

Dear Incoming Honors Sophomore Literature and Composition Students,

I am so pleased you've decided to join me at this point of your academic journey. During these uncertain times—and other hardships throughout modern history—the constants that people often turn to are literature and the arts. As author Neil Gaiman said, books “...are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.” While the world takes on metaphorical dragons of its own, it is with renewed enthusiasm that we begin this year of finding meaning in the written word, and ultimately finding meaning in our shared human experience.

This summer, you are going to read two short stories by Ursula K. Le Guin. I would wait until the beginning of August to complete this. Also, you should read each story at least twice. Once, just to read it and then a second time to complete your notes, etc.

Read “The Wife’s Story” first. Complete the guided questions and annotations. You can also take notes on a separate sheet of paper. I can’t get the line numbers to match up and print properly, so, unfortunately, you will need to count and label them.

Review the annotation rubric. Apply this rubric to your notes and annotations for “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”.

When we come back in August, we will discuss both stories and Le Guin’s style. This will prepare us for our first piece of writing for the year.

If you don’t have the capability of printing this assignment, there will be copies in the main office for you. You may also use Kami to annotate, etc. Just make sure you email me your assignment.

Looking forward to meeting you in August!

Sincerely,

Ms. Genova

PS. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

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# The Wife's Story

Short Story by Ursula K. Le Guin

1. As you read lines 1-32, begin to collect and cite text evidence.

- Underline text that describes the husband.
- Circle language that hints that something bad is going to happen.

5 He was a good husband, a good father. I don't understand it. I don't believe in it. I don't believe that it happened. I saw it happen but it isn't true. It can't be. He was always gentle. If you'd have seen him playing with the children, anybody who saw him with the children would have known that there wasn't any bad in him, not one mean bone. When I first met him he was still living with his mother, over near Spring Lake, and I used to see them together, the mother and the sons, and think that any young fellow that was that nice with his family must be one worth knowing. Then one time when I was walking in the woods I met him by himself coming back from a hunting trip. He hadn't gotten any game at all, not so much as a field mouse, but he wasn't cast down about it. He was just larking along enjoying the morning air. That's one of the things I first loved about him. He didn't take things hard, he didn't grouch and whine when things didn't go his way. So we got talking that day. And I guess things moved right along after that, because pretty soon he was over here pretty near all the time. And my sister said — see, my parents had moved out the year before and gone south, leaving us the place — my sister said, kind of teasing but serious, “Well! If he's going to be here every day and half the night, I guess there isn't room for me!” And she moved out — just down the way. We've always been real close, her and me. That's the sort of thing doesn't ever change. I couldn't ever have got through this bad time without my sis.

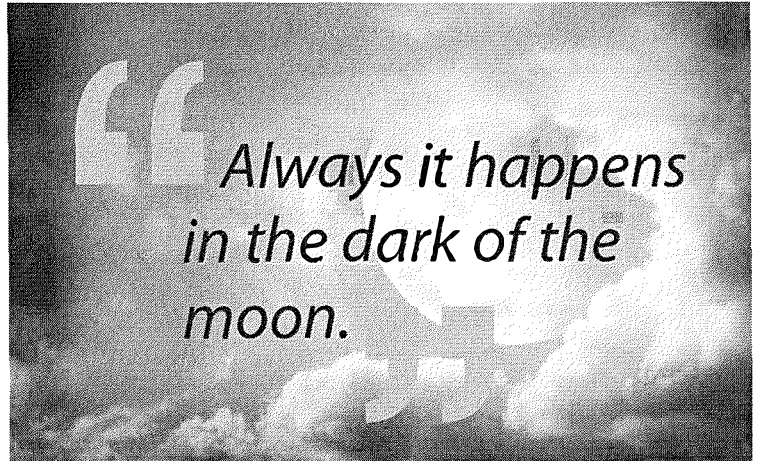
5 Well, so he come to live here. And all I can say is, it was the happy year of my life. He was just purely good to me. A hard worker and never lazy, and so big and fine-looking. Everybody looked up to him, you know, young as he was. Lodge Meeting nights, more and more often they had him to lead the singing. He had such a beautiful voice, and he'd lead off strong, and the others following and joining in, high voices and low. It brings the shivers on me now to think of it, hearing it, nights when I'd stayed home from meeting when the children was babies. — the singing coming up through the trees there, and the moon light, summer nights, the full moon shining. I'll never hear anything so beautiful. I'll never know a joy like that again.

2. Reread lines 1-18, and think about how the narrator describes her husband. What do you learn about her character?

3. As you read lines 33-63, continue to cite textual evidence.

- Underline text that hints that something bad is going to happen.
- Circle text that describes changes in the husband's behavior.
- In your notes, note what the narrator experiences directly.

5 It was the moon, that's what they say. It's  
the moon's fault, and the blood. It was in his  
father's blood. I never knew his father, and now I  
wonder what become of him. He was from up  
Whitewater way, and had no kin around here. I  
always thought he went back there, but now I  
don't know. There was some talk about him, tales,  
0 that come out after what happened to my husband.  
It's something runs in the blood, they say, and it  
may never come out, but if it does, it's the change  
of the moon that does it. Always I happens in the  
dark of the moon. When everybody's home and  
5 asleep. Something comes over the one that's got  
the curse in his blood, they say, and he gets up  
because he can't sleep, and goes out into the glaring sun, and goes off all alone — drawn to find those like him.



And it may be so, because my husband would do that. I'd have rouse and say, 'Where you going to?' and he'd say, 'Oh, hunting, be back this evening,' and it wasn't like him, even his voice was different. But I'd be so  
0 sleepy, and not wanting to wake the kids, and he was so good and responsible, it was no call of mine to go  
asking 'Why?' and 'Where?' and all like that.

5 So it happened that way maybe three times or four. He'd come back late, and worn out, and pretty near  
cross for one so sweet-tempered — and not wanting to talk about it. I figured everybody got to bust out now  
and then, and nagging never helped anything. But it did begin to worry me. Not so much that he went, but that  
he came back so tired and strange. Even, he smelled strange. It made my hair stand up on end. I could not  
endure it and I said, "What is that — those smells on you? All over you!" And he said, "I don't know," real  
short, and made like he was sleeping. But he went down when he thought I wasn't noticing, and washed and  
washed himself. But those smells stayed in his hair, and in our bed, for days.

0 And then the awful thing. I don't find it easy to tell about this. I want to cry when I have to bring it to  
my mind. Our youngest, the little one, my baby, she turned from her father. Just overnight. He came in and she  
got scared-looking, stiff, with her eyes wide, and then she begun to cry and try to hide behind me. She didn't  
yet talk plain but she was saying over and over, 'Make it go away! Make it go away!'

4. Reread lines 48-63. How has the narrator's relationship with her husband changed?

5. Read lines 64-76. In the margin, explain happens between the father and the child? Why does the narrator scold her child?

6. As you read lines 64-106, continue to cite textual evidence.

- Underline the unexpected events the narrator witnesses.
- In your notes, write what you think is happening to the narrator's husband.

The look in his eyes, just for one moment, when he heard that. That's what I don't want ever to remember. That's what I can't forget. The look in his eyes looking at his own child.

5 I said to the child, 'Shame on you, what's got into you?' — scolding, but keeping her right up close to me at the same time, because I was frightened, too. Frightened to shaking.

He looked away then and said something like, 'Guess she just waked up dreaming,' and passed if off that way. Or tried to. And so did I. And I got real mad with my baby when she kept on acting crazy scared of her own dad. But she couldn't help it and I couldn't change it.

0 He kept away that whole day. Because he knew, I guess. It was just beginning dark of the moon.

It was hot and close inside, and dark, and we'd all been asleep some while, when something woke me up. He wasn't there beside me. I heard a little stir in the passage, when I listened. So I got up, because I could bear it no longer. I went out into the passage and it was light there, hard sunlight coming in from the door. And I saw him standing just outside, in the tall grass by the entrance. His head was hanging. Presently he sat down, 5 like he felt weary, and looked down at this feet. I held still, inside, and watched — I didn't know what for.

And I saw what he saw. I saw the changing. In his feet, it was first. They got long, each foot got longer, stretching out, the toes stretching out and the foot getting long, and fleshy, and white. And no hair on them.

The hair begun to come away all over his body. It was like his hair fired away in the sunlight and was gone. He was white all over, then, like worm's skin. And he turned his face. It was changing while I looked. It 0 got flatter and flatter, the mouth flat and wide, and the teeth grinning flat and dull, and the nose just a knob of flesh with nostril holes, and the ears gone, and the eyes gone blue — glue, with white rims around the blue — staring at me out of that flat, soft, white face.

He stood up then on two legs. I saw him, I had to see him, my own dear love, turned into the hateful one.

5 I couldn't move, but as I crouched there in the passage staring out into the day I was trembling and shaking with a growl that burst out into a crazy, awful howling. A grief howl and a terror howl and a calling howl. And the others heard it, even sleeping, and woke up.

It stared and peered, that thing my husband had turned into and shoved his face up to the entrance of our house. I was still bound by mortal fear, but behind me the children had waked up, and the baby was 0 whimpering. The mother anger came into me then, and I snarled and crept forward.

The man thing looked around. It had no gun, like the ones from the man places do. But it picked up a heavy fallen tree branch in its long white foot, and shoved the end of that down into our house, at me. I snapped at the end of it in my teeth and started to force my way out, because I knew the man would kill our children if it could. But my sister was already coming. I saw her running at the man with her head low and her 5 mane high and her eyes yellow as the winter sun. It turned on her and raised up that branch to hit her. But I come out of the doorway, mad with the mother anger, and the others all were coming answering my call, the whole pack gathering, there in that blind glare and heat of the sun at noon.

0 The man looked round at us and yelled out loud, and brandished the branch it held. Then it broke and ran, heading for the cleared fields and plowlands, down the mountainside. It ran, on two legs, leaping and weaving, and we followed it.

7. Reread lines 97-106. What transformation has taken place? What assumptions had you made about the characters that had to be changed? Support your answer with explicit textual evidence.

8. As you read lines 107-127, underline text that describes changes in the narrator's feelings toward her husband.

5 I was last, because love still bound the anger and the fear in me. I was running when I saw them pull it down. My sister's teeth were in its throat. I got there and it was dead. The others were drawing back from the kill, because of the taste of the blood, and the smell. The younger ones were cowering and some crying, and my sister rubbed her mouth against her forelegs over and over to get rid of the taste. I went up close because I thought if the thing was dead the spell, the curse must be done, and my husband could come back — alive, or even dead, if I could only see him, my true love, in his true form, beautiful. But only the dead man lay there white and bloody. We drew back and back from it, and turned and ran, back up into the hills, back to the woods of the shadows and the twilight and the blessed dark.

9. Reread lines 120-127. Why the did wolves killed “the man thing.” Do you think this was the right thing to do? Support your opinion with details from the story.

**SHORT RESPONSE:** Le Guin purposely misleads her reader as to the true identity of the narrator. How does this technique help the reader understand the motivations behind the narrator's actions? **Cite text evidence in your response.**

Annotation Rubric

Types of Annotations	Quality of Annotations	Score
<p>Student annotations should reflect comprehension, inference and depth/breadth of interaction with text.</p> <p>Based on text type, the following types of responses should be evidenced in annotations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions (levels 2 and 3)</li> <li>• Reactions and Analysis</li> <li>• Opinions with support</li> <li>• Locating important passages / key evidence or ideas</li> <li>• Connections including those to other sources/accounts of this topic (allusions)</li> <li>• Key words or phrases including figurative, connotative and specific word choices of the writer</li> <li>• Themes or Central Ideas</li> <li>• Paraphrasing</li> <li>• Predictions and Inferences with support</li> <li>• Challenges of author's bias/assumptions</li> <li>• Identification of author's strategies: Development of events or characters OR structure and development of argument</li> <li>• Writer's Style: Tone, POV, Facts v. Opinions, Rhetorical/Persuasive Devices</li> <li>• Purpose</li> </ul>	<p>The text is <b>extensively</b> annotated with copious margin notations. The annotations demonstrate a <b>comprehensive and thoughtful</b> reading. The margin notes show that the reader has proficiently analyzed the text, made insightful connections and drawn valid conclusions. Notations are balanced and show deep reading and thinking. <b>All</b> of the text is addressed.</p>	5
	<p>The text is <b>adequately</b> annotated with margin notations. The annotations demonstrate that the reader understands the text <b>beyond the literal level</b>. The margin notes show that the reader has analyzed the text, made <b>some</b> connections and drawn some conclusions. Notations are <b>balanced</b> and show <b>some deep reading and thinking</b>. Most to all of the text is addressed.</p>	4
	<p>The text is annotated with some margin notations. The annotations are basic and consist mainly of plot driven questions or literal ideas. Annotations indicate a basic understanding of the text. The reader has been able to make one or two connections, but has been unable to use the text to draw valid conclusions. Notations are unbalanced and only half of the text is addressed.</p>	3
	<p>The text is underlined in appropriate places, but there are <b>very few margin notes</b> making it difficult to evaluate how well the reader understood the reading. Notes are <b>illogical and not balanced</b>. Only one quarter of text has been glossed. <b>Insufficient length and depth</b> in comments.</p>	2
	<p>Significant parts of the text are completely unmarked. There are no margin notes, only underlined text.</p>	1

## **The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas** *Ursula K. Le Guin*

With a clamor of bells that set the swallows soaring, the Festival of Summer came to the city Omelas, bright-towered by the sea. The rigging of the boats in harbor sparkled with flags. In the streets between houses with red roofs and painted walls, between old moss-grown gardens and under avenues of trees, past great parks and public buildings, processions moved. Some were decorous: old people in long stiff robes of mauve and grey, grave master workmen, quiet, merry women carrying their babies and chatting as they walked. In other streets the music beat faster, a shimmering of gong and tambourine, and the people went dancing, the procession was a dance. Children dodged in and out, their high calls rising like the swallows' crossing flights over the music and the singing. All the processions wound towards the north side of the city, where on the great water-meadow called the Green Fields boys and girls, naked in the bright air, with mud-stained feet and ankles and long, lithe arms, exercised their restive horses before the race. The horses wore no gear at all but a halter without bit. Their manes were braided with streamers of silver, gold, and green. They flared their nostrils and pranced and boasted to one another; they were vastly excited, the horse being the only animal who has adopted our ceremonies as his own. Far off to the north and west the mountains stood up half encircling Omelas on her bay. The air of morning was so clear that the snow still crowning the Eighteen Peaks burned with white-gold fire across the miles of sunlit air, under the dark blue of the sky. There was just enough wind to make the banners that marked the racecourse snap and flutter now and then. In the silence of the broad green meadows one could hear the music winding through the city streets, farther and nearer and ever approaching, a cheerful faint sweetness of the air that from time to time trembled and gathered together and broke out into the great joyous clanging of the bells.

Joyous! How is one to tell about joy? How describe the citizens of Omelas?

They were not simple folk, you see, though they were happy. But we do not say the words of cheer much any more. All smiles have become archaic. Given a description such as this one tends to make certain assumptions. Given a description such as this one tends to look next for the King, mounted on a splendid stallion and surrounded by his noble knights, or perhaps in a golden litter borne by great-muscled slaves. But there was no king. They did not use swords, or keep slaves. They were not barbarians. I do not know the rules and laws of their society, but I suspect that they were singularly few. As they did without monarchy and slavery, so they also got on without the stock exchange, the advertisement, the secret police, and the bomb. Yet I repeat that these were not simple folk, not dulcet shepherds, noble savages, bland utopians. They were not less complex than us. The trouble is that we have a bad habit, encouraged by pedants and sophisticates, of considering happiness as something rather stupid. Only pain is intellectual, only evil interesting. This is the treason of the artist: a refusal to admit the banality of evil and the terrible boredom of pain. If you can't lick 'em, join 'em. If it hurts, repeat it. But to praise despair is to condemn delight, to embrace violence is to lose hold of everything else. We have almost lost hold; we can no longer describe a happy man, nor make any celebration of joy. How can I tell you about the people of Omelas? They were not naive and happy children—though their children were, in fact, happy. They were mature, intelligent, passionate adults whose lives were not wretched. O miracle! but I wish I could describe it better. I wish I could convince you. Omelas sounds in my words like a city in a fairy tale, long ago and far away, once upon a time. Perhaps it would be best if you imagined it as your own fancy bids, assuming it will rise to the occasion, for certainly I cannot suit you all. For instance, how about technology? I think that there would be no cars or helicopters in and above the streets; this follows from the fact that the people of Omelas are happy people. Happiness is based on a just discrimination of

what is necessary, what is neither necessary nor destructive, and what is destructive. In the middle category, however—that of the unnecessary but undestructive, that of comfort, luxury, exuberance, etc.—they could perfectly well have central heating, subway trains, washing machines, and all kinds of marvelous devices not yet invented here, floating light-sources, fuelless power, a cure for the common cold. Or they could have none of that; it doesn't matter.

As you like it. I incline to think that people from towns up and down the coast have been coming in to Omelas during the last days before the Festival on very fast little trains and double-decked trams, and that the train station of Omelas is actually the handsomest building in town, though plainer than the magnificent Farmers' Market. But even granted trains, I fear that Omelas so far strikes some of you as goody-goody. Smiles, bells, parades, horses, bleh. If so, please add an orgy. If an orgy would help, don't hesitate. Let us not, however, have temples from which issue beautiful nude priests and priestesses already half in ecstasy and ready to copulate with any man or woman, lover or stranger, who desires union with the deep godhead of the blood, although that was my first idea. But really it would be better not to have any temples in Omelas—at least, not manned temples. Religion yes, clergy no. Surely the beautiful nudes can just wander about, offering themselves like divine souffles to the hunger of the needy and the rapture of the flesh. Let them join the processions. Let tambourines be struck above the copulations, and the glory of desire be proclaimed upon the gongs, and (a not unimportant point) let the offspring of these delightful rituals be beloved and looked after by all. One thing I know there is none of in Omelas is guilt. But what else should there be? I thought at first there were not drugs, but that is puritanical. For those who like it, the faint insistent sweetness of drooz may perfume the ways of the city, drooz which first brings a great lightness and brilliance to the mind and limbs, and then after some hours a dreamy languor, and wonderful visions at last of the very arcana and inmost secrets of the Universe, as well as exciting the pleasure of sex beyond belief; and it is not habit-forming. For more modest tastes I think there ought to be beer. What else, what else belongs in the joyous city? The sense of victory, surely, the celebration of courage. But as we did without clergy, let us do without soldiers. The joy built upon successful slaughter is not the right kind of joy; it will not do; it is fearful and it is trivial. A boundless and generous contentment, a magnanimous triumph felt not against some outer enemy but in communion with the finest and fairest in the souls of all men everywhere and the splendor of the world's summer: this is what swells the hearts of the people of Omelas, and the victory they celebrate is that of life. I really don't think many of them need to take drooz.

Most of the procession have reached the Green Fields by now. A marvelous smell of cooking goes forth from the red and blue tents of the provisioners. The faces of small children are amiably sticky; in the benign grey beard of a man a couple of crumbs of rich pastry are entangled. The youths and girls have mounted their horses and are beginning to group around the starting line of the course. An old woman, small, fat, and laughing, is passing out flowers from a basket, and tall young men wear her flowers in their shining hair. A child of nine or ten sits at the edge of the crowd, alone, playing on a wooden flute. People pause to listen, and they smile, but they do not speak to him, for he never ceases playing and never sees them, his dark eyes wholly rapt in the sweet, thin magic of the tune.

He finishes, and slowly lowers his hands holding the wooden flute.

As if that little private silence were the signal, all at once a trumpet sounds from the pavilion near the starting line: imperious, melancholy, piercing. The horses rear on their slender legs, and some of them neigh in answer. Sober-faced, the young riders stroke the horses' necks and soothe them, whispering, "Quiet, quiet, there my beauty, my hope...." They begin to form in rank



along the starting line. The crowds along the racecourse are like a field of grass and flowers in the wind. The Festival of Summer has begun.

Do you believe? Do you accept the festival, the city, the joy? No? Then let me describe one more thing.

In a basement under one of the beautiful public buildings of Omelas, or perhaps in the cellar of one of its spacious private homes, there is a room. It has one locked door, and no window. A little light seeps in dustily between cracks in the boards, secondhand from a cobwebbed window somewhere across the cellar. In one corner of the little room a couple of mops, with stiff, clotted, foul-smelling heads stand near a rusty bucket. The floor is dirt, a little damp to the touch, as cellar dirt usually is. The room is about three paces long and two wide: a mere broom closet or disused tool room. In the room a child is sitting. It could be a boy or a girl. It looks about six, but actually is nearly ten. It is feeble-minded. Perhaps it was born defective, or perhaps it has become imbecile through fear, malnutrition, and neglect. It picks its nose and occasionally fumbles vaguely with its toes or genitals, as it sits hunched in the corner farthest from the bucket and the two mops. It is afraid of the mops. It finds them horrible. It shuts its eyes, but it knows the mops are still standing there; and the door is locked; and nobody will come. The door is always locked; and nobody ever comes, except that sometimes—the child has no understanding of time or interval—sometimes the door rattles terribly and opens, and a person, or several people, are there. One of them may come in and kick the child to make it stand up. The others never come close, but peer in at it with frightened, disgusted eyes. The food bowl and the water jug are hastily filled, the door is locked, the eyes disappear. The people at the door never say anything, but the child, who has not always lived in the tool room, and can remember sunlight and its mother's voice, sometimes speaks. "I will be good," it says. "Please let me out. I will be good!" They never answer. The child used to scream for help at night, and cry a good deal, but now it only makes a kind of whining, "eh-haa, eh-haa," and it speaks less and less often. It is so thin there are no calves to its legs; its belly protrudes; it lives on a half-bowl of corn meal and grease a day. It is naked. Its buttocks and thighs are a mass of festered sores, as it sits in its own excrement continually.

They all know it is there, all the people of Omelas. Some of them have come to see it, others are content merely to know it is there. They all know that it has to be there. Some of them understand why, and some do not, but they all understand that their happiness, the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the health of their children, the wisdom of their scholars, the skill of their makers, even the abundance of their harvest and the kindly weathers of their skies, depend wholly on this child's abominable misery.

This is usually explained to children when they are between eight and twelve, whenever they seem capable of understanding; and most of those who come to see the child are young people, though often enough an adult comes, or comes back, to see the child. No matter how well the matter has been explained to them, these young spectators are always shocked and sickened at the sight. They feel disgust, which they had thought themselves superior to. They feel anger, outrage, impotence, despite all the explanations. They would like to do something for the child. But there is nothing they can do. If the child were brought up into the sunlight out of that vile place, if it were cleaned and fed and comforted, that would be a good thing indeed; but if it were done, in that day and hour all the prosperity and beauty and delight of Omelas would wither and be destroyed. Those are the terms. To exchange all the goodness and grace of every life in Omelas for that single, small improvement: to throw away the happiness of thousands for the chance of the happiness of one: that would be to let guilt within the walls indeed.

The terms are strict and absolute; there may not even be a kind word spoken to the child.

Often the young people go home in tears, or in a tearless rage, when they have seen the child and faced this terrible paradox. They may brood over it for weeks or years. But as time goes on they begin to realize that even if the child could be released, it would not get much good of its freedom: a little vague pleasure of warmth and food, no doubt, but little more. It is too degraded and imbecile to know any real joy. It has been afraid too long ever to be free of fear. Its habits are too uncouth for it to respond to humane treatment. Indeed, after so long it would probably be wretched without walls about it to protect it, and darkness for its eyes, and its own excrement to sit in. Their tears at the bitter injustice dry when they begin to perceive the terrible justice of reality, and to accept it. Yet it is their tears and anger, the trying of their generosity and the acceptance of their helplessness, which are perhaps the true source of the splendor of their lives. Theirs is no vapid, irresponsible happiness. They know that they, like the child, are not free. They know compassion. It is the existence of the child, and their knowledge of its existence, that makes possible the nobility of their architecture, the poignancy of their music, the profundity of their science. It is because of the child that they are so gentle with children. They know that if the wretched one were not there sniveling in the dark, the other one, the flute-player, could make no joyful music as the young riders line up in their beauty for the race in the sunlight of the first morning of summer.

Now do you believe in them? Are they not more credible? But there is one more thing to tell, and this is quite incredible.

At times one of the adolescent girls or boys who go to see the child does not go home to weep or rage, does not, in fact, go home at all. Sometimes also a man or woman much older falls silent for a day or two, and then leaves home. These people go out into the street, and walk down the street alone. They keep walking, and walk straight out of the city of Omelas, through the beautiful gates. They keep walking across the farmlands of Omelas. Each one goes alone, youth or girl, man or woman. Night falls; the traveler must pass down village streets, between the houses with yellow-lit windows, and on out into the darkness of the fields. Each alone, they go west or north, towards the mountains. They go on. They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back. The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all. It is possible that it does not exist. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas.