

“The Rea Hawk” is a saga-like tale of a woman given control of the weather while one of the gods takes a rest. ELIZABETH A. LYNN won the World Fantasy Award for both short fiction and the novel in the 1970s, but has published only rarely since. “The Red Hawk” has heretofore appeared only in a limited edition, which garnered a World Fantasy Award nomination. This tale is a particularly fine example of the fantasy world that does not owe a great deal to any historical or mythic convention but is clearly and carefully planned as original.

The Red Hawk

BY ELIZABETH A. LYNN

This story comes from the youth of the world, from a time when even the gods were young. At that time the land of Ryoka lay much as it lies now, bordered to the east by the ocean and to the west by desert, to the south by the Crystal Lake, and to the north by mountains.

The mountains were taller then. The tallest of them were known as the Gray Peaks. Goats and foxes and red hawks lived upon them, and on clear days they seemed to float above the clouds, a place of wonder and mystery to those who lived below in the green valleys of the Ippan massif.

One day Tukulina the Black Goddess, shaper of the world, decided to leave Ryoka for a time and visit with Sedi, goddess of the moon, whose home is beneath the sea. She gazed at the earth, examining the greater patterns and the lesser, and it seemed to her that all was in order... Yet the sister of order is mischief, and of all the creatures of the earth the winds are the most capricious, for they are formed of the very fabric of chaos. So Tukulina went to her son Vaikkenen. Vaikkenen was very dear to her, for he was still young and had come to his full strength, and he was very beautiful, with a ruddy face, and golden hair and beard.

Tukulina found him by a riverbank, sporting with a pride of hunting cats, and she said to him, *Dear son. I have decided to visit thy sister. I will be gone a little time. While I am gone, wilt thou cease thy play and take upon thyself the governance of the winds? For of all created beings, they are most treacherous.*

Vaikkenen lifted his shining face to his mother's gaze and said, *I do*

not wish to halt my play. Do not ask it of me! He stroked with his bare foot the flank of the tiger lolling at his side.

I will not, Tukulina said indulgently. *But while I am absent from the earth, be prudent, son of mine. In all thy amusements, do nothing to awaken thy grandmother!*

Vaikkenen swore that he would not. For when the Old One, the Mother, lies sleeping in Her cave which is the Void, it is not wise to awaken Her.

Tukulina bid a loving farewell to her son. She did not entirely trust his promise. But she knew that at the moment he so swore, he had meant each word that he said. For such is the nature of Vaikkenen, that he means whatever he says, though what he says may change from one moment to the next.

Tukulina then considered to whom she might entrust the governance of the winds. There were wise folk aplenty in Ryoka. But Tukulina did not want to entrust such power to a witch or wizard. She wanted someone who did not crave power, or fame, or fortune, someone who craved only knowledge, but cared little for magic; someone who was, in addition, solitary, a patient hermit.

And Tukulina remembered the astronomer of Ippa.

Tekkelé of Ippa had been born and bred in Nakase County, on the great green floodplains where there are no mountains. But at the age when other girls are taking lovers, Tekkelé apprenticed herself to a stargazer, and by the time she was thirty her reputation had spread far beyond the borders of Nakase and even into eastern Ryoka, to the seaport of Skyeggo, where the seabirds cry. Great honor might have been hers as navigator to one of the sealords, but Tekkelé had rejected such offers and chosen to travel to Ippa, to the Gray Peaks, to live in a cave on a bleak and stony hillside and watch the infinite patterns of the stars.

The mountain dwellers respected her and sometimes brought her news and food, but no one went to visit her save an old woman named Oshka, who once or twice a year appeared at the cave mouth, and she came to talk about the stars. Oshka was an avatar of Tukulina, who found Tekkelé's obsession with the stars rather restful. But this Tekkelé did not know.

So the ebony-skinned goddess wrapped about her the Cloak of Storms and spread her wings to the sky. She found the astronomer awake, as was her habit, observing the dawn. Tukulina stood within the cave and the stars glittered in her hair.

Tekkelé dropped to her knees in the dust.

“Get up, astronomer,” Tukulina said. “Don’t be afraid. You know me, although you do not know it.” Tekkelé rose. Her knees hurt, and her heart was pounding. “I am not displeased with you. Diligently have you studied the movements of the stars, and there is much truth in what you know of wind and cloud and sky. But you will soon know much more, for into your hands, for a little time, I intend to entrust the winds’ governance.”

As the goddess spoke, the air in the cave began to whirl and coalesce. Out of that vortex five beings emerged to stand before the dumbfounded astronomer. The first was a golden-skinned child who smelled of ripe wheat ears, the second a red-maned mare, the third a leafclad dancing boy with the green eyes of a demon, and the fourth an ebony-skinned warrior with indigo eyes and hair. And the fifth was like a white winged man, but he had no hands or feet, only talons. They grinned at the astronomer and did not speak. “The yellow one is the east wind, and the red the south,” the goddess said, “the green one is the west wind. The blue one is the north.”

“And the other?” Tekkelé said.

“That is the wind of the upper sky, who never touches earth.”

“I see,” said Tekkelé dryly, though in all her years of study she had never heard of the wind of the upper sky. She gazed at the elementals, trying not to show her terror of them.

Tukulina approved of her courage. She will do, she thought. “Come here,” she said. Tekkelé went across the cavern to where the goddess stood, and upon her narrow shoulders Tukulina laid the Cloak of Storms.

Then, to Tekkelé’s further astonishment, the goddess changed into the frail and wrinkled old woman with whom she had spoken only half a year before. “You see, we have met,” said the goddess gently.

But Tekkelé clasped her hands together and shivered where she stood. It did not help that she recognized Oshka. Did I patronize her? she wondered. She might have; she was more used to the company of hawks

and goats than she was to goddesses. “Dread goddess,” she began, and stopped. She had forgotten how to use her tongue. “I am honored by your trust in me. Nevertheless, I beg you, choose another for this task. I am a stupid mortal woman, who-”

“Mortal,” Tukulina said, “but not stupid.”

“I would not know what to say to them.”

The goddess-crone smiled. “I will tell you,” she said. “Follow me.” Tekkelé followed her to the bare rock plateau outside the cave. It was protected on the north and was the astronomer’s frequent stargazing platform. Drawing Tekkelé to her, Tukulina touched her tongue to Tekkelé’s eyelids, nose, and mouth. “Now, look!” she said, and released her.

Tekkelé gasped. The rocks enclosing the plateau seemed to melt. She stood upon the very crown of a high peak, and below her, visible in all its length and breadth, stretched the land of Ryoka. She saw into every corner of it, from the shores of the ocean where the ships of the sealords prowled, to the meanest hill farm in the Ippan range, to the orchards of the Talvelai clan in Issho, to the caravans of the nomads camped by the shores of the Crystal Lake. I had not known there were so many people on the earth, she thought. And then she saw—no, felt—no, *knew*—another thing. She *knew* where on that earth the rain had to fall, the sun to shine. She knew how the cloud packs gathered. She knew where the lightning was born. She knew it with the certainty that accompanied no other piece of knowledge in her soul, except that knowledge every woman has of her own body which is given to her by the Mother.

And despite her confusion, her heart rejoiced. Perhaps, she thought, perhaps I may even see the patterns of the stars with this sight.

“You shall come here in the morning,” Tukulina said, “before dawn. You shall look out on the earth. You shall put around you the Cloak of Storms, and when you have seen, as you are seeing now, the patterns of wind and light and weather, the winds will feel your power, and they will come. Hold in your soul that pattern you discern, and the winds will perceive it too. Then say to them, ‘Go about thy daily business, O winds!’ They will obey.”

Tekkelé stared uneasily at the dancing wind wraiths. “They will?”

“I have so charged them,” Tukulina said.

Tekkelé did not doubt the Black Goddess's power. Clenching her fingers on the Cloak, she said, "Go about thy daily business, O winds!"

The winds bowed, and sped into the sunrise.

"It is as I thought," said Tukulina. "Your strength will master them." She lifted her arms. Before Tekkelé could say another word, the old woman had vanished. A giant raven stood in her place. The red hawks screamed homage as the raven circled the rocks. Then, swifter than a new-shot arrow, it rose above the mountains and headed east.

Tekkelé the astronomer sighed. I wish I had had some time to think about it, she thought. But one did not dispute a goddess. I thought I was a stargazer. Now I am a hero... She looked at her hands. They were not heroic; they were not even comely; they were rough and scarred, ink-stained now, the knuckles swollen, and they pained her in the winter. Walking to her sleeping place, she stretched her fingers toward the fire.

Aloud she said, "I have not changed. I am what I have always been."

She slipped the Cloak of Storms from her shoulders, marveling at its lack of weight. Folding it in a square, she laid it in the wooden chest that sat by her bed. Then, yawning, she went to roll her charts and store her tools away, for now that day had come, she would sleep.

* * * *

One month passed.

Two months passed, then half a year. For the folk of Ryoka it seemed a year like any other: sun and moon followed their accustomed paths. Spring yielded to summer, to autumn, to winter; children were born; the old died, and their souls fell through the cracks in the earth to the void, where they waited to be reborn at the will of the Mother. Only the wise, who study the gods, knew that something had changed, and only the greatest of those knew what it was.

But for Tekkelé the astronomer, everything had changed. It had happened slowly, but it had happened; she was no longer solitary. Faces surrounded her. She saw them when she rose from sleep in the afternoons. She read them in her books and in her star-charts: the faces of women whose children starved when the harvest failed, the faces of men whose entire crop had been flattened by a hailstorm. They came between her and the stars. Fiercely she told them: "I did not do it!" The faces did not care. "I

only see the patterns, I do not make them.” In her mind they cursed her. In the silences of night, pacing the caverns, she cried to the rocks, “I cannot bear this grief, I am too weak!” Yet she bore it, and she endured the presence of the winds each morning. They did not speak to her: she did not know if they could speak, but sometimes they laughed.

She guessed that they were laughing at her guilt, and hated them for it. She wished she were not human, as they were not. She wished she could not feel.

Sometimes she wished that she were dead.

The months wore on. Each day Tekkelé prayed that Tukulina would soon appear and take her torment from her. But Tukulina did not come. It seemed to Tekkelé that the goddess had chosen not to honor her for her strength and diligence, but to punish her. She grew bitter. She began to hate herself, and all Ryoka, including the gods, and even the stars in their serene, indifferent glory.

The Cloak of Storms seemed to grow heavier each time she put it on.

Meanwhile, Vaikkenen played in the western hills. Though a year had passed for the folk of Ryoka, for Vaikkenen his mother had been absent from the earth a week: time moves differently for mortals than for elementals. He had barely noted her departure anyway; he was occupied with whatever young gods do when no one is watching them. But though he was young, his power was growing, and its aura clung to him as heat to flame. So the winds in their journeys sought him out, hoping to amuse him by what they told him. In this they were being true to their natures—for they could see that Vaikkenen the god had a much greater capacity for mischief than they did.

From the winds Vaikkenen learned that a mortal woman had been entrusted with the governance of the winds, that she lived in the north, and that her name was Tekkelé. At first he paid scant attention to what the winds said of her, but after a while their descriptions piqued his interest. It intrigued him that she lived alone, that she watched the stars, and that his mother had chosen her to govern the winds. Seeing his curiosity aroused, the cunning winds spoke often of Tekkelé, until Vaikkenen began to think that he would go and look upon this astronomer. It rather annoyed him that his mother had put the winds into her care. *He* was destined for such power. It should not have been given to a mortal. So Vaikkenen reasoned, choosing to forget that when Tukulina offered him governance of the winds, he had preferred to play.

Therefore Vaikkenen took the shape of a red hawk, and flew to the Ippan range. In the lower mountains below the Gray Peaks he again changed shape. "I am a wizard from the desert," he told the mountainfolk, casually dropping a ruby from his mouth. "My name is Tiera. I seek Tekkelé the stargazer. What do you know of her?"

They would have told him anything. "She is old," said one hunter, "aged beyond her years."

"She speaks with no one. She refuses visitors."

"She even refuses food! I left half a goat, fresh-killed, near her cave last week; when I passed by two days later, it was still there."

"You know," said a woman thoughtfully, "she was not like this before."

"When did she change?" Vaikkenen asked.

The mountainfolk conferred. "She has been like this for months," they said.

Donning the red hawk shape, Vaikkenen flew to Tekkelé's cave. It was sunset. Stars were blooming in the east. Perching on a crag, he preened his feathers and waited for the astronomer to emerge from her sleeping place.

He waited. The sky darkened. At last she appeared, a thin and colorless woman, moving slowly, clad in tattered furs. Vaikkenen was unimpressed. She was scrawny, he thought, her face care-lined, her mouth too severe. But then he noticed the thick length of hair falling down her back, and the uncommon grace of her carriage, and the tremendous intelligence in her eyes. She was not ugly, he decided; indeed, a discerning viewer might say that she was beautiful. The mountainfolk had exaggerated their few glimpses of her into untruths.

Then Vaikkenen was aroused, and the feathers of the hawk glittered like flame. Sharp-eyed Tekkelé saw the glow out of the corner of her eye. First she thought it a trick of the light, and then she thought it was the south wind come to tease her, and, angered, she called, "Come out!" Vaikkenen abandoned the hawk shape and resumed the form of the youthful wizard that he had worn that day. But it was not the same shape, not quite. That shape had been simple and as diffident as a god pretending to be a wizard can be. This shape was not diffident. It was young, and beautiful, and filled

with promise.

And Tekkelé said, "Who are you, stranger?" She was not happy to see him. The sight of any human face was a reproach to her; she wanted nothing to do with humankind.

Vaikkenen said, "I am Tiera, a wizard from the western hills. But I was told that an ugly crone lived amid these rocks. I find a beautiful woman. I must go to punish the fools who told me lies." He transformed himself into the hawk shape, and spread his wings as if to fly away.

"Wait!" Tekkelé cried, for she did not want him to go. Like most mortals that Vaikkenen encounters, she thought him the most beautiful of men, with his honey-red skin and his wheat-gold hair, and his jet black eyes... But Tekkelé, like the mountain dwellers, had been deceived by her own pain: she thought herself ugly. She said with grim regret, "Do not hurt the folk who spoke to you. They told the truth."

Vaikkenen became Tiera once more. "They lied," he insisted. "Look at yourself." A mirror appeared between his two spread hands.

And, as Tekkelé gazed into it, he took away the pain that ruled her face and the coarse poverty of her garments, and clothed her in warmth and comfort. Tekkelé gasped at the feel of silk on her skin. She stared at her clothes: they were her own to look at, but they felt like-like-

"Stop!" she said.

"As you wish," said Vaikkenen. He returned to her the poverty of her tunic, her old leather boots, her grime-encrusted furs. But he did not give her back her pain. Instead, taking her hand, he led her out of the chill waste of twilight to her sleeping cave. There he took her in his arms and said, "I love you." And, because at that moment he believed what he said, Tekkelé believed him too, and loved him, and put her arms about him in turn, and brought him in delight to her bed.

Just before dawn she rose. The cave smelled of sex and sweat and roses, at least she thought it was roses; it had been months since she had smelled a rose. Pressed against the wall on her narrow cot, Tiera the wizard slept, arms and legs sprawling. Next to him lay the depression where she had lain through the night. As she watched, he muttered something and reached to it, to her. Kneeling to remove the Cloak of Storms from her chest, Tekkelé damned herself for seven kinds of a fool. He was a stranger. He was beautiful, while she was, if not ugly, then certainly plain. He

was, she guessed, twenty, or a little older, and she was forty-two, and a recluse, and her bones hurt... He opened his eyes and looked at her. "Are you going away?" he said, plaintive as a child, and her heart melted all over again.

"Sleep," she said to him, rising with the Cloak of Storms in her palm. "I will return soon."

She closed the chest lid and walked from her sleeping cave to the vale of stone, where she would meet the winds. Standing in its center, she put over her shoulders the Cloak of Storms. Grimly she endured the knowledge of future famines, droughts, and human agony that came to her; courageously she invited the presence of the winds. They came and danced about her, and it seemed to her that they laughed at her more than ever that morning, especially the red south wind. Shaking with pain, she returned to the cave to find Tiera the wizard sitting against the wall, waiting for her.

"Come," he said, "let me smooth the lines from your face."

Tekkelé caught his hands as he reached for her. "Wait," she said. "You are—this has been lovely. But I know you cannot mean to stay here—" He stopped the rest of the sentence with a kiss.

"I will do anything you bid me do," he said when their lips parted, "except leave your side."

Because he meant it, she believed him.

* * * *

So Vaikkenen stayed in the cave of Tekkelé the astronomer. He praised her beauty until she began to believe that she was indeed beautiful; he marveled at her knowledge of the stars until she began to think that maybe there was value to the work she had months ago ceased doing. She taught him to read star-charts, and he sat with her uncomplaining through the coldest nights, his body heat keeping her warm. When she needed to be alone, he went walking in the mountains until she desired him back. In exchange for her teaching him the patterns of the stars, he taught her a shape-changing spell, a simple one. At first she was afraid to use it, but one day he coaxed her into taking hawk shape... Tekkelé was entranced. Never had she known such freedom. In hawk shape she could escape the earth and all its pain. "They are cleaner than humankind," she exclaimed to Tiera. She watched them as she watched the stars, and discovered that they, too,

followed patterns: that the female hawks tended to be larger than the males, for instance, and that they mated for life. As hawk—as in her lover’s arms—she could escape the faces whose torment wrung her soul.

Eight months to the day that Tiera the wizard had come to her, Tekkelé was delivered of girl twins. She named the first of them Laikkimi, which means “hawk.” The second she named Shiro, which means “ruby.”

The children grew quickly. By the time they were three years old—three years in which Tekkelé, who had never intended to have children and had thought that she did not like children, observed them with the hunger she once reserved for the stars—they had the semblance and poise and intelligence of children who are eight years old. Tekkelé thought them wonderful. It amazed her that they were so distinct: she had expected that two beings who looked alike would behave alike, yet they were different. Laikkimi was gentle and generous and laughed a great deal, and Shiro was fierce. “Thous should have had they sister’s name,” Tekkelé told her, “for thou are as swift in anger and in defense as a young hawk.” Yet the twins were alike, too, and in the manner of all children, they grew restless. To assuage their restlessness, and because she did not want her daughters to grow used to solitude, Tekkelé began to change her reclusive habits.

The first time she entered the village of the mountainfolk—the same Vaikkenen had spoken with, four years back—they did not recognize her.

“I am the stargazer,” she told them. She pushed Shiro and Laikkimi in front of her. “These are my daughters.”

They were wary. “Who was their father?” a woman asked.

“Tiera the wizard.”

“The one who drips rubies when he talks?”

Tekkelé laughed. Tiera had showed her that trick. “The same. Look, his daughter does it too. Shiro, my heart, do as thy father taught thee. Let a red jewel slip from thy tongue.”

“He did not teach me,” Shiro said. “I did it by myself.” But thus coaxed, she spat a ruby into her mother’s palm. “I thought,” Tekkelé said, “since we are neighbors, that I might bring my children here sometimes. It grows lonely in the cave.”

“Of course,” said the villagers, wondering if Shiro could be induced to do her trick again, “anytime.”

One more year passed. Laikkimi and Shiro grew like weeds in a marsh. One night, as Tekkelé sat gazing at star-patterns, at that configuration of stars which astronomers before her had named the Lizard, she realized that something about it was different. In the cluster of stars—four large ones, two small ones—which made up the Lizard’s left front claw, there were two new stars.

She hurried to her charts. Perhaps she was mistaken. But the stars were not in her star-charts. She hunted through her books, squinting at the light, wondering if her charts were wrong. Her charts were not wrong. She raced out again, ignoring Tiera’s muttered protest at the rush of cold that swept the cavern. The new stars were still there. She went back to her chart room, and, hands shaking, mixed up ink and found a sharp-nibbed pen. Then she marked the new stars on the chart and wrote in the margin: “Observed, this 17th day of the month of the Goat, in the Year of the Fish, two stars, white, separated two degrees from one another and one degree southwest of their nearest neighbor in the cluster which is the left front talon of the constellation Lizard, the 4th hour after midnight, by Tekkelé of Ippa.”

She signed her name. Then she entered their sleeping room and shook wakeful her daughters. “Come. I want you to see something.”

“I don’t want to,” Shiro said.

Laikkimi whined, “It’s too cold.”

But Tekkelé was not cold; she did not think she would ever be cold again. Patiently she pushed them outside and told them where to look, insisted that they find the Lizard’s claw, remember the Lizard? They did. See that little red star, and then the other red star close by, and next to it the two white stars?

They saw them. So?

“So,” said Tekkelé, “those two stars were not there last night. Or the night before. Or ever before.”

Laikkimi was polite. “That’s interesting, Mama.” Shiro grumbled, and went back to bed. Tekkelé stared at the night sky, smiling. She decided she had never been so happy. She wondered if she should wake Tiera and show him the new stars, and decided it would wait until the next night. Even

the mocking wind wraiths held little terror for her now. Too excited to sleep, she paced the caverns composing a message to Jouvi of Nakasé, her old teacher.

But Vaikkenen was bored. Tekkelé and her stars had ceased to interest him. He was still fond of her, but he was a young god, and his attention span was short. He had forgotten what he had come north to do. It had involved the wind wraiths; probably it had not been important. The weeks, in his perception, that he had been Tiera the wizard had been amusing. Tekkelé, he knew, would miss him. He would miss her, for a while.

He did not think he would miss the children; he preferred tiger cubs.

So the next day, when Tekkelé and the children traveled down the mountain trails to the nearest large village, hoping to find someone to carry a message south, Vaikkenen departed. He left no farewell, for the gods are not accustomed to explaining themselves. He had come as the red hawk; he would leave as the red hawk, wild and free, needing nothing.

At the last moment, knowing that Tekkelé would thank him for rendering her unable to do a task she hated, he removed the Cloak of Storms from the chest by the bed they had shared and took it with him.

* * * *

The journey down the mountain was arduous but uneventful. Tekkelé was still euphoric. Laikkimi and Shiro were excited; they had never been farther from home than the mountaineers' huts, and now they were going to a big village, almost a town! Tekkelé beguiled them with descriptions of the bazaar and the treasures it held—"ribbons, and iron pots, brass rings, bells, lace and cloth." Their eyes grew wide to think of it.

It took several hours to reach the village. It was indeed more than a cluster of huts. It had four streets. A wooden statue of Tukulina greeted travelers as they came through the gate. Tekkelé bowed to it, thinking as she did that it did not much resemble that austere goddess. For one thing, it had no nose.

"I hear music, Mama," said Laikkimi.

"So do I," Tekkelé answered. "Go see where it is. Mind your manners! I shall be here." She pointed to the headman's house. While the children scampered toward the bazaar, Tekkelé knocked, and was admitted. The headman's name was Arpa, the mountaineers had told her,

and he was slow. It was generally believed that his wife, Shouk, was the true administrator of the village.

The house was small but clean; it smelled of goat's milk and tallow. Arpa was a chubby, slow-speaking man with fat little hands like a baby's. Shouk was thin and quick, with yellow teeth. When Tekkelé introduced herself, she was asked to sit, and Shouk brought tea. She had heard of this woman, whose daughters dripped rubies from their tongues, and whose husband was a wizard.

Tekkelé came right to the point. "I need someone to take a message to Nakasé."

Arpa blinked. Tekkelé thought idly that he looked like a toad. "I will pay five rubies," she said.

The headman frowned. People were not usually so direct with him; it confused him. He glanced at his wife.

"Uma could go," she said. "He has been to Nakasé twice. He knows the roads." The two women gazed at one another and acknowledged that kinship between them which all women are given and which comes to them from the Mother.

"I should like to meet this Uma," Tekkelé said. Uma was sent for. He was a broad-featured man of about Tekkelé's age.

"What shall I say, and to whom?" he asked.

"You shall seek out Jouvi the astronomer, and you shall say to him, the Lizard's left foot has grown new toes. If he is dead, may the Mother show him mercy, give that message to whoever inherited his charts. Be sure to say the message comes from Tekkelé of Ippa."

Uma repeated the message. He wondered if the astronomer was mad, with this talk of lizards and toes, but there was a woman in Nakasé he liked better than his wife, who was older than he, and nagged. "And my pay?"

"When will you leave?"

"If I am paid today, I will leave tomorrow."

"Your pay is two rubies," Tekkelé said. She spilled five rubies from

the pouch around her neck—she had coaxed them from Shiro that morning—and laid them in Arpa’s palm. He held one to the light, rolled it between his fingers, and passed it and a second to Uma.

Shouk said. “He is an honorable man.”

“Thank you,” Tekkelé said. Suddenly there was a patter of hands against the door, and Shiro and Laikkimi burst into the headman’s hut.

“Mama, look what a man gave me!” cried Shiro, waving a blue scarf. Laikkimi rang a brightly polished bell.

“These are my daughters,” Tekkelé said, catching each by an ear. “Stand quietly, imps!” Arpa’s dull eyes grew moist; he was sentimental about children, especially girls. “Compose thyself; we must go.”

But the twins set up a wail. “Please, Mama, I want to stay,” Laikkimi implored.

Imperious Shiro hit her mother on the leg. “I want to ride the goat!”

Shouk lifted the lid from the pot on the hearth. The meat smell made Tekkelé’s knees buckle. She had not eaten since sunset of the night before. Prompted by his wife’s gaze, Arpa cleared his throat and muttered something about the midday meal.

I do need food, Tekkelé thought. Not to stay would be impolite... “Thank you,” she said. Shrieking with pleasure, the girls raced from the hut.

The meat was goat’s meat, and it was very good. Tekkelé ate meat and rice, and drank tea, as did Shouk. Arpa drank some milky beverage which, Shouk said, was fermented goat’s milk. Tekkelé tried some. It made her loquacious. While Arpa went for a walk, she told Shouk about the new stars and about her golden lover who had come to her in the shape of a hawk. Shouk shared with her the gossip about Uma’s wife, who got drunk and threw pots.

The day waned. At last Tekkelé rose to leave. She walked, with Shouk, to the bazaar to find the children. The weather had turned chill; the merchants were shuttering their shops. Gray clouds coursed southward across the sky.

“The lowlands will have rain tonight,” said Shouk.

As she spoke, a gust of wind nearly blew them off their feet. An awning tore loose from the front of a nearby shop. Swearing, a man seized it and began to roll it up. “Stargazer,” the village woman said, “you should not climb the mountain in such ugly weather. Stay the night. Sleep in our hut.”

Tekkelé was touched. But in seventeen years she had not spent a night away from her cave. “I cannot,” she said.

“Then let your children stay,” Shouk said. “They have not the strength to battle this wind.”

Tekkelé frowned. The weather was foul. It would do no harm for Laikkimi and Shiro to sleep in the village for one night.

She called them. “How would you like to sleep here tonight?”

They were overjoyed. “But where will you be, Mama?” Laikkimi asked.

“I will go home to Papa. He will be lonely if I do not. But we shall come get you tomorrow. Do not be a trouble to these kind folk!”

“Oh, no,” said Shiro. Tekkelé kissed them, wondering if she were doing right. I should not have had that taste of goat’s milk, she thought.

Arpa and Shouk escorted her to the foot of the trail. “Take care,” Arpa said. “Ware winds.”

“I do not fear the winds,” answered Tekkelé.

The fermented goat’s milk was warm within her as she fought her way up the trail. The winds swirled, plucking at her clothes as if they sought to jar her from her perch. The rocks tore her hands. She bound them and went on. Once she glimpsed a flock of mountain goats, and marveled at their uncanny balance, and once she saw—or thought she saw, in the growing darkness—a huge sapphire-eyed black bear that she knew to be an avatar of the north wind.

Tired beyond thought, she stumbled through the cave into calm. “Tiera,” she called, “I am here.”

But Tiera was not. He was not in the sleeping room, nor in the chart room, nor in that open space from which she ordered the winds, nor in the storage cave. Panicked, Tekkelé screamed his name to the night, but only

the winds answered. Heedless of her own peril, she looked for him, sure that he had fallen while gathering herbs and lying on the stones, broken, lost... She did not find him. At last, too worn to weep, she returned to her bed.

In the morning she opened her chest and discovered that the Cloak of Storms was missing.

* * * *

Shiro and Laikkimi woke with the sun. They had been put to bed in a hayloft, which they found exciting. Both had acquired fleas. They ate the morning meal with the headman and his wife, and even picky Laikkimi ate everything that was set before her. After all, their mother had told them not to be a trouble. They then went to play in the bazaar, where they fought with the village children and tormented the merchants.

As the day wore on, Shouk grew concerned. Tekkelé had said she and her man would return for the twins, and Tekkelé, she felt sure, was not the sort of woman to betray a promise. Fearing that the astronomer had injured herself climbing to her cave, Shouk spoke with her husband. "Someone should go and see."

He disagreed. "What can harm a wizard?"

But Shouk had her way, and two men were sent on the journey to the astronomer's cave. They went up swiftly.

They came more swiftly down, and their yellow faces were gray as ash. "What did you see?" Shouk said.

"Ruin," they said, shuddering. "Ruin and devastation. No one was there. Everything was burnt. We found neither man nor woman, just a red hawk which sat on a smoking pile and screamed at us."

"Were there charts?" Shouk asked, although she was not sure what a chart was. "Clothing, foodstuffs-"

"Nothing!" said the younger of the two, and the whites of his eyes showed. "Some angry god has been there. We did not dare stay-" A wild shriek interrupted him. A great red hawk soared above their heads. Shouk recalled that Tekkelé had told her that Tiera had first come to her in the shape of a red hawk. It is the wizard, she thought. And she wondered what dreadful fate had befallen Tekkelé of Ippa.

“The poor babes,” she said. “To lose at one time both mother and father. We must care for them.” For she thought, practically, one of them spits rubies, and who knows what the other can do? Her own children were grown. “The poor lost babes,” she said. Arpa agreed. He was sentimental about children, especially girl children.

So Shouk called Shiro and Laikkimi to her and told them what the men had seen. “Your mother and father are gone, but you shall live with us.” She expected them to be afraid, and to weep, and then, in the manner of the young, to forget. But Shiro and Laikkimi were the daughters of Tekkelé and Vaikkenen, and they were not like other children.

Stony-faced, they stared at Shouk. “I do not believe you,” Shiro said.

“Our mother would not leave her cave,” said Laikkimi.

“Our father is a wizard. No one harms a wizard.”

“We will see,” they declared in unison. To Shouk’s astonishment, they marched from the hut and began to ascend the trail to the peak.

“Huh,” grunted one old woman who claimed wisdom. “They are not children at all, but demons.” Intrigued whispers echoed around the village. If we harbor them, some folk said, perhaps we, too, will offend the gods. The men who had been to the cave described what they had seen there, with elaborations.

And when Laikkimi and Shiro returned, faces chalk-white, they were met by a host of frightened, angry people throwing stones and yelling curses.

“Go away!” the villagers shouted, except for Arpa, who disliked noise, and Shouk, who stayed within her house and fumed at her neighbors’ stupidity. “You are not wanted!”

“We will go,” said Shiro fiercely, “but you will be sorry!” With that childish, ominous threat the twins turned and ran from the village. Sick at heart, and not a little frightened by what had happened to their home, they struggled south. Suddenly a hawk’s raucous call shrilled above them. They glanced up. A great red hawk was circling over them, calling. It was a familiar sound.

“Perhaps Father sent it,” Laikkimi said hopefully. She had frequently

heard from her mother how her father had come to the cave in the guise of a hawk.

“I think it means for us to follow it,” Shiro said. So follow they did, to a half-fallen lean-to at the edge of a stream. “We can sleep here,” said Shiro. The hawk, screaming agreement, plunged to perch on the roof-beam. Shiro prodded the still standing planks. “This wood is good, not rotten.” They pushed inside. “Look, here is a blanket, and a cooking pot, and a ring of stones for a hearth. You shall have to make a fire, Laiki.” For that was one of Laikkimi’s gifts, that she could make fire flow from her fingers.

They gathered wood, and Laikkimi made a fire in the hearth. Shiro made a broom out of a pine branch, and swept the lean-to clean. She found a rope, and two fishhooks, and a knife, and, elated, took them outside, where she quickly caught first one fish, then another. She hit them with a stone to kill them. Cleaning them was messy, but she managed it, and, leaving what she did not want for the hawk, brought the flesh to the fire and laid it on the stones. Afterward the girls lay in the dark hut with their arms about each other, and did what they had refused to do in front of the villagers—they wept.

“I hate those people,” Shiro said. “They threw rocks at us. I would like to hurt them. We could burn their huts.”

But Laikkimi disagreed. “That woman was kind to us, and she did not throw stones. I don’t want to burn her hut.”

They did not burn the village. But they did not return to it for fear of being met with stones. They made their home in the lean-to, and survived by trapping small animals and fishing in the stream, and, occasionally, stealing from the village. After a few weeks the villagers decided that they had been hasty—as Shouk pointed out, throwing stones at ten-year-old girls won no favor of the gods—and sent to see if the twins would return. But Laikkimi and Shiro wanted nothing to do with humankind. “Be *off*,” Shiro cried, “or we shall kill you and skin you and wrap your hides about our feet!” Such was the power of Vaikkenen’s daughters that the villagers believed them, and ran, while overhead, in a voice filled with menace, the red hawk wheeled, screaming.

And in the fertile meadows of Ryoka, Vaikkenen played. He thought not at all of Tekkelé the astronomer or of his two abandoned daughters: he was having too much fun seducing the maidens of the rich, scattering the cattle of the poor, and riding wild horses until they foundered from exhaustion. Possessing the Cloak of Storms gave him mastery over the

winds, but such is his nature that, having attained what he wanted, he no longer wanted it. At first he did what Tekkelé had done: each morning before sunrise he would call the winds and order them to be about their business. But though a god, Vaikkenen does not share his mother's knowledge, and so he could not see what they had to do. Without knowledge, the power to command means very little. Therefore, it began to bore him. The task was the same each time; there was no challenge in it, no spice or excitement. So he ceased to do it—it was a task fit only for mortals, he told himself—and ordered the capricious winds one morning to "Do what thou wilt!"

They were happy to obey him. Directionless, they scattered, driving all before them across the world. A month passed. Two months; then half a year. Across the face of Ryoka, lamentation and misery started to rise. Rain no longer fell when it should or where it should. Crops withered in the soil. Snow did not fall in winter, and the rivers no longer rose in spring to flood the land. Grain did not sprout. Patterns that had held for generations failed. There was no food, no water save salt water, which humanfolk cannot drink. Balance and order shattered, and rich and poor alike died.

In terror people knelt in prayer, mouths against the earth, begging mercy from the Mother. All over Ryoka women and men spoke. And in Her sleep, the Old One heard. She did not wake, but, troubled in dream, She shifted uneasily on Her bed.

The stricken earth groaned. Fissures gaped. Springs dried. Fires spouted from the stone. Humankind trembled, and in her cave beneath the sea, Sedi lifted her head and exclaimed, *Grandmother is restless! What can be wrong?*

Tukalina, who had felt it, too, said grimly, *I do not know, and I should. This has been a pleasant visit, daughter.* Rising up through the sea, the goddess cloaked herself in cloud and rode the back of a waterspout to the nearest point of land. It turned out to be Skyeggo harbor, the great trading port of the east. She looked for the sails of the trading ships and did not see them. She went to the docks. The ships lay broken on the sand, and about them lay corpses. In the city streets she found more dead. The city seemed a charnel house. She sniffed the air, the moist air that flows from the sea and drives pestilence before it. It was bitter, hot, and dry.

The winds are loose, ungoverned, the goddess thought. I smell chaos. And spreading her dark wings over the wretched city, Tukalina flew north to the Gray Peaks.

There she found ruin, and the memory of pain. The pain shouted at her from the walls as she stood in Tekkelé's empty chambers. There was no sign of the astronomer's presence—the malicious winds had long since scattered the scraps of her charts—but as Tukulina walked through the caverns a glint of red caught her eye. She bent and picked it up. It was a ruby.

The Black Goddess stalked to the stone plateau from which Tekkelé had called the winds, and spread her arms to the sky. She did not have the Cloak of Storms, but then, she did not need it. Filled with righteous anger, she summoned the errant winds. She waited. And waited, and still they did not come; they were far from the sound of even a goddess's voice, playing on the edge of the world. At last they heard the puissant call, and came and bowed before her, trembling. Only the icy wind of the sky did not quake, for he knew that, rage as she might, even Tukulina could not unmake them.

But she could, she pointed out to them in asperity, return them to the Void, that great vast darkness beneath the earth, and summon other spirits to take their places in the unbounded sky. "Others can assume the duties you have so shamefully neglected. Look at what you have done! Ryoka lies in torment, and who will its poor people blame? Me! You owe me an accounting. Tell me what happened to Tekkelé of Ippa."

So the winds that had refused to speak to Tekkelé spoke to their mistress of Tekkelé's anguish at her task, of Vaikkenen's curiosity, of his coming to the Gray Peaks, and of what had occurred in the five years he remained there.

When they finished, the goddess said, "Well do I know, O winds, that my son would not have come to this place if he had not been told of it, and who should tell him of it but you? I do not hold you guiltless in these matters. You"—she pointed to the golden-skinned child and the red-maned mare—"shall go and find for me the Cloak of Storms which my son has no doubt dropped or thrown aside or hidden in some place he has since forgotten, and bring it to me." The east and south winds bowed and danced into the sky. "You"—pointing to the leafclad boy and the ebony-skinned warrior—"shall find Tekkelé of Ippa. "They also bowed and disappeared. "And you," she said to the white wind of the sky, "shall find my son."

"I go," he said, and went.

The yellow east wind found the Cloak of Storms wrapped around a thorn bush in a swamp. Plucking it from that fetid place, he called the south

wind to him. Together they returned to Tukulina and laid the Cloak at her feet. The white wind of the sky returned and said, "I have seen your son. He lies in a bower domed with flowers that he has built in the southern plains."

"I see," Tukulina said. How like my son, she mused. The land starves around him, and he builds a house of flowers in which to hide. O Vaikkenen! Saddened, she awaited the return of the west and north winds. At last they came. "Well," demanded the goddess, "where is Tekkelé?"

"O Tukulina," they answered, "we cannot find her."

The Black Goddess drew herself to her full height and spread her wings. They blotted out the sun. "O winds," she said, "now hope within they malignant hearts that Tekkelé is not dead. For if she has gone before her time to the Void, I promise you shall return there as well to serve her shade. Begone from my sight!"

The chastened winds departed to take up the tasks they had ignored for so long. Tukulina, her rage subsiding, held the Cloak of Storms to the light. It was tattered from its sojourn in the thorn bush. She healed its rents with a touch and let it fall around her shoulders. O Vaikkenen, she thought, would that I could as easily heal the ills that you unthinking heaped upon Ryoka!

Then, setting aside her divinity, Tukulina assumed the guise of the old woman Oshka. She did not expect to find Tekkelé: but somewhere on the mountainside were Laikkimi and Shiro, Tekkelé's children, and even immortals hate to incur debts. Tukulina could not help but feel she owed them something.

* * * *

Life had not been easy for Laikkimi and Shiro since their parents had vanished from the cave and they had been driven from the village. Life had grown hard in the mountains. Winter lasted overlong that year, and the spring foliage took a long time to rise: when it did, the buds were shriveled and stunted. The leaf-eating animals of the slopes moved south; the predators, bereft of food, began to attack the mountandwellers. First they killed the cattle, then the human beings. The villagers left their homes, those that could. Those that could not, died.

Laikkimi and Shiro survived by watching the goats and eating what they did, and by stealing from the villagers as they succumbed to starvation. They stole bows and arrows and guessed how to use them; they stole pots

and pans and metal things that they could not make for themselves. The red hawk nested in an ancient spruce tree near the shack. She had stayed with them, and on days when they could not find food she hunted for them, bringing them rabbits and forest birds and even an occasional chicken. She screamed to warn them when the hunting cats of the mountains came too close, and once had flown at a panther which, drawn by the scent of the two girls, had approached the hut at dusk. Sometimes she would disappear for days on end, only to reappear battered and tired, with a few feathers missing.

Laikkimi first saw the old woman while gathering the soft inner bark of the sweet birch, which is good to eat. Ceasing to strip the bark, she watched the stranger climb slowly and steadily along the trail. Then, gathering up what she had foraged, Laikkimi went to find Shiro.

Shiro heard the news with surprise and unease. "Who can it be? Is it one of the village folk? I thought they were dead."

"No," Laikkimi said. "I do not know her. She is old; her hair is gray and her skin dry and wrinkled."

Shiro fingered her bow and arrows. "If she is an enemy," she declared, "I will kill her."

Laikkimi said, "I do not think she is an enemy."

"You are sure you do not know her?"

"I'm sure," Laikkimi said.

And when Tukulina arrived at the shack beside the stream, she found Shiro standing in the doorway, bow strung, aiming an arrow at her breast. She knew that she had found those she sought.

"Peace to you," she said gravely. "Do not shoot; I mean no harm."

"Who are you?" Shiro said.

"My name is Oshka."

"What do you want?"

"I am looking for someone who used to live north of here."

Laikkimi emerged from the shack. “Who?”

“Tekkelé the astronomer.”

Laikkimi gasped. “You know her?” Shiro said.

“I did know her. She lived in a cave on the peak.”

“She is not there,” Shiro said. “Go back to where you came from and tell them that she is gone.”

“Is she dead?” Tukulina asked.

“No!” the children cried in unison.

“I will tell them,” said Tukulina. She gazed at the two, marveling at their size and strength. Human children do not grow so fast, she thought. Do they know what they are? They were lean as dogs. “May I offer you food? I have some.”

Laikkimi licked her lips. Shiro’s arrow tip sagged. “What sort of food?” she asked. Her sister shot her a reproachful glance. What did it matter what sort of food it was? They would eat it.

“This,” said the disguised goddess, and she caused four small but perfect peaches to appear in her hands. They were yellow and pink and soft with down. A sweet fragrance drifted across the clearing to the famished children.

Shiro moaned, and dropped the bow. The girls ran like goats to Tukulina’s side. Two of the peaches vanished so swiftly that it seemed as if they had been swallowed whole. The girls reached for the next two—and hesitated.

Laikkimi said, “One of these is yours, Old One.”

“I have had mine,” said Tukulina. Their generosity despite their hunger pleased her greatly. “Take them.”

Suddenly a hawk’s scream ripped the air. It was the red hawk, returning from the hunt. She dived, still shrieking, coming to protect the children who were dear to her as her life. Tukulina recognized the human soul under the bristling feathers, and even her immortal heart was wrung.

“Tekkelé!” she said, and gestured with one hand, casting off her own disguise as she did so. So named in mid-strike, Tekkelé the red hawk faltered. Her feathers dropped away; she landed on the earth a human woman wearing tattered clothes.

“Mother!” cried the girls, and ran to touch her.

She backed from them, shivering, and her eyes were vague and wild.

“Wait,” said the goddess. The children stared, awestruck, at the majestic winged woman whose skin was black as night. “In a moment she will know you. Watch her eyes.” And as the children waited, hearts pounding, the wild eyes changed and became those of Tekkelé, their mother whom they had lost.

They went to her, and held her, weeping.

“Mother,” said Shiro, torn between delight and tears, “how is it you are so little?” For the twins were taller than their mother. Tekkelé’s hair, once black, was gray, and she was spare and lean as the hawk whose shape she had stolen.

She gazed at Tukulina with a hawk’s steady stare.

“Tekkelé of Ippa,” said the goddess, “can you speak?” For mortals who have worn animal shape sometimes lose their power to make human sounds.

“I speak,” said Tekkelé. The words emerged in a hoarse croak, but they were human.

“Can you listen?”

“I listen.”

“Then know,” said the Black Goddess, “that the being you knew as Tiera the wizard is in truth Vaikkenen, my son. Deeply has he wronged you, and all Ryoka, by his theft of the Cloak of Storms. For this, and for his having disturbed his grandmother, he shall be punished. Is there aught he might do for you to make amends for the harm he has already done?”

Tekkelé cocked her head to one side. With the passion that she once had reserved for the stars, she hated Tiera the wizard. Long distances had she flown in her hawk shape, hoping to find him. Her fingers curled like

talons.

“I want to eat his eyes,” she said.

“That you may not do,” said the Black Goddess.

Tekkelé’s fingers uncurled; the wildness left her face, and weariness replaced it. “Then I want nothing,” she said. Her human intelligence was coming back to her. She had had enough, she thought, of gods and goddesses and of the gifts of gods and goddesses...

“Do you wish to remain here?” Tukulina said. “I can return you to Nakasé.”

But the twins objected to this. “She shall stay with us!” exclaimed Shiro. The twins watched their mother anxiously. Much had happened that they did not understand: the hawk that had guarded them for half a year had turned out to be their mother; their father, it seemed, was a god, and their mother hated him although once she had loved him...

“I will stay,” Tekkelé said. “It is as good as any other place.” She gazed indifferently at the shack, the stubby blue trees, the stream, the mountains, and then at her daughters. “Perhaps it is better than some others.”

She needs rest, the goddess thought. The frailty of mortals constantly surprised her. She spread her wings until their tips brushed the sky. “I will see that you are not disturbed,” the Black Goddess promised.

Her shadow fell over the valley. The winds regarded it, and understood that neither storm nor heat nor flood was to touch it. The spirits of earth likewise saw it. Small animals sensed it and began to move toward the hut, hoping that there they would be safe from predators. Tukulina folded her wings. Then, wrapping the Cloak of Storms about her, she sped south.

* * * *

She found Vaikkenen asleep beneath his bower, and woke him by removing it. The sun fell upon his upturned face. Vaikkenen opened his eyes to find his mother looming over him. He recognized immediately that she was displeased. Sighing to himself, for he hated scenes, he rose from his couch, graceful as a gazelle, and knelt at her feet, smiling sweetly.

O my mother, welcome back to Ryoka, he said. I trust my sister is well. How may I serve thee?

Get up, said Tukulina tartly. You have already served me, and all Ryoka, ill.

Rising, Vaikkenen assumed a penitent mien. *What have I done?*

You seduced my servant Tekkelé and then left her and her daughters, your daughters, unprotected. You stole the Cloak of Storms, which I entrusted to Tekkelé, and then threw it away, creating great misery across this land. Have you not felt it? And most important, you disturbed your grandmother, when I expressly warned you not to do so! What have you to say?

Vaikkenen squirmed. How degrading, he thought, for a god to have to defend himself. It is all the fault of the winds. They told me about Tekkelé of Ippa. They practically dared me to steal the Cloak! *I did not mean to do it*, he began.

His mother interrupted him. *That is no excuse. You did it. And there are no amends you can make to the souls whom your thoughtless behavior sent to the Void before their time. For this, and for your temerity in daring to disturb your grandmother, you shall leave Ryoka.*

Where shall I go? Vaikkenen asked, for he could see that Tukulina was truly angry, and that only obedience would mollify her.

You shall go to the Void, Tukulina said. Vaikkenen paled. The Void is where the souls of the dead go to await rebirth, and immortals, who can neither die nor be reborn, hate it. *You shall go to Cendrai the Gatekeeper, and you shall offer her your services, and do what she tells you.*

For how long? Vaikkenen asked grimly.

Until the souls who entered the Void after your theft of the Cloak of Storms are judged and reborn.

This was not, as immortals count time, very long, and Vaikkenen knew it. Yet any time was too long to spend in the Void. He wondered if there was some way to avoid his mother's judgment.

There is not, said Tukulina, knowing her son's thought. She pointed at

the ground and spoke. The ground shuddered. A dark tunnel, like an open mouth, appeared in the fabric of the earth.

Vaikkenen went. The souls that filled the caverns of the Void were astonished to see the bright god coming toward them. He halted at the Gate, where the throng was thickest. Cendrai the Gatekeeper greeted him roughly. "What are you doing here, Trickster? This is no place for an immortal. Be off!"

Vaikkenen said, "Oh Cendrai, I would obey you if I could. But I have been sent to offer you my services until all the souls who entered here after I stole the Cloak of Storms from Tekkelé of Ippa have been judged and reborn." He put on his most winning expression. Whatever task she finds me, he thought, may not be too bad.

Cendrai clapped her hands in delight. "Good!" she cried. "I need a rest. I have not left this Gate for centuries. You will take my place, and I will return to the sunlight. Come, immortal!" With a grin she stepped aside.

So Vaikkenen the Trickster became the warden of the dead. It is a wearisome task, for the dead are eager to leave the Void and must be watched, lest they sneak through the Gate and return to the world before their proper time. Vaikkenen despised the task. He spent a great deal of time planning the trick which he intended to play on the winds to repay them for their part in his theft, and when that grew dull, he designed another trick which he hoped to play on Cendrai. He half-expected her to take advantage of him and not return—it was the sort of thing he himself might do—but when the last soul who had entered the Void since his theft of the Cloak of Storms from Tekkelé was judged and reborn, Cendrai reappeared.

"Come back anytime!" she yelled as Vaikkenen with a shout of joy left the Gate and sped toward the sunlight.

Vaikkenen did eventually repay the winds for their part in the theft, and the trick he played on Cendrai is one of the Six Great Tricks, and is much sung of across Ryoka. Tukulina the raven-winged was later to say that her son learned nothing from his sojourn in the Void, except caution. Tekkelé the astronomer lived long in Ravenswood, as the valley came to be called. Eventually Shiro and Laikkimi left the valley, and went to have their own adventures, as befitted the daughters of a god. The hawks returned to the mountaintop, and the people to their villages; beavers dammed the stream, and it turned into a lake filled with fish.

At last Tekkelé grew bored with solitude. To amuse herself, she

would leave her hut and wander to the nearest town, where she would sit in the sunlight and tell stories to the children. "Once upon a time," she would say, "there was a woman who lived on a mountain, maybe this mountain, and her name was Tekkelé, and she watched the stars..." And she told them about Tekkelé the stargazer, who loved a wizard with golden hair. To the older ones she spoke of the stars, showing them the patterns, and of the life of the red hawks that nested in the mountains. Twice a year Shiro and Laikkimi returned, as dutiful daughters should, to visit their mother. They had grown to be beautiful and loving women and had remained true to their natures: Shiro was wild and fierce, and had gone to the castles of the folk of the Crystal Lake and become a warrior, and Laikkimi had gone east to the city of Skyeggo and there met a man who loved her, and by him bore two children, a girl whom she named Tekkelé, and a boy named Ruha, after his father's father. Both her children had golden hair.

It is not clear when Tekkelé of Ippa first became known as a sibyl. But as time went on, men and women would come to the village by the lake, approach her, and beg her to instruct them if such and such an act would be pleasing to the gods. At first Tekkelé thought this funny. "You are fools," she said, "to think that the gods care for your petty problems!" But whatever she said, people would repeat it, and take it to heart. They left the village telling each other how wise she was.

That spring Shiro and Laikkimi returned, as they did every spring, to visit their mother. They rode into Ravenswood on two tall horses. But when they entered Tekkelé's hut, which stood where the old lean-to had stood, they found it empty, and the hearthstone, when they touched it, was cold. They sought out the headman of the village. "We are looking for Tekkelé of Ippa," they said.

The headman answered, "She is gone."

"Gone where?" said Shiro, ever fierce. The headman spread his hands and shrugged. "Do you mean that she's dead?"

"Oh, no," the headman said. "Not that. She was very wise. Now the gods have taken her."

"I doubt it," said Laikkimi dryly. Neither of the twins, being part-devine themselves, had much use for the gods. They searched through Ravenswood for traces of their mother but found nothing, and no one who could tell them anything, except one girl who admitted that the day before Tekkelé's disappearance she had heard the old woman standing beside the lake, whispering to herself.

“What was she saying?” Laikkimi asked.

“I did not understand it—she spoke of faces, many faces,” answered the child.

Shiro and Laikkimi turned this over in their minds, but could make no sense of it. Puzzled and sad, they decided that Tekkelé—who was very old by now—had lost her footing and fallen into the lake. Lovingly they spoke the death ritual for her, that her soul might not fly continually through the vast caverns of the Void.

At the last moment, as the twins made ready to leave the peaceful valley, Shiro said, “Wait.”

“What is it?” Laikkimi said.

Shiro pointed toward the mountaintop. “What if-?” Laikkimi nodded. It had been many years since they had left the cave in which Tekkelé had borne them; they did not miss it. But perhaps, they thought, Tekkelé the stargazer had chosen to return there, to die amid the rocks, listening to the wild music of the winds and the hawks’ shrill cries.

They started up the mountain trail. But they had not gone very far before they heard above them the rustle of wings. A red hawk—female, by the size of it, and gaunt with age—soared toward them from the ever-present bank of cloud that surrounded, and still surrounds, the Gray Peaks. The sun glinted on its wings. Silently it circled once, twice, three times over their heads.

Laikkimi lifted her arms to the bird. “Mother!”

The red hawk screamed in assent, confusion, challenge? Its yellow eyes gleamed. Then, veering, it flew north. Laikkimi and Shiro waited on the trail, hoping that it would return. But it did not. At last they retraced their steps to the hut where they had left their horses grazing, and, mounting, turned their faces away from Ravenswood.

But as they rode, Tekkelé’s daughters smiled, for they believed they knew what had become of their mother. And no one has seen or heard of anybody who has seen Tekkelé of Ippa since that time.