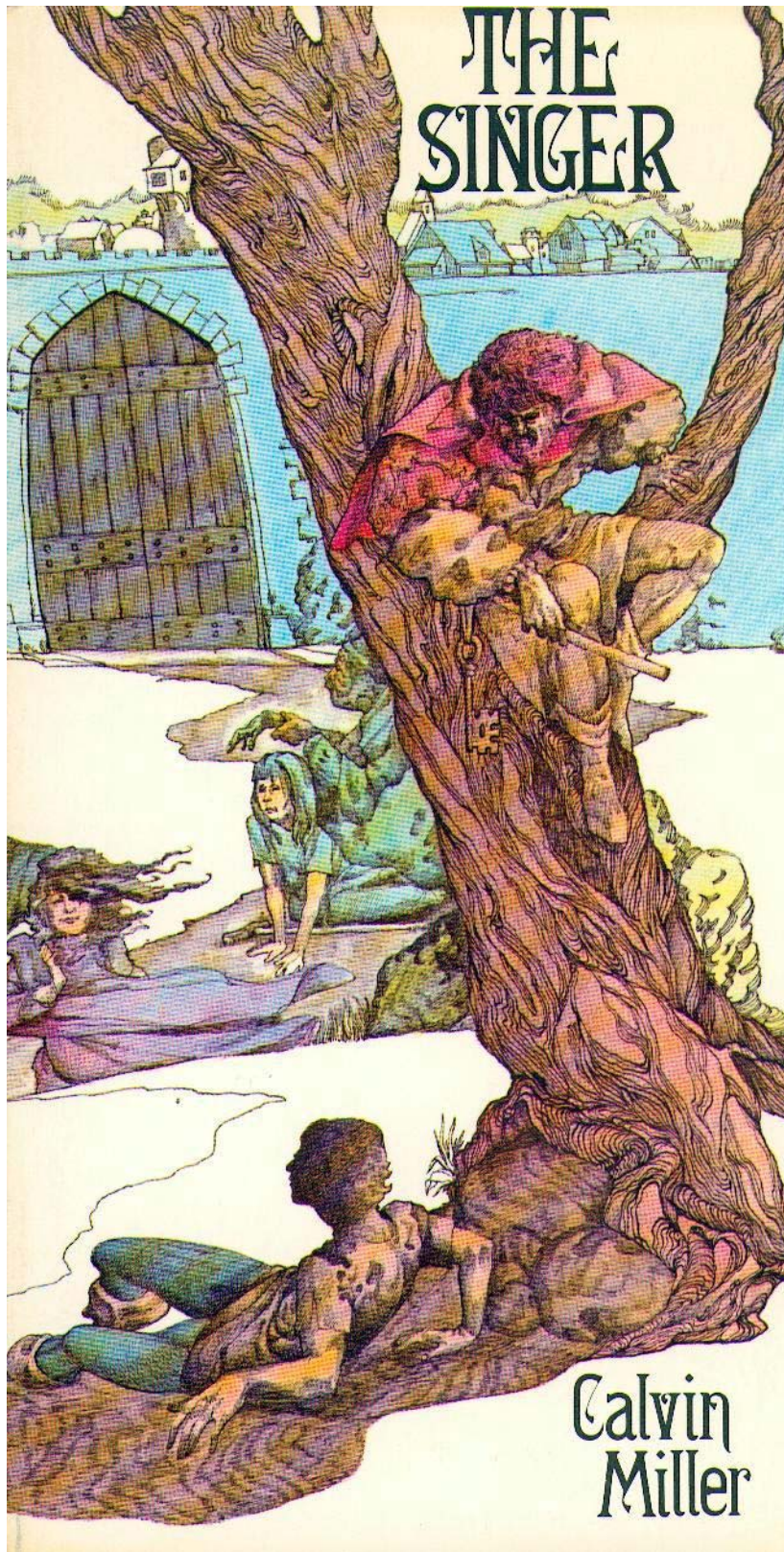


THE SINGER



Calvin
Miller

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Calvin Miller

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I

**For most who live,
hell is never knowing
who they are.
The Singer knew and
knowing was his torment.**

When he awoke, the song was
there.

Its melody beckoned and begged him to sing it.

It hung upon the wind and settled in the meadows where
he walked.

He knew its lovely words and could have sung it all, but
feared to sing a song whose harmony was far too perfect for
human ear to understand.

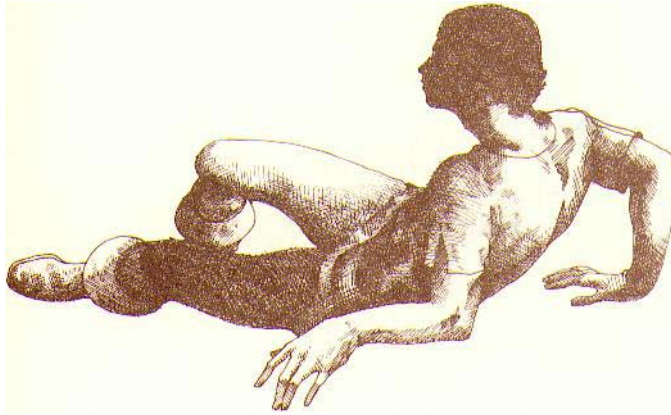
And still at midnight it stirred him to awareness, and
with its haunting melody it drew him with a curious mystery
to stand before an open window.

In rhapsody it played among the stars.

It rippled through Andromeda and deepened Vega's hues.

It swirled in heavy strains from galaxy to galaxy and gave
him back his very fingerprint.

"Sing the Song!" the heavens seemed to cry. "We never could have been without the melody that you alone can sing."



But he drew back, sighing that the song they so desired was higher than the earth.

And always in his agony of longing and reluctance, the atmosphere around him argued back.

"You, too, are higher than the earth! You sang the higher music once, before the oceans ever crashed their craggy coasts."

He braced himself upon a precipice above the canyon floor, and with the wind full on his face, he cried into the sky:

"Earthmaker, tell me
if I have the right
to sing..."

But then his final word trailed off into gales.

The gull screamed.

"No," he thought, "only Earth-maker is everlasting. His alone must be the theme from which sprung the world I stand upon."

And so he only loved but never sang the song.

Full well he knew that few would ever see him as a singer of so grand a piece.

He knew that they would say to
him:

"You are no singer! And even if you are you should sing the
songs we know."

And well he knew the penalty of law. A dreamer could be ostracized
in hate for singing songs the world had never heard.

Such songs had sent a thousand singers to their death already.

And the song which dogged his aching steps and begged him
pleadingly to sing it was completely unfamiliar.

Only the stars and mountains knew it. But they were old. And
man was new, and chained to simple, useless rhymes; thus he
could not understand the majesty that settled down upon him.

But daily now it played upon his heart and swept his soul, until
the joy exploded his awareness- crying near the edge of sanity,
"Sing... sing... SING!"

II

**It is strange how
oftentimes the air
speaks.**

**We are sane as long
as we hear voices
when there are none.**

**We are insane when
we hear nothing and
worse we are deaf.**

He worked the wood and drove the pegs methodically.

The shavings from the adze piled high upon the floor.

"Earthmaker, full of mercy," he said, when evening had
come, "I am a tradesman!"

"No," said the silent air,
"not a tradesman-a troubadour instead!"

"A tradesman!" he said firmly as he smashed his mallet on
the vise.

"A troubadour!" the silence thundered back.

III

**Two artists met one time within
a little wood. Each brought
his finest painting stroked by
his complete uniqueness. When
each revealed his canvas to the
other—they were identical.**

**So once in every solar system
there are two fingerprints alike.**

But only once.

His seeming madness made the music play a hundred times
more loudly than before.

It lured him from his highland home.

He left the mallet broken on the vise and walked away.

Never had he been the way he walked, and yet his feet knew
every step. He could not cease to marvel how they moved his
body forward through the mist of circumstances which he
vaguely knew by name.

His naked feet intrigued him, for they moved with purpose
which his mind had not yet measured. Besides they each
one wore a curious scar of some wound as yet unopened; yet they
had been there long before his birth. What twist of meaning
had Earthmaker given him, to scar his feet before he ever
walked?

From the hills, he walked ever downward to the valley miles
below.

Down, down, down—until the vegetation thickened into shrubs, and the desert gave way to river jungles.

And there where water lapped at his fatigue, he heard a singer, singing his compelling carols to the empty air.

The tradesman knew that it was just an earth song, for it was different from the Star-Song which begged him be its singer—yet somehow like it.

The River Singer finished and they walked into the trees.

"Are you the Troubadour, who knows the Ancient Star-Song?" the tradesman softly asked.

"No, *you* are the Great Troubadour for whom the songless world, so long has waited," the River Singer said. "Sing, for many years now, I have hungered to hear the Ancient Star-Song..."

"I am a tradesman only. .."

Then the River Singer waded out into the water and beckoned with his hand. Slowly the tradesman followed.

They stopped waist-deep in water. Their eyes swam and they waited for the music to begin.

It did.

The tradesman knew the River Singer heard it too.

The water swirled around them and the music surged.

Every chord seemed to fuse the world in oneness.

They stood until the surging current buried them in song. It then receded and the music died away.

And the river was once more a simple river.

Then over that thin silver stream the thunder pealed, and a voice called from the sky above...

"Tradesman! You are

the Troubadour! Go
now and sing!"

IV

**I knew a blind man
whom a surgeon
helped to see. The
doctor never had a
lover such as he.
It is in such a way
that singers love
composers.**

From the river, he moved on and on in quietness alone.

He still talked to Earthmaker as he always had but now he
called him "Father-Spirit."
He loved the newer name.

The Star-Song came upon him with a manly joy.

At last he sang!

He threw the song against the basalt canyon walls.

It ricocheted in splendor, and he remembered far before
that he had sung those very canyons into being.

"Father-Spirit!" he shouted at the desert sky, "I love you.
Ask of me anything you will and I will do it all."

The universe gathered up the echoes of his joy and answered
back, "I love you, too, my Singer. One thing alone I ask
of you:

Sing my Ancient Star-
Song to the world."

"Father-Spirit, I will sing it, in every country will I sing
it, till all the world you love can sing it."

In joy he sang and sang until he fell asleep upon the desert floor.

V

**Hate sometimes
stands quite
close to love.**

**God too stands
often near to
evil—like si-
lent chessmen—
side by side.
Only the color
of the squares
is different.**

He was not alone when he awoke.

The ancient World Hater had come upon his resting place
and not by chance.

The Hater leered at him with one defiant, impish grin.

"Hello, Singer!"

"Hello, World Hater," the
Troubadour responded.

"You know my name, old friend of man?"

"As you know mine, old enemy of
God."

"What brings you to the desert?"

"The Giver of the Song!"

"And does he let you sing it only in these isolated spots?"



"I only practice here to sing it in the crowded ways!"

It was hard to sing before the World Hater, for he ground each joyous stanza underneath his heel.

The music only seemed to make the venom in his hate more bitter than before.

The Hater drew a silver flute from underneath his studded belt. He placed it to his leathered lips drawn tight to play a melody.

The song surprisingly was sweet. It filled the canyon with an airy-tune and hung its lingering reverberations mysteriously in every cleft. It rippled on the very ground around their feet.

A strange compulsion came upon the Singer. Furiously he wanted so to sing the Hater's tune.

He barely stanchd the eager urge to sing.

The morning sun glinted fire upon the silver flute. The music and the dazzling light appeared to mesmerize the Singer.

"You must not sing the Hater's song," the Father-Spirit cried, "Be very careful, for I love you, Troubadour."

"Now," cried the World Hater, "Let's do this tune at once. I'll pipe, you sing. Think of the thousand kingdoms that will dance about our feet."

"No, Hater, I'll not sing your melodies," the Troubadour replied.

"What then Singer will you sing?"

"The Ancient Star-Song of the Father-Spirit."

"Alone, without accompaniment?" "Yes, Hater, all alone if need be." "You need my pipe, man."

"You need my song instead."

"The music of your song is far beyond my tiny pipe."

"Then, go! For I shall never sing a lesser piece."

Then all at once the Troubadour began again. The mountains amplified his song. It swirled as sunlit symphony, until the Hater put his pipe beneath his belt and fled before the song of love.

"Beloved Singer, beware the World Hater," the Father-Spirit said.

Then upward there the Singer stretched his arms and said again, "I love you, Father-Spirit." He waited there a moment while the sky embraced him and then he walked away. Ahead he saw the cities rise, and people thronged the crowded ways.

VI

**If she has loved
him, a man will carry anything
for his mother—
a waterpot or a world.**

Where first to sing?" he thought.

He turned back to the highlands where he had left the broken tool so useless on the vise.

For days he walked. The dust flew up around his feet as he walked home.

At length, he passed the village signpost and there by odd coincidence, his mother at that very time stood by the well.

They met.

He reached to carry her stone jar.

"It's not traditional," she said. He took it anyway.

Her cares had made her fifty years seem even more.

"You broke your hammer on the vise," she said. "I had it mended for you."

"I'm through with hammers, anyway," he said. "I've just come home to board the shop."

33

"And then you'll leave?"

"I will," he said.

"Where will you go?" She studied paving stones as on they walked. He moved the heavy jar to ride upon his other shoulder.

"Wherever there are crowds of many people."

"The Great Walled City of the Ancient King?"

"Yes, I suppose."

He feared to talk to her. Yet he must tell her of the River Singer and all about the Star-Song, he had so lately sung. He seemed afraid that she would think him mad. He could not bear to hurt her. For besides the Father-Spirit, he loved her most of all. At length he knew he must lay bare his heart.

"You seem so troubled, son," she said.

"Not for myself," he said. Then with the hand that was not needed in balancing the jar, he took her hand and smiled.

"I hate for you to board the shop and leave..."

"Am I the tradesman that my father was, while still he was alive?" he asked.

"You both were good, but somehow wood is never kind to your great hands. Your father's hands never paid the pain it cost you, just to love his trade."

She looked down at the gentle, suffering hand that held her own. Somewhere in her swimming recollection, she remembered the same hand with infant fingers that had clutched the ringlets of her hair and reached to feel the leathered face of Eastern Kings. But he could not remember that.

They walked still further without speaking.

"MOTHER, I AM THE SINGER!" He blurted out at once.

"I know," she said.

"I love the Father-Spirit more than life. He has sent me to the crowded ways to sing the Ancient Star-Song."

"I know," she said again. "I heard the Ancient Star-Song only once. It was the very night that you were born. And all these years, my son, I've known that you would come to board the shop someday. Can you sing the Star-Song yet?"

"I can," he answered back.

They neared a house and entered. They shared a simple meal and sat in silence. And the song, which they alone of all the world did know, was lingering all around them in the air.

She had not heard its strains for thirty years but hungered for its music.
He had not sung it for an afternoon but longed to have its fluid meaning coursing through his soul.
Of course the song began.

VII

**Before the song all
music came like
muted, empty octaves
begging a composer's pen.
The notes cried silently
for paper staves and
kept their sound in theory only.**

In the beginning was
the song of love. Alone in empty nothingness
and space It sang itself through

vaulted halls above Reached gently out to
touch the Father's face.

And all the tracklessness where worlds would be
Cried "Father" through the aching void. Sound tore
The distant chasm, and eternity
Called back—"I love you Son— sing Troubadour."

His melody fell upward
into joy And climbed its way
in spangled rhapsody. Earthmaker's infant stars
adored his boy, And blazed his name through
every galaxy.

"Love," sang the Spirit Son
and mountains came. More melody, and life
began to grow. He sang of light, and darkness
fled in shame Before a universe in
embryo.

Then on the naked ground the Troubadour
Knelt down and firmly sang
a stronger chord. He scooped the earth dust
in his hand And worked the clay
till he had molded man.

They laid him down beneath
primeval trees And waited there. They loved
him while he slept And both rejoiced as he began
to breathe A triumph etched in brutal
nakedness.

"I am a Man!" the sun-crowned
being sang. He stood and brushed away the
clinging sand. He knew from where his very
being sprang. Wet clay still dripped from
off the Singer's hands.

Earthmaker viewed the sculptured
dignity Of man, God-like and strident,
President Of everything that was,
content to be God's intimate and only earthen
friend.

The three embraced in that
primeval glen. And then God walked away,
his Singer too. Hate came—discord—they

never met again.

The new man aged and died
and dying grew A race of doubtful, death-owned
sickly men. And every child received the
planet's scar And wept for love to come and
reign. And then To heal hate-sickened life
both wide and far.

"We're naked!" cried the new men in their shame, (they really were)
A race of piteous things who had no name.

They died absurdly whimpering
for life. They probed their sin for
rationality. Self murdered self in endless
hopeless strife And holiness slept with
indecenty.

All birth was but the prelude
unto death And every cradle swung above
a grave. The sun made weary trips from
east to west, Time found no shore, and
culture screamed and raved.

The world, in peaceless orbits,
sped along And waited for the Singer and
his song.

VIII

**It is always much more
difficult to sing when
the audience has turned
its back.**

The Singer ceased. The Ancient Star-Song slept.

"You know the final verse?" his mother asked.

"I know it all," he answered back. "But I'll not sing it here. I'll wait till I am on the wall. Then alone the melody will fall upon thick ears."

"They will not like the final verse," she said.

"They will not like it, for its music is beyond their empty days and makes them trade their littleness for life."

"The self of every singer of the song must die to know its music?"

"They all must die, and ever does the self die hard. It screams and begs in pity not to go. Nor can it bear to let the Father-Spirit own the soul."

He turned the thoughts methodically within his mind then spoke again, "Mother, I shall sing the song while I move out to seek more singers who like me are quite content to sing, then die."

She knew that he was right, but found it hard to talk of joyous life and painful death at the same time. How odd the song born on Earthmaker's breath should lead his only Troubadour to death.

"I cannot bear to see you
die. Let all The world go by. Don't
sing upon the wall. At least don't sing the
hell-bound ancient curse. If you must sing of life
leave off the final verse."

"I go," he said. "God give me strength to sing upon the wall— the Great Walled City of the Ancient King."

He turned.

She cried.

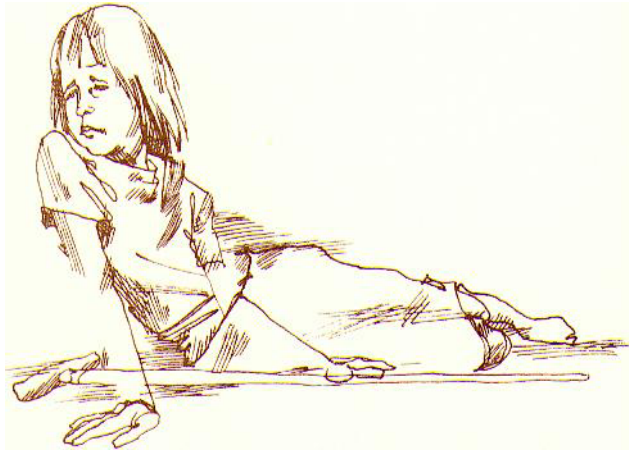
"Leave off the final verse and not upon the wall."

He kissed her.

"I can't ignore
the Father-Spirit's call So I will sing it there,
and I will sing it all."

IX

**A healthy child is
somehow very much
like God. A hurting
child, his son.**



The sunlight lured him from the shaded, village streets and drew him into day. And everywhere he went, the World Hater had already been. The sick men lay among the roadside thorns. The old ones groaned from habit. The young ones whimpered out of hopelessness.

The Singer stopped. Beside the road he saw a brown-eyed child. Her mouth was drawn in hard, firm lines that could not bend to either smile or frown. Her sickness ate her spirit, devouring all the sparkle in her eyes.

Her legs misshapen as they were, lay useless underneath the coarsest sort of cloth. The Singer knelt beside her in the dust and touched her limpid hand and cried. He drew the cloth away that hid her legs. He reached his calloused hand and touched the small, misshapen foot.

"I too was born with scarred feet. See mine!" he said, drawing back the hem of his own robe.

She seemed about to speak, when the music of a silver pipe broke in the air around them. He had heard the pipe before.

Above them towered the World Hater.

"I knew you'd come," he said. "You will, of course, make straight her twisted limbs?"

"I will, World Hater... but can you have no mercy? She's but a child. Can her wholeness menace you in any way? Would it so embarrass you to see her skipping in the sun? Why hate such little, suffering life?"

"Why chide me, Singer? She's Earthmaker's awful error. Tell your Father-Spirit he should take more time when he creates."

"No, it is love which brings a thousand children into life in health. It is hate that cripples each exception to eternal joy. But why must you forever toy with nature to make yourself such ugly pastimes of delight?"

"I hate all the Father-Spirit loves. If he would only hate the world with me, I'd find no joy in it again. You sing. The only music that I know is the cacophony of agony that grows from roadside wretches such as these."

The child between them lay bewildered by their conversation. The Singer spoke again:

"I'll bring my song against
your hate Against the bonds of human
sins.
And human tears will all subside When the Ancient Star-Song wins.'

The Hater raged and screamed above his crippled joy:

"Sing health! If you must. Sing everybody's but your own. I soon will have your song, likewise your life. Your great Star-Song is doomed to fall. You'll groan my kind of music When I meet you at the wall."

The Singer scooped the frightened child into his arms. He sang and set her in the sunny fields and thrilled to watch her run. The world was hers in a way she'd never known. The butterfly-filled meadows danced her eyes alive and drew her scurrying away.

And others came!

Untouchables with bandages heard the healing song and came to health:
The crippled and the blind.
Sick of soul Sick of heart
Sick of hate
Sick of mind.
Everywhere the music went, full health came.

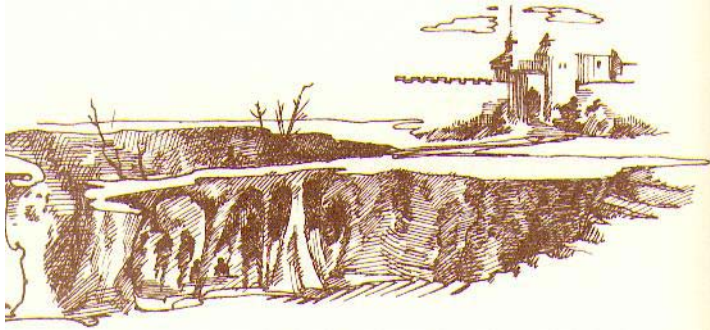
And all the way, men everywhere were whispering that the long-awaited Troubadour had come.

"It is he," they said, "at last he's come. Praise the Father-Spirit, he has come."

X

**The word crying
does not appear
in the lexicon
of heaven. It**

**is the only word
listed in the
lexicon of hell.**



The Singer woke at midnight. In the stupor of half-consciousness—neither quite aware nor yet asleep—he was alone.

The air was full of moans. With groans of grief and pity, the night was crying. He had never heard the darkness cry before.

"Where are you, World Hater?" he shouted.

"Standing in the doorway of the worlds—reveling in my melodies of ugliness and death." The Singer listened. The morbid air depressed him and he could not help but weep himself. He ached from the despair. "How long have they cried beyond the doorway of the worlds?" he asked.

The World Hater seemed to summon up the volume of their moaning and then he shouted, "They've moaned a million years— It never stops. They hurt with pain that burns and eats the conscience—illuminating every failure. They never can be free. Crying is the only thing they know."

"Poor souls! Have they nothing to look back upon with joy?" the Singer asked.

"No. Nor anything to look forward to with hope."

"Could they never give up suffering for one small moment, every thousand years or so?"

"No. Never. They ache in simply knowing they will never cease to ache."

"I'm coming to the Canyon of the Damned you know."

"You dare not think that you could sing above their anguished dying that never will be dead."

"You'll see, World Hater. I will come."

"It's my domain!" the Hater protested.

"You have no domain. How dare you think that you can hold some corner of Earthmaker's universe and make it your own private horror chamber!"

"It is forever, Singer!"

"Yes, but not off-limits to the song. I'll smash the gates that hold the damned and every chain will fall away.

"I'll sing to every suffering cell of hate, the love song of my soul.

"I'll stand upon the torment of the Canyon of the Damned."

The troubled air grew still. The World Hater stepped outside the universe—pulled shut the doorway of the worlds.

And Crying softly slept with Joy.

XI

**Oftentimes Love is
so poorly packaged
that when we have
sold everything to
buy it, we cry in
finding all our
substance gone and
nothing in the tin-
sel and the ribbon.**

**Hate dresses well
to please a buyer.**

He met a woman in the street. She leaned against an open door and sang through her half-parted lips a song that he could barely hear. He knew her friendship was for hire. She was without a doubt a study in desire. Her hair fell free around her shoulders. And intrigue played upon her lips.

"Are you betrothed?" she asked. "No, only loved," he answered. "And do you pay for love?" "No, but I owe it everything."

"You are alone. Could I sell you but an hour of friendship?"

Deaf to her surface proposition, he said, "Tell me of the song that you were singing as I came upon you. Where did you learn it?"

His question troubled her. At length she said, "The first night that I ever sold myself, I learned it from a tall impressive man."

"And did he play a silver pipe?" the Singer asked.

She seemed surprised. "Do you know the man who bought me first?"



"Yes. Not long ago, in fact, he did his best to teach that song to me."

"I cannot understand. I sell friendship and you your melody. Why would he teach us both the self-same song?"

The Singer pitied her. He knew the World Hater had a way of making every victim feel as though he were the only person who could sing his song.

"He only has one song; he therefore teaches it to everyone. It is a song of hate."

"No, it is a love song. The first night that he held me close, he sang it tenderly and so in every way he owned me while he sang to me of love."

"And have you seen him since?"

"No, not him, but a never ending queue of men with his desires."

"So it was no song of love. Tell me, did he also say that some day in the merchandising of your soul, you would find someone who would not simply leave his fee upon the stand but rather take you home to care for you and cherish you?"

Again she seemed surprised, "Those were indeed his very words—how can you know them?"

"And have you found the one that he has promised?"

"Not yet."

"And how long have you peddled friendship?"

"Some twenty years are gone since first I learned the song that you inquired about."

The Singer felt a burst of pity.
"We sometimes give ourselves
to hate in masquerade and only
think it love. And all our lives
we sing the song we thought
was right. The Canyon of the Damned
is filled with singers who
thought they knew a love song. ..
Listen while I sing for you
a song of love."

He began the melody so vital to the dying men around him. "In the beginning was the song of love..."

She listened and knew for the first time she was hearing all of love there was. Her eyes swam when he was finished. She sobbed and sobbed in shame. "Forgive me, Father-Spirit, for I am sinful and undone... for singing weary years of all the wrong words..."

The Singer touched her shoulder and told her of the joy that lay ahead if she could learn the music he had sung.

He left her in the street and walked away, and as he left he heard her singing his new song. And when he turned to wave the final time he saw her shaking her head to a friendship buyer. She would not take his money.

And from his little distance, the Singer heard her use his very words.

"Are you betrothed?" the buyer asked her.

"No, only loved," she answered. "And do you pay for love?" "No, but I owe it everything."

XII

**In hell there is no music—
an agonizing night that
never ends as songless as
a shattered violin.**

Sing the Hillside Song!" they cried.

There were so many of them. He wasn't even sure he could be heard above the din of all their voices. He walked among them and looked them over. In his mind he knew that the Father-Spirit wanted each of them to learn his song.

Someone in the sprawling crowd stood and handed him a lyre. "Sing for us please Singer—the Hillside Song!"

"Yes, yes," they called, "the Hillside Song."

He looked down at the lyre and held it close. He turned each thumbset till the string knew how to sound, then he began:

"Blessed are the musical," he said, "for theirs shall be a never-ending song."

"Blessed are those who know the difference between their loving and their lusting, for they shall be pure in heart and understand the reason."

"Blessed are those who die for reasons that are real, for they themselves are real."

"Blessed are all those who yet can sing when all the theater is empty and the orchestra is gone."

"Blessed is the man who stands before the crudest king and only fears his God."

"Blessed is the mighty king who sits beside the weakest man and thinks of all their similarities."

"Earthmaker is love. He has sent his only Troubadour to close the Canyon of the Damned."
Then they broke his song and cried out with one voice, "Tell us Singer, have you any hope for us?
Can we be saved?"

"You may if you will sing Earth-maker's Song!"

"Is there another way to cheat the Canyon of the Damned?"

"None but the Song!"

XIII

**No person ever is so helpless as
the man in whom joy and misery
sleep comfortably together.**

**No physician can give health and
happiness to the man who enjoys
his affliction. For such a man
health and happiness are always
contradictory.**

From night to day and back to night again he travelled on. He saw the glow of the great city, far on the horizon, and just the light of it roused expectancy and fear. By twilight he was weary and he turned aside to sleep beside a moonlit stream. The water fell in froth and white cascades into the wooden lattice of a creaking wheel.

The Miller who was still at work seemed most determined to finish out his toil by starlight. It was only by the merest chance he found the Singer sleeping by the stream just above the giant wheel.

For a moment he saw the Singer only as a vagrant and was inclined to drive him from the premises. But then he changed his mind and invited him to share the evening meal.

As they went into the grain room, the Singer looked upon the great machine which turned the giant stones which milled the grist.

The Singer was about to ask him where he found the mason to quarry such impressive stones, when suddenly he discovered that one of the Miller's hands was badly scarred and crippled.

"Can you run so great a stone with but a single hand?" The Singer asked.

"I manage... though it always was much easier with two."

"Did you lose your hand in this machinery?"

"I was in much too great a hurry three harvest-times ago. I was trying to sweep the grist away when I dropped my broom upon the floor stone. When I reached to pick it up, the great stone caught my arm and hand. And when they rolled the grinder back, this was all that I had left," he said.

"I will," observed the Singer, "make it useful once again if you will just desire it whole and believe it can be."

"It cannot be so easy, Singer. Would you wave your magic wand above such suffering and have it all be done with? I sometimes wake at midnight with a searing flame of fire and throbbing agony alive through all this twisted, dying limb. You have both hands and cannot understand this sort of pain."

"I have no pain like yours, but I have a healing melody. Earth-maker gave the song to me for healing hands like yours. Already it has helped a little girl to be made whole."

"Was her hand as badly mangled as my own?"

"It was her legs—but yes, they were..."

"How often I have wished that I might trade a useless hand for such a leg/" the Miller interrupted.

"Why either—why not simply be made whole?"

"Oh that such a healing now were possible—the speed I might regain in working at the mill. But no, it cannot be. Can you not understand? Have you no sympathy for suffering? Are you so empty of conscience as to suggest a hopeless remedy. You only add to misery by forcing me to see myself a cripple. I soon shall have to close the mill or sell it. I cannot make the necessary quota since the accident occurred."

"There is power within the Melody I know to make you well. Please, Miller, trust and let me sing and you will run the mill alone with two good hands."

"Stop your mocking. I am a sick old man whom life has cheated of a hand. The nightly pain has already now begun. The season of my hope is gone."

The Singer watched him caught in some dread spasm of his aching circumstance. He moaned and fell upon the floor and with his healthy fingers he held his mangled hand.

His surging pain caused him to cry, "O God deliver me from this body... I never can be well and whole as other men."

He waited for the Singer to join him in his pity, but when he raised his head for understanding, the door stood open on the night and the Singer was nowhere to be seen.

XIV

**To God obscenity is not uncovered
flesh. It is exposed intention.
Nakedness is just a state of heart.**

Was Adam any more unclothed when he discovered shame? Yes.

The wall of the great city reached upward till it defied all measurement of mind.

Outside the fortress, stretching up the slopes, a grove of trees bearded the great stone wall that had slept for centuries above the seasons of new leaf and naked frost.

Towers and minarets glinted in the sun-washed sky and caused the Singer apprehension as he leaned against a tree.

He watched the human commerce flowing through the rough-hewn gates. Never had he seen so many people hungry for a living song. They jostled shapelessly, a mass of urban sameness. Each hurried after urgent unattended business, yet none had any reason for the press.

The Singer sighed.

Sometimes a child would follow in the madding throng. Already it appeared the youngster tried to learn the routine, manufactured steps of older men he mimicked in the way.

Reluctant to adopt the business cadence of the empty throng, the Singer turned and sought a quiet place beneath the wall. He walked into the trees.

"Hello, Singer," said the voice he knew too well. "Welcome to the quiet of the grove. Does the senseless empty crowd offend you?"

The Singer's only offense came in knowing that the World Hater always seemed to know what he was thinking.

"How did you manage to make them cherish all this nothingness?" he asked the World Hater.

"I simply make them feel embarrassed to admit that they are incomplete. A man would rather close his eyes than see himself as your Father-Spirit does. I teach them to exalt their emptiness and thus preserve the dignity of man."

"They need the dignity of God."

"You tell them that. I sell a cheaper product."

They were deeper in the woods. They stopped in a shaded spot beneath the fortress wall. A heavy set of chains hung from a great foundation stone that held the towering wall. Manacles hung bolted on the wrists of a burly, naked man.

He slept or seemed to.

Before him on the ground lay a heavy stoneware basin nearly filled with water and the dried remains of bread half-eaten.

"Is he mad?" the Singer asked.

"Senselessly," the Hater answered.

"Who brings him bread and water?"

"I do."

"Why?"

"To see him dance in madness without a tiny hope! Imagine my delight when he raves and screams in chains. Would you like for me to wake this animal?"

"He is a man. Earthmaker made him so. What is his name?"

"The Crowd."

"Why such a name?"

"Because within this sleeping hulk there are a thousand hating spirits from the Canyon of the Damned. They leap at him with sounds no ears but his can hear. They dive at him with screaming lights no other eyes can see. And in his torment he will hold his shaggy head and whimper. Then he rises and strains in fury against the chains to tear them from the wall. Stand back and see."

The Hater took the silver pipe out of its sheath. The tune began—a choppy, weird progression of half tones.



The sleeping giant stirred and placed his massive hands upon his temples. In fever hot the Hater played and just as rapidly the Madman stumbled to his feet.

The Singer never had beheld so great a man as he. Some unseen, unheard agony rippled through his bleeding soul. He growled, then screamed and tried to tear the chains that held him to the wall.

"Stop, Hater!" cried the Singer.

But the Hater played more loudly than before. At that precise and ugly moment, the pinion on the left gave way. The chain fell loose. Then with his one free hand the monster tore the other chain away. In but a second he stood unchained before them. The Hater took his pipe and fled into the trees. The Singer then began to sing and continued on until the Madman stood directly in his path. With love that knew no fear, the Singer caught his torment, wrapped it all in song and gave it back to him as peace.

And soon the two men held each other. In their long embrace of soul, the spirits cried and left. They stood at last alone.

"What year is it?" the giant asked with some perplexity.

"It is the year of the Troubadour," the Singer said. "How long have you hung upon the wall and writhed in madness?"

"I cannot tell the years."

"Will you come with me into the ancient city?"

"Yes," said the Madman, and then remembering, he added, "I cannot, for I am naked."

"Not if you love me. He whom Earthmaker loves," replied the Troubadour, "is hidden from his shame forevermore."

"I love you more than life," the Madman then confessed.

And when they turned to leave the two of them were dressed.

XV

**Humanity is fickle.
They may dress for a
morning coronation and
never feel the need to
change clothes to
attend an execution in
the afternoon.**

**So Triumphal Sundays
and Good Fridays
always fit comfortably
into the same April
week.**

The way through the gates was full.

The Holiday had come and the eagerness of all the citizens for tradition and festivity had charged the air with expectation. The Singer and the Madman felt the strain of something dread but pending, threatening but unannounced.

Within the press of people the Singer felt a mixing of compassion and revulsion. He pitied them for emptiness but resented their contentment in it. He knew that what they needed was the Song.

When they approached the gates, a woman in the crowd came to the Madman, then shuddering fell back in fright. They stopped and the congestion moved around them.

"You are the Madman," she said. Then changing her mind she denied it, "No you are clothed and sane."

"I am the Madman," he said, "but the Troubadour has come and I am full and whole."

"Who is this Troubadour?" she asked. "He is the Son of Earthmaker!"

A crowd was gathering around their conversation.

"Listen to me," called the Madman to the crowd.

"I hung upon the wall until this very hour. When the moon was full I roamed in wild unholy grottoes of my mind. See these wrists," he said pulling back his sleeves.

The marks and scars of chafing steel were obvious to all.

"The manacles of iron did this. I could kill and would have many times except for the great chains which held me. I cried within the grove and wished to die. I tore at every band and tried to set my own brutality toward freedom, but never did the chains give way until today."

"Stop!" cried a voice within the crowd. "You are still mad," the voice continued as the Hater came out of the crowd. "Listen to me, Madman," he said pulling out the silver pipe.

Beads of perspiration appeared upon the Madman's brow. Fear tore at him—could he stand the melody that formerly had driven him insane? The weird progression of shrieking notes began.

But the Madman's tension soon began to ease. In the frustration of his losing, the Hater played more loudly than before.

Soon the Madman was entirely at peace. He exulted in the confidence of total sanity. "It's no use Hater, the Troubadour has come."

The crowd had grown to several hundred people and the Madman called out over them, "This man's pipe wiped out all my sanity until today. I learned a new song from the Singer for whom the world so long has waited. Listen to the Song of Life."

He began to sing. The Singer himself was startled at the beauty of his voice. He sang with such confidence that none could doubt the meaning he found springing up within his soul.

"Where did you learn this confidence and joy?" they asked him.

He nodded toward the Singer.

"He has saved me from myself and from a thousand maddened spirits from the Canyon of the Damned."

"Who are you, Man?" they asked the Singer.

"I am the Troubadour, the Son of Earthmaker," the Singer then replied. "I have come to save the world and close the Canyon of the Damned."

"Can we know your saving song and sing it as the Madman does?"

"You may, if you believe I am the only Troubadour."

They mulled the proposition in their muddled minds.

Then someone in the fringe cried loudly, "Halana to the Troubadour, Son of Earthmaker!" Another to the far left took up the cry. A third and then a fourth—and suddenly the world seemed caught up in the cry.

"Halana to the Troubadour, Earthmaker's only Son."

Through the ancient city gates the joy echoed down the plaster canyons and drubbed its cadence over cobblestones. The cry became a tumult in the city,

Joy to the Earth,
The Troubadour has come
Make ready for the Song of Life.

A thousand dancers swelled the streets and instruments of music gathered up the merriment of holiday. Every street cried out the newness of the singing age that came to close the joyless era that had gone before.

The music swept through every city street and purged the evil and the sin before it. The Hater dropped his pipe and barely could retrieve it from beneath the thousand driving feet.

The Song had come, and for one swelling surge of love there was no room for hate.

Even the sentinels upon the walls raised their hands, threw their bearded faces to the sky and cried out over all the world beneath them, "Halana to the Troubadour, Earthmaker's only Son."

XVI

SYLLOGISM

Major Premise:

God is a custom.

Minor Premise:

**A custom is an
old, old habit.**

Conclusion:

**Therefore, God is
an old, old habit.**

The singing and the dancing swept the crowd in joyful madness till all the city gathered in the Plaza of Humanity—a colonnaded forum around the Shrine of Older Life.

The Shrine of Older Life was attended by the Keepers of the Ancient Ways. They were every one gray-bearded and wore the pointed hats, the custom of their ordered service at the shrine. Each sang the hymns of their tradition and kept with strict obedience the rituals of the ages.

Since the Holiday of Hope had come the Grand Musician was himself the chief director of the liturgy. The formality of the great high adoration was broken by the singing and dancing crowd that swept through the Holy Square. The Singer went before them in a sea of warm approval till he stood beneath the towering Shrine of Older Life. It glittered in the sun and lifted up its marble proclamation to the world.

An acolyte of lower caste rang a brazen gong that brought the roaring crowd to silence and only then did the Grand Musician rise to speak.

"What does this uproar mean?" he asked.



A single voice rose from the sea of faces. "We have found the long-awaited Troubadour. He knows the Ancient Star-Song!"

"Yes! Yes!" cried the throng, "He knows the Ancient Star-Song—He is the Troubadour, Son of Earthmaker!" The mere suggestion of the joyous prose began the cries of "Halana" all over again. Once again the gong restored a silence to the square. The Grand Musician turned to the Singer.

"Is it true? Are you the Troubadour? Can you sing the Ancient Star-Song?"

"I am he. I know the song."

"Then sing it now," agreed the Keepers of the Ancient Ways.

The Singer took his lyre and strummed the strings. The chords fell outward over all the throng.

The audience grew still. He sang the very words he first had sun before his mother. Above him towered the wall and high upon the bulwark he saw the framework of a strange machine.

It was the great machine on which false singers met their death.

He knew then what it meant to sing a new song.

And then his finger swept the strings and he began the final verse.

XVII

**A finale is not always the best
song but it is always the last.**

The Father and his Troubadour sat down Upon the outer rim of space.

"And here, My Singer," said Earthmaker,

"is the crown Of all my endless skies—the green, brown sphere Of all my hopes." He reached
and took the round New planet down, and held it to his ear.

"They're crying, Troubadour," he said. "They cry So hopelessly." He gave the little ball Unto his
Son, who also held it by His ear. "Year after weary year they all Keep crying. They seem born to
weep then die. Our new man taught them crying in the Fall.

"It is a peaceless globe. Some are sincere In desperate desire to see her freed Of her absurdity. But
war is here. Men die in conflict, bathed in blood and greed."

Then with his nail he scraped the atmosphere And both of them beheld the planet bleed.

Earthmaker set earth spinning on its way
And said, "Give me your vast infinity
My son; I'll wrap it in a bit of clay.
Then enter Terra microscopically
To love the little souls who weep away
Their lives." "I will," I said, "set Terra free."

And then I fell asleep and all awareness fled.
I felt my very being shrinking down.
My vastness ebbed away. In dwindling dread,
All size decayed. The universe around
Drew back. I woke upon a tiny bed
Of straw in one of Terra's smaller towns.

And now the great reduction
has begun: Earthmaker and his Troubadour
are one. And here's the new redeeming
melody— The only song that can set Terra free.

The Shrine of older days must be laid by. Mankind must see Earthmaker left the sky, And he is
with us. They must concede that I am he. They must believe the Song or die.

XVIII

Vengeance (ven'jdns) noun

- 1. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth;
a fair, satisfying and rapid
way to a sightless, toothless world.**

Mercy (mer'se) noun

- 1. The infrequent art of turning
thumbs up on an old antagonist
at the end of one's rapier.**

Liar," cried the Keepers of the Ancient Ways, when he had finished with his song. "We've kept this Shrine for many years as our fathers did before us. Earthmaker loves the shrine he gave us. He will meet us here forever."

"No/" cried the Singer. "Please believe the Song. Earthmaker never will again meet men within this holy square."

"Liar!" they cried again. "Strike him on the mouth." A bearded monk, who only lately read the liturgy, laid aside his scroll and struck the Singer on the mouth. The blood ran down his chin.

"Listen, men of Terra!" cried the Grand Musician. "He sings a lie. Earthmaker loves the Shrine. He has loved it for a thousand holidays."

The Singer stumbled to his feet and cried above the crowd. "Earthmaker loves neither shrines nor holidays. He loves only men. Life is the Song and not the Shrine." Another Keeper of the Ancient Ways laid aside his incense and his holy book and struck him in the face. He fell once more.

The Madman who had lately sung in joy the great Halana Chorus was bewildered by this furious turn of circumstance. When they struck the Singer the second time he rushed upon the Keepers of the Ancient Ways. He attacked them with such fury that they fell away in fright. Then suddenly a sentinel struck him from behind and sent him sprawling in the dust unconscious. In a moment they had him clamped securely in the irons.

"Listen," cried a voice above the tumult of the moment. The Singer knew the voice. It was the World Hater masquerading as a Keeper of the Ancient Ways. He wore the mask of those who led in worship at the Shrine.

"Listen," he said again, "this man in irons is mad. For years he hung in chains and quite away from all that he might hurt until today. The Singer freed him to attack and hoped that he might injure the Keepers of the Ancient Ways.

"Look at him," said the masquerading World Hater, pointing to the Singer. "Does he appear a Holy Singer? Where are his prayer book and candle? If he had come to worship, would he not have brought along a scroll of ancient truths? If his song is from the Father-Spirit, why did it not come to us through the Grand Musician? He wears no robe, he has no beard like other holy men. Where is his pointed hat? He was but a tradesman in the northern hills. He never studied music like the Grand Musician. Is it reasonable to suppose that God would give a tradesman a song that he withheld from those who keep his very Shrine?"

The Grand Musician rose and sang. Infirmly at the first, but gaining confidence, he sang the Anthem of the great Shrine.

"Blessed be Thou, O Earthmaker, Lover of the ancient days May we adore the ancient truths, Walk only on the ancient ways."

Gradually the crowd began to join the Grand Musician.

"Keep Thy Shrine a sacred place For practice of Thy timeless lore Of ancient holy men who taught us Great traditions we adore."

Finally from the habit of their worship all the crowd rose up to sing the songless melody they had learned from the generations who had left them with the weariness of worship.

"Blessed art Thou, O Earthmaker, Help of ours in ages past, Keep Thy holy Shrine forever, Never changing truth Thou hast."

"Long live Earthmaker!" cried a gray-beard Keeper of the Ancient Ways. "Long live Earthmaker," he repeated. "Long live the Shrine of Older Life."

And all of them called out together, "Long live Earthmaker. Long live the Shrine of Older Life."

"What shall we do, O Grand Musician, with the Liar who hates the Shrine of Older Life?" cried the Hater still in masquerade.

"We shall smash his lyre and..." Before he could name the sentence, a small bent man made his way to the steps of the Shrine. It was the Miller with the injured hand. "May I speak before you pass the sentence?" the Miller asked the Grand Musician.

"You may," he answered back.

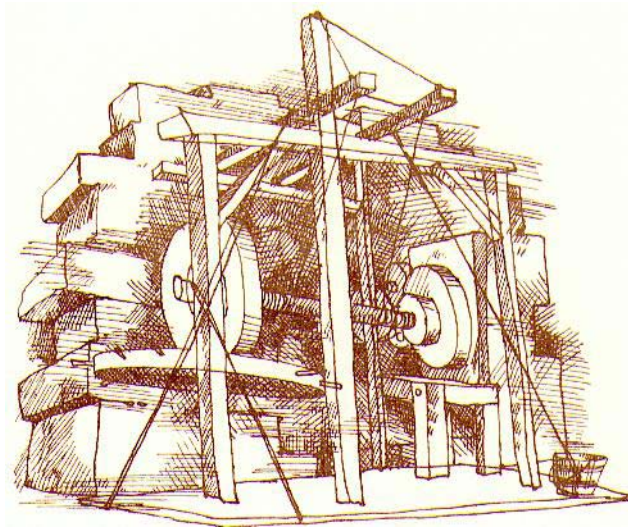
"I am a miller. My home is by the grainfields of the east. Three years ago my hand was crushed in an accident at my own mill. This liar who calls himself the only Troubadour mocked my crushed deformity and left me screaming in the night."

"Had you no pity, Singer, for this man?" the Grand Musician asked.

"He had pity enough for himself. I could have made him whole," the Singer said.

"How can you call yourself Earth-maker's Son and have no pity? Earthmaker is merciful and filled with love." He paced the marble stones before the crowd. At length he spoke, "Because you had no pity your hand shall be like his."

He thought once more and said, "And now I pass the sentence. We shall break his lyre, then we shall break his hand and set him free. On the flesh of his forehead we shall burn the word 'Liar' and he shall live beneath his sentence all his life. So shall the sentence be of anyone who claims to be Earthmaker's Son and sings a song which desecrates the Shrine."



"Bring out the block and mallet."

The guards obeyed. They placed the Singer's hand upon the block and brought the crushing mallet down.

The Singer winced.

The Miller walked up to the Singer who gently held his injured hand.

"Would you like pity from me, Singer?" he said through his teeth. "Here, Singer, is the only kind of pity that you know." He spit into the Singer's face and laughed.

The Madman strained against the chains and was about to rip them free. His struggle ended in futility. He could not look upon the suffering of the only man who knew him sane. He cried to see the spit of hate coursing down the Singer's face.

"Crush his other hand before you set him free," cried someone in the crowd. "Teach him through great pain that Earthmaker pities injury."

"It's true he must learn how to care," the Grand Musician cried. "Place his other hand upon the block."

Once more the mallet fell and the splintering of tendons shot burning agony throughout the Singer's soul.

They laid his lyre upon the block and smashed it with the mallet that had fallen twice before.

"Sing for us!" they cried in vengeance. "Play and sing!" they said.

The Grand Musician turned his head and sang an ancient hymn while they spit again upon the Singer and struck him with their fists.

"You were going to heal the Miller's hand," cried someone in the crowd. "Sing healing to your own."

When the Grand Musician finished singing - all the ancient hymn, he turned back to the Singer who gazed in agony upon his broken hands. "Bring the fire and irons and we shall etch the name upon his face."

They seared the word across his forehead ...LIAR.

The Madman held his shaggy face and cried into his hands. His sobbing went unnoticed in the action of the trial.

"May I now release this false Troubadour?" the Grand Musician asked.

"No. He must die upon the wall. Let him suffer for his lies. Let him hang where everyone may know the nature of his ugly melodies of desecration. Hang him on the great machine of death."

"Yes! Yes!" they cried in fevered chanting. "Yes! Yes! thou Great Musician! Yes! Hang him on the great machine of death."

XIX

Institutions have a poor safety record. The guillotines of orthodoxy keep a clean blade that is always honed for heresy. And somewhere near the place where witches die an unseen sign is posted whose invisible letters clearly read:

**WE ARE PROUD TO REPORT
0 WORKING DAYS LOST TO
INJURY OR ACCIDENT.
—THE MANAGEMENT**

Let us pray.

The sentinels returned the Madman to the grove. He followed them without a struggle. He walked along in the stupefaction of his disbelief. In his former madness he would have crushed the wardens in the foment of his rage. He could scarcely understand that in a single day he had been granted both a new mind and an injured heart.

The day's proceedings had been too much for him. Every time he closed his eyes, he saw the mallet of the executioner again: The splintering of tendons, the wincing of the Singer, the facial blows the priest had given him: all these made his mind a horror chamber.

Somewhere in his reverie of agony they reached the wall. The attendants locked him in the irons, while he stared vacantly away. They brought him bread and water, which he never saw.

He only wept. A tremor shook his giant frame.

The darkness came. The Madman cried. While somewhere higher on the wall the Singer died.

It was good the Madman could not behold his suffering. He could not have borne it. A trinity of other lovers came, all three absorbed in one great hurt. The little girl sat down between the older women.

"I am his mother," said the oldest. "I am the demonstration of his power," said the little girl. "I am only a friend," said the other woman.

"I gave him life," said his mother. "I gave him twisted feet," said the little girl. "I gave him shame," said the friend.

"He taught me obedience to the Father-Spirit," said the mother. "He taught me running." "He taught me love."

They sat beneath the great machine of death. It was a trebled pieta of stone and still it wept.

"I feel very old today," said the mother as she placed her arm around the shoulder of the little girl.

"I feel as though I soon must watch the Father-Spirit die." The girl sobbed into the bosom of the Singer's mother.

The Friendship Seller was a world away. She said, "I am ashamed of being human. It is the very shame I felt the first time that I..." She could not bring herself to tell her ugly fall before the grieving child. "The moment that I saw the Keeper of the Ancient Ways who was chief accuser, I knew he bore some vague familiarity. He was no priest..."

"I know," the older woman said.

"He was the piper who taught me a song of death and called it love," the Friendship Seller said.

"I knew him too," said the little girl. "He used to pass me where I begged, and look upon my twisted legs and laugh. I used to feel so bad when he would look and smirk in satisfaction. And every time he passed he left me crying."

They ceased their talking and looked up at the wall. The great machine hung heaviness into their souls, the giant timbers creaked in the ordeal they were asked to undergo. The women shuddered when they viewed the suffering form that lay among the cables and the gears.

Grief owned the day.

In turn the three stood up and stared upon the dying Singer, high and lifted up.

"My joy, my health," said the little girl.

"My life," said the Friendship Seller.

The night stood dumb. The burdened mother wept. "The Ancient Star-Song lost. The World Hater won. I wish I might have died instead of you, my son, my son, my son."

XX

**A child who cries at the
coffin of his father is**

**only mature when he has
lived long enough to cry
at the coffin of his son.**

**Never was a boy crucified,
but that the weeping Father
always found the nail-prints
in his own hands.**

The dying went slowly. The great timbers were weathered by the grimness of their task. A single, great gear pivoted upon an axis, that culminated in a windlass upon which wound a cable. Below in an ever tightening arc an armature was turning. A group of smaller cams and gears seemed each to play their part in keeping tension on the heavy ropes.

The beams and cables ended where a set of chains fastened their steel bands to the hands and feet of the Singer. Each time the great windlass moved a fraction of an inch, the tension grew upon the ropes and left the Singer caught in agony that grew increasingly unbearable.

Suspended from a rough-hewn crane there hung a hopper. And everyone who lived within the ancient city filed silently along the wall and dropped a stone within the great receptacle. The growing weight increased the stress. The lines groaned upon the metal bands.

The Keepers of the Ancient Ways began the execution by laying on the stones of offense first. It was their holy stones of accusation that set the great machine in motion. In fidelity to the truth, they bowed their knees and looked to heaven and chanted in the file of death.

Oh God of ancient days,
Thou Keeper of the Ancient Ways,
Our fathers' God, we praise!

Over and over ran the litany of death. The weight of accusation grew with each successive stone.

The Singer seemed small among the heavy beams of wood. The gray of the day settled close around the spiraled towers and by the afternoon, the fog removed the upper walls from sight. Still it settled downward. At last the great machine itself was shrouded by the mist that came to cool the fever in the dying Singer.

When the fog had made the city one great livid criminal, the Singer looked through glazed eyes and saw his foe, sitting on an old and rotten beam. He leered above the stretched and dying man before him.

"You give me joy and music you will never hear, Singer. Groan for me. Scream the fire that fills your soul. Spew the venom of your grudge upon the city. Never have I known the triumph of my hate till now."

He rose and walked across the beam and stepped upon a cable. The added strain drew the manacles into the wrists of the dying Singer.

"Check-mate, Singer!" He howled into the mist and the shrieking of his laughter was absorbed into the opaque air.

The Singer felt the agony of dying, the multiplied pain of a hundred thousand men all dying at one time.

With an agility of delight the Hater danced his way around the armature and strutted on the ropes. He looked into the fog again and shouted, "Your move, Earthmaker!"

The great, gray, unseen walls grabbed the mockery and flung their sonic echoes from stone to stone. And while the reverberations rang throughout the Great Walled City, the Hater in sadistic gaiety ran out upon the ropes, swung around a beam and threw his words outward into the sick sky.

"I have you crying, Earthmaker. You can never glory in your universal riches, for I have made you poor. And there is none to pity you. Everyone you made has retired to eat and drink away their absurd holiday, and when they wake up in the morning their great machine will have done its work. You lie at man's caprice and wait for him to break your heart. .. Earthmaker is crying at the mercy of his earth.

"You started crying when they broke his hands. Can it be that the agony which plunges you in grief can wash my soul with joy?"

"Look how he dies. Cry, Creator, Cry! This is my day to stand upon the breast of God and claim my victory over love. You lost the gamble. In but an hour your lover will be pulp upon the gallows. Did you tell him when his fingers formed the world, that he would die on Terra, groaning with his hands crushed and whimpering in my great machine?"

He laughed and turned to look again upon the Troubadour.

"Now, who will sing the Father-Spirit's Song?" he asked the dying man.

The Singer seemed to rally in his suffering. From somewhere far beyond himself he drew a final surge of strength and sang the final verse again.

"And now the great reduction has begun: Earthmaker and his Troubadour are one."

He sang. And then his lips fell silently apart and his head slumped forward on his chest.

The Father-Spirit wept.

The fog swirled in bleak and utter numbness.

Existence raved.

The stones bled.

The Shrine of Older Life collapsed in rubble.

And Terra shuddered in her awful crime.

XXI

Decision is the key to destiny.

**"God, can you be merciful and send
me off to hell and lock me in
forever?"**

**"No, Pilgrim, I will not send you
there, but if you chose to go
there, I could never lock you out"**

The Hater cringed to hear the sound he feared above all else. The doorway of the worlds stood open. He felt the giant key that dangled from his belt. He wished to gloat a little longer in his victory but left the silent gallows where the Singer was as dead as the rotting beams of the machine.

He reached the threshold of eternity and found the doorway of the worlds not only open but clearly ripped away. He strained to hear the everlasting wail, the eternal dying which he loved. All was silent. Then he heard the Song.

"No," he cried. "Give me back the door and key for this is my domain." He felt again and found the great key at his waist had disappeared.

"Where is the key? Where is the key?" the Hater cried. But all the while the Hater knew. Each man on Terra had a key. And never could they come into the Canyon of the Damned unless they chose to do it. To live there, men would have to reject the Song. It was a song that only four on Terra knew, but it would grow until the world could sing it.

"Earthmaker, this day was not the victory I had thought," the World Hater cried. "We both have lost. You have lost your Son and I have lost my kingdom."

It was a hollow loss. Full well the Hater knew the Canyon of the Damned would never be as large as he had hoped.

He steeled himself for the battle out ahead.

He would have to fight the Song. He would fight with every weapon in his arsenal of hate.

But he knew that he would lose. And he knew that when the course of time was done, the door would be put back upon the Canyon of the Damned, and he would be locked in with all the discord of the universe. And he would suffer with all of those he had taught to hate the Song or consciously ignore it.

And he himself would be a prisoner of the hate he spread on Terra. And when the doorway of the worlds was locked the final time, he himself would be inside the Canyon of the Damned.

And only God would have the key.

XXII

WHEN GOD LOSES HIS BELOVED

habeas corpus is a weak and futile law. But Earthlings never seem to learn that it is futile to dredge the graveyards for messiahs. No matter how intently you may man the cables, the grappling hooks will always come up empty.

In the morning, the wreckage of the great machine lay in splintered beams beneath the wall. It had fallen in the night. The great iron pinions that held it to the ancient stones had given way.

The whole affair had been so wrapped in mist that none had seen its fall. But all had heard the roar and crash of its collapse.



The city had not slept. A common guilt had kept them thinking of the man who died above them and the holiday that they had passed in emptiness. And when they had tried to sleep, the image of the Singer etched itself upon the darkness of the night. They felt unspoken shame in merely being sons and grandsons of the masons and carpenters who had made the great machine in centuries long gone.

When Terra shuddered in the night, the old machine had torn itself away and splintered in a single heap of rotted wood and rusted iron. And many in the peaceless night remarked that it was odd the Singer and the old machine should die the self-same moment.

Shortly after daybreak the wreckage lay behind a civil barricade and a crew of laborers was sent to clear the chaos from the streets. A group of men lifted the heavy beams. Ox-drawn sledges took them well beyond the city gates.

Each workman feared that he might be the one to come upon the mangled body of the Singer who now lay buried in the last remains of the machine. The heavy drayage of debris lasted into early afternoon.

A workman finally spied the giant tension cable that drew the heavy chains. He feared to see the mutilation he would find beneath the tangled cables and the ropes.

But when he had pulled the final chains away, the manacles were empty. And where the Singer should have been there lay only a key—a great key forged from a metal never mined on earth. When the workman stooped to pick it up he found that it was broken. It was clear that whatever door it might have fit would never see its use again. That nameless door would remain forever locked or open. For a moment the workman wondered which. "Open," he thought. "Yes, definitely open."

He pondered the great key. Was it of any consequence? Should he report it to the Grand Musician? He finally threw the broken key into a passing ox-cart filled with wreckage. He shrugged his shoulders and set out to find the overseer.

At length he found the foreman sent to direct the clean-up operation at the wall. "Tell the Grand Musician," he said, "there is no body in the wreckage and the manacles are empty."

XXIII

"What would you like to be when you grow up, little girl?"

"Alive."

The child lay wide awake and filled with fear. Something dreadful in the dying of her friend left her trembling in the cold. To be an orphan in a world that took so little thought of homeless children was tenuous enough. But a greater dread stalked her smaller world. The Singer was no more, and she felt again the way she had before he came and found her begging by the roadside.

"Please keep me well," she prayed. "Father-Spirit, keep me as the Singer left me." She felt her little legs to be quite sure they had not withered in the night. "Now that he is gone, please, Father-Spirit," she pled into the darkness, "must I become an invalid again?"

In every shadow of the night she saw the lurking image of the World Hater. She remembered how he leered at her and smirked to see her in the roadside dust. "Oh, Father, it is better that I had not received the gift of motion than to have gained and lost it. I never can go back again to crawling in the streets," she sobbed. "Please do not make me crawl again and beg. Oh, Father, please..."

The first faint coloring of dawn found her lying in fatigue, still begging for her legs which had not suffered any loss for all her worry. But her agony and doubt had caused her view of things to grow narrow in the night. Even the first pale light of day did not reveal the world that really was.

She felt someone beside her on the simple mat that was her bed.

"You worried about your legs for nothing," said a voice.

She sat upright in her fear. In but a moment she was on her feet and seemed about to run. Then she looked at him more fully. Her heart was pumping. "Can it be?" And she concluded in her madness, "It is!" She threw herself into the Singer's arms with such a strong embrace it all but knocked him over. "You're alive—alive." She closed her eyes and opened them to be sure that blinking would not erase her joy. "Oh, Singer—I was so afraid. I thought my legs would be as..."

"Yours are better far than mine this morning," he said.

His hands and feet were barely recognizable. She who had cried for her own legs was overcome by real concern for his.

"You healed mine!" she said. "Heal your own. Please, Singer, make them well."

"They are well. There is no pain now."

"But they are scarred and wounded. How can they be well?"

"Earthmaker leaves the scars, for they preserve the memory of pain. He will leave my hands this way so men will not forget what it can cost to be a singer in a theater of hate."

"But the word... the word they wrote upon your face is gone."

The Singer reached up to his forehead where the searing iron had left the accusation of the council. The word was gone indeed.

"It is," he said, "because Earthmaker cannot bear a lie. He could not let me wear the word for He is Truth. He knows no contradiction in himself. So learn this, my little friend, no man may burn a label into flesh and make it stay when heaven disagrees."

"But did the Father-Spirit agree with all the other things they did to your hands and feet?"

"He wished they had not done it... But, yes... he did agree that without these wounds Terra could not know how much he loved her. You will find, my child, that love rarely ever reaches out to save except it does it with a broken hand."

She seemed to understand, and because he loved her childish eyes so much he made her ready for the future.

"Do you love me, child?" he asked. "With all my heart," she answered.

"And would you give me anything I asked of you?" he said.

"Anything!" she answered.

"It may be hard to give me all I ask. Not long ago, in the name of love, I gave you legs. Yesterday that very love demanded mine. But the Song is all that matters. It may be you will have to sing it where the crowd will shout you down and demand your legs or life. But it would be far better to give them both than to surrender up the music in your soul. Some will hate you for the song you love. They will seek to stop your singing. But no matter how they treat you, remember that I suffered everything before you. And if they should brand you with a name across your face..."

"It cannot stay, if heaven disagrees," she finished up his statement.

He had stretched her small philosophy.

But he knew that she was growing in her understanding of the Song.

"Let us stop our talking and say that for right now it is enough to be a little girl with two good legs and to know the sun is shining. Let's go out into the fields together. Are you afraid to hold my wounded hand?" he asked. "It is so ugly."

"It is so beautiful," she disagreed. He held out his gentle hand. She placed her little hand in his and was surprised to find that when his hand had closed around her own he had a healthy grip. "Your hand is firm and strong. God did not leave it broken long," she said.

"He never does," he answered.

Hand in hand they walked. The sunlight brought the brightest day the world had ever known. She held his hand as if to never let him go. She skipped at the base of her shadow and danced the way she had the very day they met.

"I'm sorry I had doubts about my legs," she said, then asked, "Where are we going?"

"To a man who has some doubts about his mind."

XXIV

**(Every constellation is but a
gathering of distant suns. It is
mere perspective that makes
Betelgeuse a star. Seen close
enough she is a raging fire.
A sphere of flaming hydrogen, if it
be nearer, will dominate the sky
and blot out all the lesser lights.
And such a fire will say again,
"Earthmaker has a living Son.")**

The sunlight came much later to the wall than it did to city streets. Two women hurried through the purple and the silver light of dawn toward the grove where they knew the sentinels had led the Madman. The trees in darkness were menacing and thick. They kept upon the path until the dark and ancient wall towered over them.

"How can we find him in this gloom?" the younger woman asked.

Before the question could be answered, they heard the clanking of his chains. The terrifying sound made them fear him all the more.

"Madman ... please... we are your friends... I am the Singer's mother. .. I saw you try to save him at the trial..." Her words fell out in unconnected phrases.

When their eyes had grown accustomed to the light, they found him crumpled like a titan child against the wall. No more a threat.

"Go away," he said, moving very little.

"Please, Madman... we are your friends. I really am the mother of the man you would have saved."

The other woman said nothing as the two of them continued. The Madman said in his despair, "No one could save him... the World Hater won. He spent the night in laughter at the gallows."

"I loved my son," the mother said, "and I must thank you for loving him as I."

"Yes, I loved him. For one brief day, my mind was well... so short a time. I knew meaning and reason. But now he's dead."

"And I with him," she said.

"Today the Hater will be back," the Madman said, "with his absurd pipe. He will play and play until he leaves me foaming in insanity again. I'll writhe and wallow to his joy and die in hopeless chains."

"We all have chains," at length the silent woman joined in. "I too may go back to chains I thought I'd left for good. When I try to sing the Ancient Star-Song the verses are disjointed and apart."

"I cannot tell how long my mind will stay when hate returns today," sighed the Madman.

The sunlight broke and came at once above the wall and ran in golden streams along the blackened stones. It set the grove aglow with bronze earth and green wax leaves. The gray was swallowed up in color and an oriole sang deep-throated joy.

The three sat in the instant morning that had baptized them with suddenness and left them studying the pathway through the grove. At the far end, they saw a little girl walking hand in hand with a tall man.

On a little knoll of ground just outside the grove, the stranger stopped and released the child and threw his arms into the air and wrapped a melody in sunlight and threw the triumph of the morning against the grove and wall.

"In the beginning was the song of love," he sang.

The two women were on their feet within the instant and running toward the thrilling song that came with day.

The Madman stood and strained against his chains. He could not move, although he threw his massive weight against the iron that held him from the Singer. The steel cut his wrists but did not break. Then at the zenith of his struggle he remembered all at once the principle of reason. He let back on the chains till they were slack.

"Once more, Lord," he called out through the trees. "Once more."

Again the Singer lifted up his bearded head and sang, "In the beginning was the song of love ..." And through the trees the Madman's strong sound voice sang back, "And here's the new redeeming melody, the only song that can set Terra free."

The chains unlocked themselves and fell away. The Madman left the dark and hurried into day.

Like autumn leaves triumph swirled upward into sky. The song came on forever.

And distant quasars hurrying in space marveled that the dull and joyless world had finally come of age.

Thus Terra joined the universe who knew the song so long before, when the parent stars themselves were tracked by wounded feet. And for a thousand years the music never ceased. It ricocheted through canyons and hung in promise over all of Terra's seas.

And those who know the Ancient Star-Song watch with singing for the sign of footprints in the galaxies through which the little planet rides in routine cycles of despair. But Joy seldom sleeps for long. And someday in a lonely moment mankind will shake an unfamiliar hand and find it wounded.

THE SINGER

a poetic narrative in the tradition of C. S. Lewis's Narnia Chronicles and J. R. R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy—is Calvin Miller's retelling of an age-old story whose significance is unmatched in human history. Those who wish to read it in its original form will find it in the Gospels of Matthew or Mark, Luke or John.

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The cover and illustrations are by Joe De-Velasco, a Chicago artist whose innovative work has appeared in many books and magazines.