mistakes. But Maris skimmed the sea, like a *flyer*, where a single dip, a brush of wing against water, meant a clumsy tumble from the sky. And death; you don't swim far when your wingspan is twenty feet.

Maris was daring, but she knew the winds.

Ahead she spied the neck of a scylla, a sinuous rope dark against the horizon. Almost without thinking, she responded. Her right hand pulled down on the leather wing grip, her left pushed up. She shifted the whole weight of her body. The great silver wings—tissue thin and almost weightless, but immensely strong—shifted with her, turning. One wingtip all but grazed the whitecaps snapping below, the other lifted; Maris caught the rising winds momentarily, and began to climb.

Death, sky death, had been on her mind, but she would not end like that—snapped from the air like an unwary gull, lunch for a hungry monster.

Minutes later she caught up to the scylla, and paused for a taunting circle just beyond its reach. From above she could see its body, barely beneath the waves, the rows of slick black flippers beating rhythmically. The tiny head, swaying slowly from side to side atop the long

neck, ignored her. Perhaps it has known flyers, she thought then, and it does not like the taste.

The winds were colder now, and heavy with salt. The storm was gathering strength; she could feel a trembling in the air. Maris, exhilarated, soon left the scylla far behind. Then she was alone again, flying effortlessly, through an empty, darkening world of sea and sky where the only sound was the wind upon her wings.

In time, the island reared out of the sea: her destination. Sighing, sorry for the journey's end, Maris let herself descend.

Gina and Tor, two of the local land-bound—Maris didn't know what they did when they weren't caring for visiting flyers—were on duty out on the landing spit. She circled once above them to catch their attention. They rose from the soft sand and waved at her. The second time she came around they were ready. Maris dipped lower and lower, until her feet were just inches above the ground; Gina and Tor ran across the sand parallel to her, each beside a wing. Her toes brushed surface and she began to slow in a shower of sand.

Finally she stopped, lying prone on the cool, dry sand. She felt silly. A downed flyer is like a turtle on its back; she could get on her feet if she had to, but it was a difficult, undignified process. Still, it had been a good landing.

Gina and Tor began to fold up her wings, joint by foot-long joint. As each strut unlocked and folded back on the next segment, the tissue fabric between them went limp. When all the extensors were pulled in, the wings hung in two loose folds of drooping metal from the central axis strapped to Maris' back.

"We'd expected Coll," said Gina, as she folded back the final strut. Her short dark hair stood out in spikes around her face.

Maris shook her head. It should have been Coll's journey, perhaps, but she had been desperate, longing for the air. She'd taken the wings—still *her* wings—and gone before he was out of bed.

"He'll have flying enough after next week, I expect," Tor said cheerfully. There was still sand in his lank blond hair and he was shivering a little from the sea winds, but he smiled as he spoke. "All the flying he'll want." He stepped in front of Maris to help her unstrap the wings.

"I'll wear them," Maris snapped at him, impatient, angered by his casual words. How could he understand? How could *any* of them understand? They were land-bound.

She started up the spit toward the lodge, Gina and Tor falling in beside her. There she took the usual refreshments and, standing before a huge open fire, allowed herself to be dried and warmed. The friendly questions she answered curtly, trying to be silent, trying not to think. This may be the last time. Because she was a flyer, they all respected her silence, though with

disappointment. For the land-bound, the flyers were the most regular source of contact with the other islands. The seas, daily storm-lashed and infested with scyllas and seacats and other predators, were too dangerous for regular ship travel except among islands within the same local group. The flyers were the links, and the others looked to them for news, gossip, songs, stories, romance.

“The Landsman will be ready whenever you are rested,” Gina said, touching Maris tentatively on the shoulder. Maris pulled away, thinking, Yes, to you it is enough to serve the flyers. You’d like a flyer husband, Coll perhaps when he’s grown—and you don’t know what it means to me that Coll should be the flyer, and not I. But she said only, “I’m ready now. It was an easy flight. The winds did all the work.”

Gina led her to another room, where the Landsman was waiting for her message. Like the first room, this was long and sparsely furnished, with a blazing fire crackling in a great stone hearth. The Landsman sat in a cushioned chair near the flames; he rose when Maris entered. Flyers were always greeted as equals, even on islands where the Landsmen were worshipped as gods and held godlike powers.

After the ritual greetings had been exchanged, Maris closed her eyes and let the message flow. She didn’t know or care what she said. The words used her voice without troubling her conscious thought. Probably politics, she thought. Lately it had all been politics.

When the message ended, Maris opened her eyes and smiled at the Landsman—perversely on purpose, because he looked worried by her words. But he recovered quickly and returned her smile. “Thank you,” he said, a little weakly. “You’ve done well.”

She was invited to stay the night, but she refused. The storm might die by morning, but besides, she liked night flying. Tor and Gina accompanied her outside and up the rocky path to the flyers’ cliff. There were lanterns set in the stone every few feet, to make the twisting ascent safer at night.

At the top of the climb was a natural ledge, made deeper and wider by human hands. Beyond it, an eighty-foot drop, and breakers crashing on a rocky beach. On the ledge Gina and Tor unfolded her wings and locked the struts in place, and the tissue metal stretched tight and taut and silvery. And Maris jumped.

The wind caught her, lifted. She was flying again, dark sea below and rumbling storm above. Once launched she never looked back at the two wistful land-bound following her with their eyes. Too soon she would be one of them.

She did not turn toward home. Instead she flew with the storm winds, blowing violent now, westerly. Soon the thunder would come, and rain, and then Maris would be forced up above the clouds, where the lightning was less likely to burn her from the sky. At home it would be calm, the storm past. People would be out beachcombing to see what the winds had brought, and a few small dories might be casting off in the hope that a day’s fishing might not be entirely lost.

The wind sang in her eyes and pushed at her, and she swam in the sky-stream gracefully. Then, oddly, she thought of Coll. And suddenly she lost the feel. She wavered, dipped, then pulled herself up sharply, tacking, searching for it. And cursing herself. It had been so good before—did it have to end this way? This might be her last flight ever, and it had to be her best. But it was no use: she'd lost the certainty. The wind and she were no longer lovers.

She began to fly at cross-purposes to the storm, battling grimly, fighting until her muscles were strained and aching. She gained altitude now; once the wind-feel left you, it was no longer safe to fly so near the water.

She was exhausted, tired of fighting, when she caught sight of the rocky face of the Eyrie and realized how far she had come.

The Eyrie was nothing but a huge rock thrust up from the sea, a crumbling tower of stone surrounded by an angry froth where the waters broke against its tall, sheer walls. It was not an island; nothing would grow here but pockets of tough lichen. Birds made their nests in the few protected crevices and ledges, though, and atop the rock the flyers had built their nests. Here, where no ship could moor, here where no one but flyers—bird and human—could roost, here stood their dark stone lodge.

“Maris!”

She looked up at the sound of her name, and saw Dorrel diving on her, laughing, his wings dark against the clouds. At the last possible moment she turned from him, banking sharply, and slipped out from under his dive. He chased her around the Eyrie, and Maris forgot that she was tired and aching, and lost herself in the sheer joy of flying.

When at last they landed, the rains had just begun, howling suddenly from the east, stinging their faces and slapping hard against their wings. Maris realized that she was nearly numb with cold. They came down in a soft earth landing pit carved in the solid rock, without help, and Maris slid ten feet in sudden-mud before coming to a stop. Then it took her five minutes to find her feet, and fumble with the triple straps that wrapped around her body. She tied the wings carefully to a tether rope, then walked out to a wingtip and began to fold them up.

By the time she had finished, her teeth were chattering convulsively, and she could feel the soreness in her arms. Dorrel frowned as he watched her work; his own wings, neatly folded, were slung over his shoulder. “Had you been out long?” he asked. “I should have let you land. I’m sorry. I didn’t realize. You must have been with the storm all the way, just in front of it. Difficult weather. I got some of the crosswinds myself. Are you all right?”

“Oh, yes. I was tired—but not really, not now. I’m glad you were there to meet me. That was good flying, and I needed it. The last part of the trip was rough—I thought I would drop. But good flying’s better than rest.”

Dorrel laughed and put his arm around her. She felt how warm he was after the flight and

by contrast, how cold she was. He felt it too and squeezed her tighter. “Come inside before you freeze. Garth brought some bottles of kivas from the Shotans, and one of them should be hot by now. Between us and the kivas we’ll get you warm again.”

The common room of the lodge was warm and cheerful, as always, but almost empty. Garth, a short, well-muscled flyer ten years her senior, was the only one there. He looked up from his place by the fire and called them by name. Maris wanted to answer, but her throat was tight with longing, and her teeth were clenched together. Dorrel led her to the fireplace.

“Like a woodwinged idiot I kept her out in the cold,” Dorrel said. “Is the kivas hot? Pour some.” He stripped off his wet, muddy clothes quickly and efficiently, and pulled two large towels from a pile near the fire.

“Why should I waste my kivas on you?” Garth rumbled. “For Maris, of course, for she’s very beautiful and a superb flyer.” He made a mock bow in her direction.

“You should waste your kivas on me,” Dorrel said, rubbing himself briskly with the big towel, “unless you would care to waste it all over the floor.”

Garth replied, and they traded insults and threats in laconic voices. Maris didn’t listen—she had heard it all before. She squeezed the water from her hair, watching the patterns the wetness made on the hearth stones and how quickly they faded. She looked at Dorrel, trying to memorize his lean, muscular body—a good flyer’s body—and the quick changes of his face as he teased Garth. But he turned when he felt Maris watching him, and his eyes gentled. Garth’s final witticism fell limply into silence. Dorrel touched Maris softly, tracing the line of her jaw.

“You’re still shivering.” He took the towel from her hands and wrapped it around her. “Garth, take that bottle off the fire before it explodes and let us all get warm.”

The kivas, a hot spice wine flavored with raisins and nuts, was served in great stone mugs. The first sip sent thin lines of fire down her veins, and the shivering stopped.

Garth smiled at her. “Good, isn’t it? Not that Dorrel will appreciate it. I tricked a slimy old fisherman out of a dozen bottles. He found it in a shipwreck, didn’t know what he had, and his wife didn’t want it in the house. I gave him some trinkets for it, some metal beads I picked up for my sister.”

“And what does your sister get?” Maris asked, between sips of kivas.

Garth shrugged. “Her? Oh, it was a surprise, anyway. I’ll bring something from Poweet the next time I go. Some painted eggs.”

“If he doesn’t see something else he can trade them for on his way back,” Dorrel said. “If your sister ever gets her surprise, Garth, the shock will kill all pleasure. You were born a trader. I think you’d swap your wings if the deal was good enough.”

Garth snorted indignantly. “Close your mouth when you say that, bird.” He turned to Maris. “How is your brother? I never see him.”

Maris took another sip of her drink, holding on to calm with both hands. “He’ll be of age next week,” she said carefully. “The wings will be his then. I wouldn’t know about his comings and goings. Maybe he doesn’t like your company.”

“Huh,” said Garth. “Why shouldn’t he?” He sounded wounded. Maris waved a hand, and forced herself to smile. She had meant it lightly. “I like him well enough,” Garth went on. “We all like him, don’t we, Dorrel? He’s young, quiet, maybe a bit too cautious, but he should improve. He’s different somehow—oh, but he can tell some stories! And sing! The land-bound will learn to love the sight of his wings.” Garth shook his head in wonder. “When does he learn them all? I’ve done more traveling than he has, but ...”

“He makes them up,” said Maris.

“Himself?” Garth was impressed. “He’ll be our singer, then. We’ll take the prize away from Eastern at the next competition. Western always has the best flyers,” he said loyally, “but our singers have never been worthy of the title.”

“I sang for Western at the last meet,” Dorrel objected.

“That’s what I mean.”

“*You* shriek like a seacat.”

“Yes,” said Garth, “but I have no delusions about my ability.”

Maris missed Dorrel’s reply. Her mind had drifted away from their dialogue, and she was watching the flames, thinking, nursing her still-warm drink. She felt peaceful here in the Eyrie, even now, even after Garth had mentioned Coll. And strangely comfortable. No one lived on the flyers’ rock, but it was a home of sorts. Her home. It was hard to think of not coming here anymore.

She remembered the first time she’d seen the Eyrie, a good six years ago, just after her coming-of-age day. She’d been a girl of thirteen, proud of having flown so far alone, but scared too, and shy. Inside the lodge she’d found a dozen flyers, sitting around a fire drinking, laughing. A party was in progress. But they’d stopped and smiled at her. Garth had been a quiet youth then, Dorrel a skinny boy just barely older than she. She hadn’t known either of them. But Helmer, a middle-aged flyer from the island closest to hers, had been among the company, and he made the introductions. Even now she remembered the faces and the names: red-headed Anni from Culhall, Foster who later grew too fat to fly, Jamis the Senior, and especially the one nicknamed Raven, an arrogant youth who dressed in black furs and metal and had won awards for Eastern in three straight competitions. There was another, too, a lanky blonde from the Outer Islands. The party was in her honor; it was seldom any of the Outers flew so very, very far.

They'd all welcomed Maris, and soon it seemed almost as if she'd replaced the tall blond as the guest of honor. They gave her wine, despite her age, and they made her sing with them, and told her stories about flying, most of which she'd heard before, but never from such as these. Finally, when she felt very much part of the group, they let their attention wander from her, and the festivities resumed their normal course.

It had been a strange, unforgettable party, and one incident in particular was burned golden in her memory. Raven, the only Eastern wing in the group, had been taking a lot of needling. Finally, a little drunk, he rebelled. "You call yourselves flyers," he'd said, in a whiplash voice that Maris would always recall. "Come, come with me, I'll show you flying."

And the whole party had gone outside, to the flyers' cliff of the Eyrie, the highest cliff of all. Six hundred feet straight down it plunged, to where the rocks stood up like teeth and the water churned furiously against them. Raven, wearing folded wings, walked up to the brink. He unfolded the first three joints of his wing struts carefully, and slid his arms through the loops. But he did not lock the wings; the hinges still moved, and the opened struts bent back and forth with his arms, flexible. The other struts he held, folded, in his hands.

Maris had wondered what he was up to. She soon found out.

He ran and jumped, out as far as he could, off the flyers' cliff. With his wings still folded.

She'd gasped, run to the edge. The others followed, some looking pale, a few grinning. Dorrel had stood beside her.

Raven was falling straight down, a rock, his hands at his sides, his wing cloth flapping like a cape. Head first he flew, and the plunge seemed to last forever.

Then, at the very last moment, when he was almost on the rocks, when Maris could almost feel the impact—silver wings, suddenly, flashing in the sunlight. Wings from nowhere. And Raven caught the winds, and flew.

Maris had been awed. But Jamis the Senior, the oldest flyer Western had, only laughed. "Raven's trick," he growled. "I've seen him do it twice before. He oils his wing struts. After he's fallen far enough, he flings them away as hard as he can. As each one locks in place, the snap flings loose the next one. Pretty, yes. You can bet he practiced it plenty before he tried it out in front of anyone. One of these days, though, a hinge is going to jam, and we won't have to listen to Raven anymore."

But even his words hadn't tarnished the magic. Maris often had seen flyers, impatient with their land-bound help, draw their almost-open wings up and shake out the last joint or two with a sharp snap. But never anything like this.

Raven had been smirking when he met them at the landing pit. "When you can do *that*," he told the company, "then you can call yourselves flyers." He'd been a conceited, reckless sort, yes, but right at that moment and for years afterward Maris had thought herself in love with

him.

She shook her head sadly, and finished her kivas. It all seemed silly now. Raven had died less than two years after that party, vanished at sea without a trace. A dozen flyers died each year, and their wings usually were lost with them; clumsy flying would down and drown them, long-necked scyllas had been known to attack unwary skimmers, storms could blow them from the sky, lightning hunted out the metal of their wings—yes, there were many ways a flyer could die. Most of them, Maris suspected, just lost their way, and missed their destinations, flying on blindly till exhaustion pulled them down. A few perhaps hit that rare and most feared menace of the sky: still air. But Maris knew now that Raven had been a more likely candidate for death than most, a foolish flashy flyer with no sky sense.

Dorrel's voice jarred her from her memories. "Maris," he said, "hey, don't go to sleep on us."

Maris set down her empty cup, her hand curved around the rough stone, still seeking the warmth it had held. With an effort, she pulled her hand away and picked up her sweater.

"It's not dry," Garth protested.

"Are you cold?" asked Dorrel.

"No. I must get back."

"You're too tired," Dorrel said. "Stay the night."

Maris drew her eyes away from his. "I mustn't. They'll worry."

Dorrel sighed. "Then take dry clothes." He stood, went to the far end of the common room and pulled open the doors of a carved wooden wardrobe. "Come here and pick out something that fits."

Maris did not move. "I'd better take my own clothes. I won't be coming back."

Dorrel swore softly. "Maris. Don't make things—you know that—oh, come, take the clothes. You're welcome to them, you know that. Leave yours in exchange if you like. I won't let you go out in wet clothes."

"I'm sorry," Maris said. Garth smiled at her while Dorrel stood waiting. She got up slowly, pulling the towel more closely around her as she moved away from the fire. The ends of her short, dark hair felt damp and cold against her neck. With Dorrel she searched through the piles of clothes until she found trousers and a brown woolweed sweater to fit her slender wiry frame. Dorrel watched her dress, then quickly found clothes for himself. Then they went to the rack near the door and took down their wings. Maris ran her long, strong fingers over the struts for weakness or damage; the wings seldom failed, but when they did the trouble was always in the joints. The fabric itself shone as soft and strong as it had when the st

sailors rode it to this world. Satisfied, Maris strapped on the wings. They were in good shape. Coll would wear them for years, and his children for generations after him.

Garth had come to stand beside her. She looked at him.

“I’m not so good at words as Coll is, or Dorrel,” he started. “I ... well. Goodbye, Maris.” He blushed, looking miserable. Flyers did not say goodbye to each other. But I am not a flyer, she thought, and so she hugged Garth, and kissed him, and said goodbye, the word of the land-bound.

Dorrel walked outside with her. The winds were strong, as always around the Eyrie, but the storm had passed. The only water in the air was the faint mist of sea-spray. But the stars were out.

“At least stay for dinner,” Dorrel said. “Garth and I would fight for the pleasure of serving you.”

Maris shook her head. She shouldn’t have come; she should have flown straight home and never said goodbye to Garth or Dorrel. Easier not to make the ending, easier to pretend that things would always be the same and then to vanish at the end. When they reached the high flyers’ cliff, the same from where Raven had leapt so long ago, she reached for Dorrel’s hand and they stood awhile longer in silence.

“Maris,” he said finally, hesitantly. He looked straight out to sea, standing by her side, holding her hand. “Maris, you could marry me. I would share my wings with you—you needn’t give up flying entirely.”

Maris dropped his hand, and felt herself go hot all over with shame. He had no right; it was cruel to pretend. “Don’t,” she said in a whisper. “The wings aren’t yours to share.”

“Tradition,” he said, sounding desperate. She could tell he was embarrassed also. He wanted to help her, not to make things worse. “We could try it. The wings are mine, but you could use them ...”

“Oh, Dorrel, don’t. The Landsman, your Landsman, would never allow it. It’s more than tradition, it’s law. They might take your wings away and give them to someone with more respect, like they did to Lind the smuggler. Besides, even if we ran away, to a place without law or Landsmen, to a place by ourselves—how long could you bear to share your wings? With me, with *anyone*? Don’t you see? We’d come to hate one another. I’m not a child who can practice when you’re resting. I can’t live like that, flying on sufferance, knowing that the wings could never be mine. And you would grow tired of the way I would watch you—watch you—oh ...” She broke off, fumbling for words.

Dorrel was silent for a moment. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I wanted to do something—to help you, Maris. It hurts unbearably knowing what is about to happen to you. I wanted to give you something. I can’t bear to think of your going away and becoming ...”

She took his hand again and held it tightly. “Yes, yes. Shh.”

“You do know I love you, Maris. You do, don’t you?”

“Yes, yes. And I love you, Dorrel. But—I’ll never marry a flyer. Not now. I couldn’t. I murder him for his wings.” She looked at him, trying to lighten the bleak truth of her words. And failing.

They clung to each other, balanced on the edge of the moment of parting, trying to say now, with the pressure of their bodies, everything they might ever want to say to each other. Then they pulled away, and looked at each other through tears.

Maris fumbled with her wings, shaking, suddenly cold again. Dorrel tried to help, but his fingers collided with hers, and they laughed, haltingly, at their clumsiness. She let him unfold her wings for her. When one of them was fully extended, and the second nearly so, she suddenly thought of Raven, and waved Dorrel away. Puzzled, he watched. Maris lifted the wing like an air-weary elder, and threw the final joint into lock with a clean strong snap. And then she was ready to leave.

“Go well,” he said, finally.

Maris opened her mouth, then closed it, nodding foolishly. “And you,” she said at last. “Take care, until ...” But she could not add the final lie, any more than she could say goodbye to him. She turned and ran from him, and launched herself away from the Eyrie, out on the nightwinds into a cold dark sky.

It was a long and lonely flight over a starlit sea where nothing stirred. The winds were steady from the east, forcing Maris to tack all the way, losing time and speed. By the time she spotted the light tower of Lesser Amberly, her home island, midnight had come and gone.

There was another light below, turning on their landing beach. She saw it as she coasted in smooth and easy, and thought it must be the lodge men. But they should have gone off duty long ago; few flyers were aloft this late. She frowned in puzzlement just as she hit the ground with a jarring shock.

Maris groaned, hurried to get up, and set to work on the wing straps. She should know enough not to be distracted at the moment of landing. The light advanced on her.

“So you decided to come back,” the voice said, harsh and angry. It was Russ, her father-stepfather, really—coming toward her with a lantern in his good hand, his right arm hanging dead and useless at his side.

“I stopped by the Eyrie first,” she said, defensively. “You weren’t worried?”

“Coll was to go, not you.” The lines of his face were set hard.

“He was in bed,” Maris said. “He was too slow—I knew he’d miss the best of the storm.”

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