

returning to their usual daily tasks. Matty ran to catch up with the blind man, who had started walking the familiar path home.

Behind him he heard an announcement being made. "Don't forget!" someone was calling out. "Trade Mart tomorrow night!"

Trade Mart. With the other things that had consumed Matty's thoughts recently, he had almost forgotten about Trade Mart.

Now he decided he would attend.



Trade Mart was a very old custom. No one remembered its beginnings. The blind man said that he had first known of it when he was a newcomer to Village, still an invalid with wounds to be tended. He had lain on a bed in the infirmary, in pain, unseeing, his memory slow to return, and half listened to the conversations of the gentle folk who took care of him.

"Did you go to the last Trade Mart?" he had heard one person ask another.

"No, I have nothing to trade. Did you?"

"Went and watched. It all seems foolishness to me."

He had put it from his mind, then. He had nothing to trade, either. He owned nothing. His torn, blood-stained clothes had been taken from him and replaced. From a cord around his neck dangled an amulet of some sort, and he felt its importance but

could not remember why. Certainly he would not trade it for some trinket; it was all he had left of his past.

The blind man had described all of that to Matty.

"Later I went, just to watch," he told him.

Matty laughed at him. They were close, by then, and he could do that. "Watch?" he hooted.

The blind man laughed in reply. "I have my own kind of watching," he said.

"I know you do. That's why they call you Seer. You see more than most. Can anyone go to Trade Mart and watch?"

"Of course. There are no secrets here. But it was dull stuff, Matty. People called out what they wanted to trade for. Women wanted new bracelets, I remember, and they traded their old bracelets away. Things like that."

"So it's like Market Day."

"It seemed so to me. I never went back."

Now, speaking of it the evening of the new ones' arrival, the blind man expressed concern. "It's changed, Matty. I hear people talk of it now, and I feel the changes. Something's wrong."

"What kind of talk?"

The blind man was sitting with his instrument on his lap. He played one chord. Then he frowned. "I'm not sure. There's a secrecy to it now."

"I got up my nerve and asked Ramon what his parents traded for the Gaming Machine. But he didn't know. He said they wouldn't tell him, and his

mother turned away when he asked, as if she had something to hide.”

“I don’t like the sound of it.” The blind man stroked the strings and played two more chords.

“The sound of your own music?” Matty asked with a laugh, trying to lighten the conversation.

“Something’s happening at Trade Mart,” Seer said, ignoring Matty’s attempt at humor.

“Leader said the same.”

“He would know. I’d be wary of it, Matty, if I were you.”

The next evening, while they prepared supper, he told the blind man he was planning to go.

“I know you said I was too young, Seer. But I’m not. Ramon’s going. And maybe it’s important for me to go. Maybe I can figure out what’s happening.”

Seer sighed and nodded. “Promise me one thing,” he told Matty.

“I will.”

“Make no trade. Watch and listen. But make no trade. Even if you’re tempted.”

“I promise.” Then Matty laughed. “How could I? I have nothing to trade. What could I give for a Gaming Machine? A puppy too young to leave its mother? Who’d want that?”

The blind man stirred the chicken that simmered in a broth. “Ah, Matty, you have more than you know. And people will want what you have.”

Matty thought. Seer was correct, of course. He had the thing that troubled him—the *power*, he thought

of it—and perhaps there were those who would want it. Maybe he should find a way to trade it away. But the thought made him nervous. He turned his thoughts to other, less worrying things.

He had a fishing pole, but he needed that and loved it. He had a kite, stored in the loft, and perhaps one day he would trade it for a better kite.

But not tonight. Tonight he would only watch. He had promised the blind man.

It was early evening, just past supper, and others were hurrying, as Matty was, along the lane to the place where Trade Mart was held. He nodded to neighbors as he passed them, and waved to some he saw farther along. People nodded back or waved in reply, but there was none of the light-hearted banter that was ordinarily part of Village. There was an intentness to everyone, an odd seriousness, and a sense of worry—unusual in Village—pervaded the atmosphere.

No wonder Seer didn't want me to come, Matty thought as he approached. It doesn't feel right.

He could hear the noise. A murmur. People whispering to each other. It was not at all like Market Day, with its sounds of laughter, conversation, and commerce: good-natured bargaining, the squealing of pigs, the motherly cluck of hens with their cheeping broods. Tonight it was simply a low hum, a nervous whisper through the crowd.

Matty slipped into a group that had gathered and was standing nearest to the platform, a simple wooden structure like a stage that was used for many

occasions when the people came together. The coming meeting to discuss the proposal to close Village would be held here, too, and Leader would stand on the stage to direct things and keep them orderly.

A large wooden roof covered the area so that rain would not prevent a gathering, and in the cold months the enclosing sides would be slid into place. Tonight, though, with the weather still warm, it was open to the evening. A breeze ruffled Matty's hair. He could smell the scent of the pine grove that bordered the area.

He found a place to stand next to Mentor, hoping that perhaps Jean would join her father, though she was nowhere to be seen. Mentor glanced down and smiled at him. "Matty!" he said. "It's a surprise to see you here. You've never been before."

"No," Matty said. "I have nothing to trade."

The schoolteacher put his arm affectionately over Matty's shoulders, and Matty noticed for the first time that the teacher had lost weight. "Ah," Mentor said, "you'd be surprised. Everyone has something to trade."

"Jean has her flowers," Matty said, hoping to turn the conversation to Mentor's daughter. "But she takes them to the market stall. She doesn't need Trade Mart for that.

"And," he added, "she already promised the puppy to me. She'd better not trade him away."

Mentor laughed. "No, the puppy is yours, Matty. And the sooner the better. He's full of mischief, and

he chewed my shoes just this morning.”

For a moment everything seemed as it had always been. The man was warm and cheerful, the same loving teacher and father he had been for years. His arm over Matty's shoulders was familiar.

But Matty found himself wondering suddenly why Mentor was there. Why, in fact, *any* of these people were here. None of them had brought any goods to trade. He looked around to confirm what he had noticed. People stood tensely, their arms folded or at their sides. Some of them were murmuring to one another. Matty noticed the young couple who were neighbors down the road from the house he shared with the blind man. They were conversing in low voices, perhaps arguing, and the young wife appeared worried at what her husband was saying. But their arms, too, like Matty's, like Mentor's, like everyone's, were empty. No one had brought anything to trade.

A silence fell and the crowd parted to make way for the tall, dark-haired man who was now striding toward the stage. He was called Trademaster. People said that he had come, already named, as a new one some years before, and had brought with him what he knew about trading from the place he had left. Matty had often seen him around Village and knew that he was in charge of Trade Mart and that he checked on things after, stopping at houses where trades had been made. He had come to Ramon's after his parents acquired the Gaming Machine. Tonight

he carried nothing but a thick book that Matty had never seen before.

Mentor's arm fell from Matty's shoulders and the schoolteacher's attention turned eagerly toward the stage, where Trademaster was now standing.

“*Trade Mart begins,*” Trademaster called. He had a loud voice with a slight accent, as many in Village had, the traces of their former languages lingering with them. The crowd fell absolutely silent now. Even the slightest whispering ceased. But over on the edge, Matty heard a woman begin to weep. He stood on tiptoe and peered toward her in time to see several people lead her away.

Mentor didn't even look toward the commotion of the weeping woman. Matty watched him. He noticed suddenly that Mentor's face looked slightly different, and he could not identify what the difference was. The evening light was dim.

More than that, the teacher, usually so calm, was now tense, alert, and appeared to be waiting for something.

“Who first?” Trademaster called, and while Matty watched, Mentor raised his hand and waved it frantically, like a schoolboy hoping for a reward. “Me! Me!” the schoolteacher called out in a demanding voice, and as Matty watched, Mentor shoved the people standing in front of him aside so that he would be noticed.



Late that night, the blind man listened with a concerned look on his face while Matty described Trade Mart.

"Mentor was first, because he raised his hand so fast. And he completely forgot me, Seer. He had been standing with me and we were talking, just as we always have. Then, when they started, it was as if I didn't exist. He pushed ahead of everyone and went first."

"What do you mean, went first? Where did he go?"

"To the stage. He pushed through everyone. He shoved and jostled them aside, Seer. It was so odd. Then he went to the stage when Trademaster called his name."

The blind man rocked back and forth in his chair. Tonight he had not played music at all. Matty knew he was distressed.

"It used to be different. People just called out. There was a lot of laughter and teasing the time I went."

"No laughter tonight, Seer. Just silence, as if people were very nervous. It was a little scary."

"And what happened when Mentor got to the stage?"

Matty thought. It had been a little difficult to see through the crowd. "He just stood there. Then Trademaster asked him something, but it was as if he already knew the answer. And then everyone laughed a bit, as if they did, too, but it wasn't a having-fun

kind of laughter. It was a *knowing* kind."

"Could you hear what he asked?"

"I couldn't hear that first time, but I know what it was because he asked it of everyone who came up. It was the same each time. Just three words. *Trade for what?* That's what he asked each time."

"And was the answer the same from everyone?"

Matty shook his head, then remembered that he had to reply aloud. "No," he said. "It was different."

"Could you hear Mentor's reply?"

"Yes. It made everyone laugh in that odd way. Mentor said, 'Same as before.'"

The blind man frowned. "Did you get a feel for what that meant?"

"I think so, because everyone looked at Stocktender's widow, and she blushed. She was near me, so I could see it. Her friends poked at her, teasing, and I heard her say, 'He needs a few more trades first.'"

"Then what happened?"

Matty tried to remember the sequence of things. "Trademaster seemed to say yes, or at least to nod his head, and then he opened his book and wrote it in."

"I'd like to see that book," the blind man said, and then, laughing at himself, added, "or have you see it, and read it to me."

"What came next?"

"Mentor stood there. He seemed relieved that Trademaster had written something down for him."

"How could you tell?"

"He smiled and seemed less nervous."

"Then what?"

"Then everyone got very silent and Trademaster asked, 'Trade away what?'"

The blind man thought. "Another three words. Was it the same for each? The same 'Trade for what?' and then 'Trade away what?'"

"Yes. But each one said the answer to the first quite loudly, the way Mentor did, but they whispered the answer to the second, so no one could hear."

"So it became public, what they were trading for . . ."

"Yes, and sometimes the crowd called out in a scornful way. They *jeered*. I think that's the right word."

"And he wrote each down?"

"No. Ramon's mother went up, and when Trademaster asked, 'Trade for what?' she said, 'Fur jacket.' But Trademaster said no."

"Did he give a reason for the no?"

"He said she got a Gaming Machine already. Maybe another time, he said. Keep trying, he told her."

The blind man stirred restlessly in his chair. "Make us some tea, Matty, would you?"

Matty did so, going to the woodstove where the iron kettle was already simmering. He poured the water over tea leaves in two thick mugs and gave one to Seer.

"Tell me again the second three-word thing," the

blind man said after he had taken a sip.

Matty repeated it. "*Trade away what?*" He tried to make his voice loud and important, as Trademaster's had been. He tried to imitate the slight accent.

"But you couldn't hear any of the answers that people gave, is that right?"

"That's right. They whispered, and he wrote the whispers in his book."

Matty straightened in his chair with a sudden idea. "How about if I steal the book and read you what it says?"

"Matty, Matty . . ."

"Sorry," Matty replied immediately. Stealing had been so much a part of his previous existence that he sometimes still, even after years, forgot that it was not acceptable behavior in Village.

"Well," said the blind man after they had sipped their tea in silence for a moment, "I wish I could figure out what things people are trading away. You say they came empty-handed. Yet each one whispered something that was written down."

"Except for Ramon's mother," Matty reminded him. "Trademaster said no to her. But others got their trades. Mentor got his."

"But we don't know what."

"No. 'Same as before,' he asked for."

"Tell me this, Matty. When Mentor left the Trade Mart, he hadn't been given anything, had he? He wasn't carrying anything?"

"No. Nothing."

"Was anyone given anything to take away?"

"Some were told delivery times. Someone got a Gaming Machine.

"I'd really like a Gaming Machine, Seer," Matty added, though he knew it was hopeless.

But the blind man paid no attention to that. "One more question for you, Matty. Think hard about this."

"All right." Matty prepared himself to think hard.

"Try to remember if people *looked different* when it was over. Not everyone, but those who had made trades."

Matty sighed. It had been crowded, and long, and he had begun to be uncomfortable and tired by the time it ended. He had seen Ramon and waved, but Ramon was standing with his mother, who was angry at having been turned down by Trademaster. Ramon hadn't waved back.

He had looked for Jean, but she wasn't there.

"I can't remember. I wasn't paying attention by the end."

"What about the person who got a Gaming Machine? You told me someone did. Who was it?"

"That woman who lives over near the marketplace. You know the one? Her husband walks hunched over because he has a twisted back. He was with her but he didn't go up for a trade."

"Yes, I know who you mean. They're a nice family," the blind man said. "So she traded for a Gaming

Machine. Did you see her when she was leaving?"

"I think so. She was with some other women and they were laughing as they walked away."

"I thought you said she was with her husband."

"She was, but he walked behind."

"How did she seem?"

"Happy, because she got a Gaming Machine. She was telling her friends that they could come play with it."

"But anything else? Was there anything else about her that you remember, from *after* the trade, not before?"

Matty shrugged. He was beginning to be bored by the questioning. He was thinking about Jean, and that he might go to see her in the morning. Maybe his puppy would be ready. At least the puppy would be an excuse for a visit. It was healthy now, and growing fast, with big feet and ears; recently he had watched, laughing, when the mother dog had growled at it because it was nipping at her own ears in play.

Thinking of the puppy's behavior reminded Matty of something.

"Something *was* different," he said. "She's a nice woman, the one who got the Gaming Machine."

"Yes, she is. Gentle. Cheerful. Very loving to her husband."

"Well," said Matty slowly, "when she was leaving, walking and talking with the other women, and her husband behind trying to keep up, she whirled

around suddenly and scolded him for being slow.”

“Slow? But he’s all twisted. He can’t walk any other way,” the blind man said in surprise.

“I know. But she made a sneering face at him and she imitated his way of walking. She made fun of him. It was only for a second, though.”

Seer was silent, rocking. Matty picked up the empty mugs, took them to the sink, and rinsed them.

“It’s late,” the blind man said. “Time to go to bed.” He rose from his chair and put his stringed instrument on the shelf where he kept it. He began to walk slowly to his sleeping room. “Good night, Matty,” he said.

Then he said something else, almost to himself.

“So now she has a Gaming Machine,” the blind man murmured. His voice sounded scornful.

Matty, at the sink, remembered something. “Mentor’s birthmark is completely gone,” he called to Seer.

The puppy was ready. So was Matty. The other little dog, the one who had been his childhood companion for years, had lived a happy, active life, died in his sleep, and had been buried with ceremony and sadness beyond the garden. For a long time Matty, missing Branch, had not wanted a new dog. But now it was time, and when Jean summoned him—her message was that Matty had to come right away to pick up the puppy, because her father was furious at its mischief—he hurried to her house.

He had not been to Mentor’s homeplace since Trade Mart the previous week. The flower garden, as always, was thriving and well tended, with late roses in bloom and fall asters fat with bud. He found Jean there, kneeling by her flower bed, digging with a trowel. She smiled up at him, but it was not her usual saucy smile, fraught with flirtatiousness, the smile that drove Matty nearly mad. This morning she seemed troubled.

“He’s shut in the shed,” she told Matty, meaning the puppy. “Did you bring a rope to lead him home?”

"Don't need one. He'll follow me. I have a way with dogs."

Jean sighed, set her trowel aside, and wiped her forehead, leaving a smear of earth that Matty found very appealing. "I wish I did," she said. "I can't control him at all. He's grown so fast, and he's very strong and determined. My father is beside himself, wanting such a wild little thing gone."

Matty grinned. "Mentor deals with lots of wild little things in the schoolhouse. I myself was a wild little thing once, and it was he who tamed me."

Jean smiled at him. "I remember. What a ragged, naughty thing you were, Matty, when you came to Village."

"I called myself the Fiercest of the Fierce."

"You were that," Jean agreed with a laugh. "And now your puppy is."

"Is your father home?"

"No, he's off visiting Stocktender's widow, as usual," Jean said with a sigh.

"She's a nice woman."

Jean nodded. "She is. I like her. But, Matty . . ."

Matty, who had been standing, sat down on the grass at the edge of the garden. "What?"

"May I tell you something troubling?"

He felt himself awash with affection for Jean. He had for a long time been attracted to her girlish affections, her silly charms and wiles. But now, for the first time, he felt something new. He perceived the young woman behind all those superficial things.

With her curly hair tumbling over her dirt-streaked forehead, she was the most beautiful person Matty had ever seen. And now she was talking to him in a way that was not foolish and childlike, designed to entrance, but instead was human and pained and adult. He felt suddenly that he loved her, and it was a feeling he had never known before.

"It's about my father," she said in a low voice.

"He's changing, isn't he?" Matty replied, startling himself, because he had not spelled it out in his mind before, had not said it aloud yet, yet here it was, and he was saying it to Jean. He felt an odd sense of relief.

Jean began to cry softly. "Yes," she said. "He has traded his deepest self."

"Traded?" That part took Matty by surprise because he had not thought it through to there. "Traded for what?" Matty asked in horror, and realized he was repeating the phrase from Trade Mart.

"For Stocktender's widow," she said, weeping. "He wanted her to love him, so he traded. He's becoming taller and straighter. The bald spot at the back of his head has grown over with hair, Matty. His birthmark has disappeared."

Of course. That was it. "I saw it," Matty told her, "but I didn't understand." He put his arm around the sobbing girl.

She caught her breath finally. "I didn't know how lonely he was, Matty. If I had known . . ."

"So that's why . . ." Matty was trying to sort through it in his head.

"The puppy. Once he would have loved a naughty puppy, Matty, the way he loved you when you were a raggedy boy. I knew it all for certain yesterday when he kicked the puppy. Till then I only suspected." Jean wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and left another endearing streak of dirt.

"And the petition!" Matty added, thinking of it suddenly.

"Yes. Father always welcomed new ones. It was the most wonderful part of Father, how he cared for everyone and tried to help them learn. But now . . ."

They heard a loud whimpering from the shed, and a scratching sound.

"Let him out, Jean, and I'll take him home before your father gets back."

She went to the shed door, opened it, and though her face was tear-streaked now, she smiled at the eager, ungainly puppy who bounded forth, jumped into Matty's arms, and licked his cheeks. The white tail was a whirl.

"I need time to think," Matty said, subduing the puppy with a rhythmic scratch below his chin.

"What's to think about? There's nothing to be done. Trades are forever. Even if a stupid thing like a Gaming Machine breaks down, or if you tire of it—you don't get to reverse."

He wondered if he should tell her. She had seen the effect of his power on the puppy and its mother, but hadn't understood. Now, if he chose, perhaps he could explain. But he was uncertain about this. He

did not know how far his power went and he did not want to promise this beloved girl something impossible. To repair a man's soul and deepest heart—to reverse an irreversible trade—might be far, far more than Matty could possibly undertake.

So he stayed silent, and took his lively puppy away.



"Look! He sits now when I tell him to." Then Matty groaned and said, "Oh, sorry."

When would he ever learn to stop saying "Look" to a man who had no eyes?

But the blind man laughed. "I don't need to be able to look. I can hear that he sits. The sounds of his feet stop. And I don't feel his teeth on my shoes."

"He's smart, I think," Matty said optimistically.

"Yes, I think you're right. He's a good little puppy, Matty. He'll learn quickly. You don't need to worry about his mischief." The blind man reached out his hand and the puppy scampered to it and licked his fingers.

"And he's quite beautiful." In truth, Matty was trying to convince himself. The puppy was a combination of several colors, big feet, a whirligig of a tail, and lopsided ears.

"I'm sure he is."

"He'll need a name. I haven't thought of the right one yet."

"His true name will come to you."

"I hope I get my own soon," Matty said.

"It will come when the time comes."

Matty nodded and turned back to the dog. "First I thought of Survivor, because he was the only one of the puppies that did. But it's too long. It doesn't sound like the right one." Matty picked up the puppy and scratched its belly as it lay on his lap.

"So then . . ." Matty began to laugh. "Since he was the one that lived? I thought of Liver for a name."

"*Liver?*" The blind man laughed as well.

"I know, I know. It was a stupid idea. Liver with onions." Matty made a face.

He set the puppy on the floor again and it dashed off, tail wagging, to growl at the logs piled beside the stove and to chew at their edges where raw wood curled.

"You could ask Leader," the blind man suggested. "He's the one who gives true names to people. Maybe he'd do it for a puppy."

"That's a good idea. I have to go see Leader anyway. It's time to take messages around for the meeting. I'll take the puppy with me."



Clumsy with his stubby legs and oversized feet, the puppy couldn't manage the stairs at Leader's homeplace. Matty picked him up and carried him, then set him on the floor in the upper room where Leader was waiting at his desk. The stacks of messages were

ready. Matty could have taken them and left on his errand without pausing. But he lingered. He enjoyed Leader's company. There were things he wanted to tell him. He began to put them in order in his mind.

"Do you want to put a paper down for him?" Leader asked, watching with amusement as the little thing scampered about the room.

"No, he's fine. He never has an accident. It was the first thing he learned."

Leader leaned back in his chair and stretched. "He'll be good company for you, Matty, the way Branch was.

"Do you know," he went on, "in the place where I was a child, there were no dogs? No animals at all."

"No chickens? Or goats?"

"No, nothing."

"What did you eat, then?" Matty asked.

"We had fish. Lots of fish, from a hatchery. And plenty of vegetables. But no animal meat. And no pets at all. I never knew what it meant to have a pet. Or even to love something and be loved back."

His words made Matty think of Jean. He felt his face flush a little. "Did you never love a girl?" he asked.

He thought Leader would laugh. But instead the young man's face became reflective.

"I had a sister," Leader said, after a moment. "I think of her still, and hope she's happy."

He picked up a pencil from the desk, twirled it in his fingers, and gazed through the window. His clear

blue eyes seemed to be able to see great distances, even into the past, or perhaps the future.

Matty hesitated. Then he explained, "I meant a *girl*. Not like a sister. But a—well, a *girl*."

Leader put the pencil down and smiled. "I understand what you mean. There was a girl once, long ago. I was younger than you, Matty, but I was at the age when such things begin."

"What happened to her?"

"She changed. And I did too."

"Sometimes I think I want nothing to change, ever," Matty said with a sigh. Then he remembered what he had wanted to tell Leader.

"Leader, I went to Trade Mart," he said. "I hadn't been before."

Leader shrugged. "I wish they'd vote to end it," he said. "I never go anymore, but I did in the past. It seemed folly and time-wasting. Now it seems worse."

"It's the only way to get something like a Gaming Machine."

Leader made a face. "A Gaming Machine," he commented with disdain.

"Well, I'd like one," Matty grumbled. "But Seer says no."

The puppy wandered to a corner of the room, sniffed, made a circle of himself, collapsed, and fell asleep. Matty and Leader, together, watched it and smiled.

"It isn't just Gaming Machines and such." Matty had wondered how to say it, how to describe it.

Now, into the silence, as they watched the sleeping puppy, he found himself simply blurting it out. "Something else is happening at Trade Mart. People are changing, Leader. Mentor is."

"I've seen the changes in him," Leader acknowledged. "What are you telling me, Matty?"

"Mentor has traded away his deepest self," Matty said, "and I think that others are, too."

Leader leaned forward and listened intently as Matty described what he had seen, what he suspected, and what he knew.



"Leader gave me a name for him, but I don't know if I like it."

Matty was back home by lunchtime, after delivering the last of the messages. The blind man was at the sink, washing some clothes.

"And what is it?" he asked, turning toward Matty's voice.

"Frolic."

"Hmmm. It has a nice sound to it. How does the puppy feel about it?"

Matty lifted the puppy from where it had been riding, curled up inside his jacket. For most of the morning it had followed him, scampering at his heels, but eventually its short legs had tired, and Matty had carried it the rest of the way.

The puppy blinked—he had been asleep in the

jacket—and Matty set him on the floor.

“Frolic?” Matty said, and the puppy looked up. His tail churned.

“*Sit, Frolic!*” Matty said. The puppy sat instantly. He looked intently at Matty.

“He did!” Matty told the blind man in delight.

“*Lie down, Frolic!*”

After a flicker of a pause, the puppy reluctantly sank to the floor and touched the rug with his small nose.

“He knows his true name already!” Matty knelt beside the puppy and stroked the little head. “Good puppy,” he said. The big brown eyes gazed up at him and the spotted body, still sprawled obediently on the floor, quivered with affection.

“Good Frolic,” Matty said.

9

There was much talk in Village about the coming meeting. Matty heard it everywhere, people arguing about the petition.

By now, some of the latest group of new ones were out and about, their sores clearing up, their clothes clean and hair combed, frightened faces eased, and their haunted, desperate attitudes changing to something more serene. Their children played, now, with other children of Village, racing down the lanes and paths in games of tag and hide-and-seek. Watching them, Matty remembered his own child self, his bravado and the terrible anguish it had concealed. He had not believed anyone would want him, ever, until he came to Village, and even then he had not trusted in its kindness for a long time.

With Frolic scampering at his heels, Matty made his way toward the marketplace to buy some bread.

“Good morning!” he called cheerfully to a woman he encountered on the path. She was one of the new ones, and he remembered her from the recent welcome. Her eyes had been wide in her gaunt face that day. She was scarred, as if by untended wounds, and