

# An Eye for an Eye

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eyeno sat outside the ramshackle dwelling at midnight on her favourite stone. She was rereading her latest poem in the wash of silvery light from the sky-sickle which had once, aeons before, been Kaleva's moon.

The sloping sweep of the sickle dominated the clear southern sky. It arched low from horizon to horizon and beyond, quenching stars with its brilliance. Some people regarded that curve of light as a great ice-bridge in the sky under which the black river of death must pass. Others saw it as a bubbling mercurial via-duct down which mana spilled sparkingly from out of the cosmos. As if mana could be visible.

If she squinted her right eye she would espy the illusion of a giant world in almost full eclipse. The upper limb of such a world, at least. Seemingly a huge planet hung adjacent to Kaleva. Light spilled around its vast dark camber. Her own Kaleva could only be a little moon accompanying that colossal phantom globe. Eyeno would strain to discern faint partial shapes of oceans and continents on that wraith-world which no one else saw.

Her inward eye saw it, the eye hidden inside her head.

What did her other eye see? Her imitation eye, which occupied her left eye-socket? That false eye of Juttahat manufacture? Why, it saw nothing at all of which she was aware.

Sickle-light laid bare a rugged, tangled landscape of jutting cloven rocks and trees. Trees thrust from amongst great boulders. Trees sprouted up from cracks. Bygone winter storms or weight of snow had tumbled many such trees from their precarious nooks. Some were locked together in

death. Others flourished at a slant. Thousands more stood to attention downslope for as far as any eye could see.

Sickle-light shone on the raggy thatch and shingles of nearby cotts and barns. Mocky-houses, with mocky-people in them. This settlement, Outo, comprised a hundred such homes.

The sickle-light also gleamed on the pages in Eyeno's hands. The words thus illuminated were large enough and bold enough to read by night, the letters rotundly formed like necklaces of moons.

Eyeno thought she understood eclipses and moons well enough, even though she had never seen the disc of a moon or an eclipse gnawing it. The notion of an actual moon fascinated her: a neighbour world, a twin in the sky such as the original home of humankind had possessed.

Her latest poem was about a moon. She had called the poem "Otherwhys"; and now she read it over to herself once again by sickle-light, wondering whether it was suitable to recite at the gala.

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She had all the words in her memory, but actually reading those aloud in this silvery light - this offspring of ancient moonlight - might reveal faults. Her poem should be perfect. If brother Juke was going to proclaim at Speakers' Valley this year, why so was she in her own silkier way: the way not of power-words which could impose one's will, but of poetry which might enchant the soul.

*"Why does Sun?" she read aloud slowly.*

*"Why, Moon?"*

*"Ah, those are two different whys.*

*"One why is of gaseous fire*

*"— Trembling meniscus*

*"On gravity's deep pool.*

*"The other why, of that harem-captive*

*"Marble odalisque*

*"—Body of passive stone*

*"So cold while Sun's gaze*

*"Is turned away, yet*

*"Agonizedly incandescent*

*"If caressed.*

*“Worlds are only moons of a Sun;  
“Yet the lover, the empress,  
“Visits her World daily  
“Not fortnightly  
“In rotation.*

*“Sun’s touch warms World,  
“Does not scald.  
“Hence that jealousy  
“Of Moon towards World,  
“Envy that steals the breath  
“Away, crusting acne  
“On Moon’s skin.*

*“Moon would throw stones at World,  
“Flail World with the hair  
“Of comets...”*

Would connoisseurs of words understand? Only immigrants from Earth had ever seen a real moon. (You couldn’t count Ukko up in orbit; it looked no larger than a lamp rushing by in the distance.) That glowing band of rocks and stones and dust was all that most people knew about a moon. Its debris. How did Kaleva’s one-time moon become debris? Long ago, it spiralled too close and was torn apart. She at least knew that. But then, she had been able to read a book.

*“Why else,” Eyeno read on, “does Moon conspire  
“To seed nightmares?  
“For Moon is vexed  
“If Sun is peering elsewhere  
“— Staring avidly out  
“At those others  
“Whom Sun truly adores:  
“Sun’s flame-sisters  
“Stars lost so far away  
“Except to a gaze  
“Always centuries  
“Out of date.*

*“Why is the sigh  
“Of the sea-tide seduced*

*"By bitter Moon..?"*

And on Kaleva there were no such tides as on Earth. Once, there would have been tides. Seas would have surged. The largest lakes might have lapped and slurped. But then Kaleva's moon shattered and spread out in a ring around the world's waist, further out from that waist than twice the world's width. In her room under the raggy reed-thatched eaves Eyeno treasured half a dozen volumes which were tatty with thumbing, their pages breaking loose. She owned three giant compendiums of verse. She owned a dictionary. And the *Book of the Land of Heroes* - which she used for fortune telling. There was also an ancient volume about stars and moons and worlds.

*"One day," she resumed, "Moon will plunge  
"Into warm World,  
"Shattering herself  
"In a rupturous and "Forced embrace.*

*"What shall issue  
"From this genocidal union?  
"Eventually, some aeons afterwards?  
"Perhaps a new race  
"Of tortoise-roaches,  
"Of armoured ants  
"— Or of sapient spiders  
"That dream  
"And ask why.*

*"Yet one why will be missing  
"From their understanding  
"— Being sunk in the bowl  
"Of a new ocean  
"Around which the breasts  
"Of lunar mountains rear."*

And that was it.

Her fat book about worlds contained pictures of tor-toises and ants and spiders and roaches. Instead of spiders should she refer to hammockis, spinners of nets which could coat a field with dewy floss of a spring morning...? Ach, her poem was about a different world than this one. It was about an Earth and a moon of almost and never, an invisible world within the embrace of the sky-sickle.

Perhaps a new race...

... of mutant things. Muties. Mocky-folk.

Who all slumbered just now, this midnight, except for herself.

The Lord of Saari tolerated mocky-folk in this wilderness, and of course taxed them as the measure of his tolerance. Lord Johann Helenius took tithes from their economy of goats. The mocky-folk paid him with animals and cheeses and kid gloves. Since ear-liest adolescence Juke and Eyeno had helped drive the tribute and other saleable beasts and produce all the long way from Outo and neighbouring Halvek to Niemi or Threelakes or Saari itself. Juke and his sister were presentable mocky-folk. Juke was completely so. Eyeno had become so to all appearances now that she wore a plausible false eye.

*Where was her brother, this midnight?* Sleeping in his cloak on some lake shore? In a bed in a hostelry? If only her inward eye would show him to her. Yet what the eye inside of her skull almost always saw, all be it hazily, was vistas of lacy trees, lush meadows, bubbling streams, creamy waxen flowers, gauzily-clad young maidens laughing and skipping and dancing.

Could it be that inside her head she was spying upon blissful pastures of death where echo-souls sported for as long as their bones endured in the soil? What her inward eye perceived was a beauty so poignant that she must needs prevent most of it from spilling into verse, or else her lines would be too sweet by far, cloying and winsome. Fortunately for her poems, the terrain around Outo was severe and rugged - goat-land. And her mocky-folk kin were grotesque.

Except for her brother, of course. Except for Juke who craved power through words, and honour. Whom she loved; whom she feared for.

Eyeno gazed at the sky-sickle a while longer, then went yawning into the ramshackle cott to climb creaky stairs as quietly as she could.

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That night once more she dreamt the memory-dreams of how she had gained her false eye. It was as if, while she slept, that imitation eyeball of Juttahat manufacture was peering within her, obsessively rummaging through the same set of recollections associated with its own origin. Eyeno

did sometimes wonder whether this bauble of the Serpents possessed some ulterior (or more properly, interior) purpose aside from its role as a skillfully matched and comfy filler for her empty socket. Serpents were such unpredictable creatures; though they did grant favours. Maybe Eyno's mild worry on this score was what prompted her dreams to search for some hidden motive which might well not exist at all.

Her memory-dreams usually followed the sequence of actual events faithfully for a while, then spun permutations. Well, dreams usually sprouted legs and ran off willfully in their own chosen direction. She dreamed the dreams perhaps once a week. As the dreamer she remained aware - though in an uncritical fashion - of discrepancies between what had actually happened, and the dream variations.

What a quest hers had been, for the imitation eye.

A true quest - even if it had involved no brawling or desperate expedients. Her quest; her own. No wonder she dreamed of it, the unmind of slumber fertiley embellishing what her waking mind had experienced, the imagination of sleep concocting event-poems.

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Eyno had been born to Arto and Ester Nurmi almost as wonderfully well-formed as her brother Juke, who had been born a year earlier. The baby girl's left eye was missing, that was all.

Glove-maker Arto possessed six slim functional fingers on each hand. His legs were short and bowed. His ears were as long and pointy as a goat's, with hearing which was preternaturally acute. Each creak and groan of the cott, every sigh of wind through a crack, was a familiar spirit to Arto. That was why he could never endure the thought of any improvement or genuine repair. His home was growing older along with him. When he finally succumbed, so might the house likewise, to a storm. Until then it would hold out.

In this regard Arto resembled the other mocky-folk who lived in Outo. For a swathe of reasons they all neglected their dwellings.

"Look poor; pay less tax."

"This cott's no more warped than me."

"You want to look like some Prince of Outo lording it in your palace?"

“We knows our place; an’ our place knows us.”

“Keeps the Jutties away.”

“Saarifolk would get riled if they didn’t feel *vastly* grander than us.”

When Eyeno first saw smart tiled houses at Niemi she could hardly believe her eye and thought fanci-fully that those might be dwellings where the maidens of her inward vision lived.

Her plump hirsute mother Ester had the eyes of a goat, with rectangular pupils. Ester’s sense of smell was as well-endowed as Arto was in the acoustic department. Eyeno’s mother wouldn’t sweep or scrub a familiar odour out of the cott. On that score she saw eye to eye - rectangular pupil to rounded pupil - with Arto. The cott was her den.

Shortly after Eyeno’s birth the crookbacked wisewoman from Halvek examined the baby girl. She diagnosed that the missing eye was inside the baby’s head, within her brain. The lurking eye ought to be reminded of its absence from the usual place. It shouldn’t be left in the dark but be encouraged. Or else it might harden. It might turn to stone and give the girl megrims.

Hence the choice of name for the baby. Eyeno. Naturally such a name caused the growing girl to be preoccupied by that hollow in her cranium in a way which otherwise mightn’t have occurred to quite the same degree. Surrounded in Outo by many varied dis-tortions of the human form, in what way was her deformity unique? Ester seemed almost comforted by her daughter’s absent orb. *Two* perfect offspring could have amounted to impudence. Eyeno’s flaw, emphasized by her name, redeemed the Nurmi family.

So Juke and Eyeno grew up, and played hide and seek among the mazes of boulders, and they herded goats. Ester made cheeses of subtle delicacy

which

were powerfully pungent to her. Arto nimbly sewed soft gloves of four fingers and a thumb apiece for ladies of the court at Saari a hundred keys distant and more. Eyeno began to glimpse dancing damsels with her inward eye. Juke began to proclaim - at recalcit-rant goats to begin with. His powerful words quic-kened beauty-words in his sister, words inspired by phantom meadows and by the sky-sickle.

One day squash-headed, bulgy-eyed Ami (who could only hear voices and no other noises) told Eyeno he suspected she was a poetess. The mocky-man brought from his cott a brass box containing a stained leather-bound *Book of the Land of Heroes* and began to teach her to read the runes, to figure out the letters. Ami had learned to write to help his brother Kuro who could hear the bleats of goats and the whis-tle of the wind but no human speech at all. Kuro was thin-headed, sunken-eyed, web-fingered. Ami would chalk any important communication on a slate for Kuro. Kuro would lay a webbed palm on the slate and thanks be to mana absorb the import. Kuro never framed a syllable with his lips yet he would guide Ami's hand to inscribe a reply.

Together Ami and Kuro guided Eyeno to read and write.

Presently Pieman, whose skin resembled crusty pastry all over, returned from a goat-droving trip to Saari with a bundle of yellowed old paper, and pencils too. In Saari he'd been laughed at for such purch-ases. Just the sort of thing a mutie would need! Maybe he was going to make a paper bag to cover himself?

Pieman was thick-skinned, but the mockery he'd endured led soon enough to Juke, now 14 - and his 13-year-old sister - becoming the front-people for the communities of Outo and Halvek in their relations with the wider realm of Saari. Fellow mockymen would accompany Juke and Eyeno and the goats and the gloves and the cheeses for most of a journey. Then the mocky-men would bivouac out of sight. The two Nurmi siblings would proceed onward into towns. No normal folk stared askance at Juke or made jinx signs. No kids threw fish heads. And Juke could direct a herd of goats ably with his words.

As for Eyeno, she was growing long-limbed without gawkiness. Juke's hair was fawn and greasy, but hers was silky and yellow. Her single eye was a less vivid blue than his two eyes - which caused less of a shock that there was only one on view. Her skin was creamy, with a few milk-chocolate moles on her cheeks and neck - those seemed adornments rather than blem-ishes. Her features were dainty though determined, almost



provocative in their poise. The lack of a left eye, the limp-lidded hollow of the socket, was unsettling rather than nauseating. It served her as a protection. A stranger's gaze would slide off her rather than him ogling her.

Goat-drovings infected Juke with a taste for wan-dering and a growing vexation at the lack of respect for mocky-men. He certainly counted himself as a mocky-man. Arto and Ester had raised their two chil-dren devotedly. Often their son or daughter found a lucky almond hidden in their rice pudding. No, he would not desert the community.

Eyeno began to yearn for a false eye at the same time as she composed her first real poems, a cycle of bit-tersweet lyrics on the theme of eyes themselves. As was often the way with words, these poems impelled her to consider completing her visage by filling that hollow orbit with a suitable and attractive *globe*. (From a crypt below the mana-kirk in Threelakes she had liberated an ancient dust-covered volume on worlds and suns and moons, globes all of them - just as eyes were globes.)

This ambition in no way marked a desire to alienate herself from her mocky kin, and mother and father, or a wish to pass as a pure person (though this had its uses to the community) but rather a commitment to the idea that her own peculiar poetic perception - her illuminatory perception - deserved some proudly-worn token, worn where nature had already set a frame, allowing Eyeno herself to choose the trinket.

Meanwhile the one-eyed girl also told fortunes, not only in Outo and Halvek, but when droving took her further, in Niemi and Threelakes and Saari. An inquirer must, with their fingertip, chose five random words from that *Book of the Land of Heroes* which Ami had given her. Eyeno would invite a short poem to compose itself. Fortunes were poems by another name. Poems were fortunes, though in an allusive way quite unlike the proclaiming which Juke was striving to master.

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In the first memory-dream Eyeno at the age of 16 was visiting a glassmaker in Niemi. Niemi was southernmost of the three principal towns in the straggling domain of Saari. It was certainly poorer than either Threelakes or Saari itself, though Eyeno hadn't thought so initially. Compared with the village of Outo, Niemi appeared sumptuous.

White-painted wooden houses with tiled roofs - the paintwork not peeling too scabbily. Gravelled streets. A few fountains which might yet spout again. Shops and a market, a public hall and a mana-kirk. The town

occupied an upthrust of land which lined the northern flank of Lake Lasinen with modest cliffs. A promontory housed a tumbledown keep. Zig-zag-ging flights of steps, a snaking roadway, and a rusty funicular railway (which always seemed out of action) linked the town proper with a long sandy lakeside strip of boatsheds, fishermen's shanties, and sauna huts. The serene lake, often as smooth as a mirror, was landlocked though there was desultory talk of a ten-key-long canal to link it to the artery of the Murame river, thus with Threelakes and Saari.

This glassmaker was a sweaty balding tub of a man. His surviving slicked hairs seemed likely to float away soon enough from his scalp. He was also a genial fellow, otherwise his products might have fractured. He was happy to turn his hand to Eyeno's commis-sion. He too had a daughter who was quite a beauty. The glassmaker could sympathize with what he pre-sumed was Eyeno's motive for wanting a false eye.

"My little hen'll find herself a fine nest," he boasted, there in his workshop amongst barrels of sand and potash and soda, furnace and moulds and marvering slab.

"No less than the Dame of Niemi's own son has kissed my hen at a dance, quite ruffling her feathers," he bragged. "He's a handsome lad, that Minkie Kennan. Has quite a way with him. The Kennans have fallen on hard times, 'tis true, what with Minkie's dad making himself so many enemies as he had to run away for years - then Ragnar Kennan got himself killed anyway. Their keep's a bit of a ramshackle. But I say as a keep's a keep, and it's breeding that counts, don't you think?"

Eyeno emphatically didn't think so, except in the negative sense that mocky-men counted for very little indeed. However, she understood discretion.

"The Dame's a tough bird, so we'll all see better times when young Minkie gets in his stride. We'll have our canal at last."

Did Eyeno know what a paperweight was?

She did not.

The glassmaker, Mr Ruokokoski, hastened to fetch a hemisphere of glass from a cupboard. The bulging little dome filled Eyeno's palm, weighing heavy. Deep inside, hundreds of tiny bright flowers gleamed. It was the loveliest creation she had ever seen - a lyric in glass, enduring, immortal, the souls of all those flowers perfectly preserved. The fat sweaty

man deserved a poem for showing her this. But what flow-ers were those?

“Ach no, those are slices from rods of coloured glass,” explained Mr Ruokokoski. “You gather molten glass from pots of different colours. You roll, you marver, you do that all over again, right? You mould your layered glass into a star shape, you pull the star out into a rod, let it cool, and cut. You arrange your pattern in a pan the size of the paperweight, pour clear glass, knock the pan off, reheat and shape; gather another clear layer then reshape with a wooden pad-dle, right?”

Right; and if he told her half a dozen times more the process might become perfectly clear:

*The marver man, she thought,  
Paddles in a lake of molten glass,  
And fishes out rainbow flowers.*

Such “paperweights,” he said, had once been used by people who could read to stop breezes blowing their pieces of paper around. Using just such a technique of paperweight-making he could embed a black pupil within a blue iris within an eye-socket-size paper-weight.

“Couldn’t I have a flower inside, instead?” Eyno asked him. “A single, lovely flower? A daisy?”

“You’d look odd.”

But I am odd, she thought.

As to the price, how about a fortune for his daugh-ter?

“No, not in money!” Mr Ruokokoski laughed. “A fortune in words.”

She was the fortune-telling goatherd, wasn’t she? He wanted the fortune told to him privately, not to his pretty little hen.

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Eyno and Juke were staying in a decrepit hostel which outranked their own home in Outo by several rungs. What a surprise it would be for her brother to see her with an eternal glass daisy in her right eye, a corolla of white petals for an iris around a golden pupil. Next noon, she hurried back to the glassmaker’s, clutching her box containing the *Book of the Land of Heroes*.

The paperweight eye was ready. It perched upon a china eggcup, tilted so that the daisy eye looked at her when she first entered the hot workshop.

“The actual glass flower’s quite small,” explained Mr Ruokokoski proudly. “Magnification swells it.”

With thumb and forefinger she prised her sunken eyelids apart. He inserted the paperweight for her. How solid and how enormous the glass eye felt. Released, her lids clasped it.

He held up a mirror.

Beautiful, yes. A poem of a pupil, and iris. The majority of the eyeball was clear glass so that a flower seemed to float in that small cave in her head. Did it matter that the effect might be disconcerting? People wore tattoos, did they not? A poem ought to disconcert a little, otherwise it was banal.

Time to settle accounts. Mr Ruokokoski summoned his daughter from the house behind the workshop.

Ellen Ruokokoski proved to be a whimsical wisp of a teenager of undoubted fragile beauty. Large-eyed, her flaxen hair in pigtails, Ellen looked as though she habitually starved herself in case she put on lard like her father. A necklace of lovely glass beads complimented a loose, low-cut cream frock. She glanced once, twice, then a haunted third time at Eyeno’s daisy eye.

Eyeno placed the leather volume on the iron marvering slab where glass was rolled. At Eyeno’s bidding Ruokokoski’s daughter opened the book at random, and dipped her finger on to a different page, five times. Silently Eyeno read the words that the girl’s fingernail touched. As each word entered Eyeno’s imagination that word leapt to join its companions in a dance within her mind, a dance which summoned other words to join it willy-nilly.

In spite of Ellen’s protests her father dismissed her.

“What’s my little hen’s fortune?” he asked when Ellen had gone.

The verse spun in Eyeno’s mind. She already heard it clearly in her head. Sometimes a fortune-poem took her quite by surprise. She didn’t

know what it would be till she uttered it. On this occasion she knew; and what she overheard disconcerted her. If only the verse had organized itself differently! Alas, it hadn't. Such was the way with fortune-verses. There was mana in words taken from that book.

"Sometimes," she warned, "words use a person - rather than a person using words. This verse has put itself together of its own accord. Do you understand that?"

"I'm all ears."

So she recited, stressing those words taken from the book:

"*Simpering* daughter, dancing, *kissing*,  
"Father finding daughter missing,  
"Comes the *rascal* from the *tower*, "  
"*Thinking* only to deflower."

Mr Ruokokoski was very much taken aback.

"You're jealous of my little hen's prospects, that's the nub of it!" The fat man fulminated. "Deflower, deflower indeed? Decent girl like Ellen. I've a mind to deflower you!"

Not sexually. No, simply by demanding the return of the glass eye. The glassmaker held out his hand. He glared. He accused her of false pretences. Of abusing his kindness. Mischief-making mutie, that's what. He would summon the watch.

Her lower lid drooped and tears leaked. When she squeezed out the eye, Ruokokoski placed his creation on the marvering slab. With a heavy hammer he hit the bauble, shattering it into pieces, liberating the daisy which was suddenly so much smaller. Bye-bye, eye.

And this event was true...

In her dream she fled from his workshop without surrendering the paperweight. Guided by her false eye she chased a trail of daisies through the town. Larger, creamy blooms appeared ahead of her then disappeared once she reached them. More flowers materialized ahead. Those promised that she must soon arrive at a meadow where maidens could dance without fear of assault or mischief.

Instead she came to a halt on the clifftop overlook-ing the calm mirror

of Lake Lasinen. The dream-cliffs were so tall, far higher than Niemi's real bluffs. This cliff she stood atop was a plunging precipice. The lake was so far below. Nor did any beach exist with cabins and shanties and boat sheds. Rock dived directly into water. Underwater, there spread a meadow dotted with a million daisies.

Eyeno pitched herself forward, cartwheeling down. Poems took wing as she fell, a stream of white birds with black words written on them, deserting her.

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In her second dream she was at Threelakes. The cloverleaf lobes of the triple lake reflected a sky of blue porcelain. A fine purple tammywood bridge straddled the narrow neck of the southern lobe. This bridge joined the older stone town with the newer wooden town, which housed a fair number of settlers who had been born on Earth. Some of those settlers could still speak tongues other than Kalevan. Occasional flurries of exotic words at first intrigued then disappointed Eyeno - there seemed to be no mana in such babble.

Some mocky-folk of Halvek had been panning gold from a river in the wilderness, so they entrusted Juke and Eyeno with the task of turning the accumulated grains and morsels into coin on their next droving trip. The brother and sister were less likely to be cheated, less likely to stir up resentment that outcasts had access to a little wealth. In spite of the derelict appearance of settlements such as Halvek and Outo, mocky-folk weren't out-and-out paupers. This fact wasn't to be advertised.

Thus Juke and Eyeno exchanged a fat leather pouch of grits and bits for a passably plump purse of silver marks at Missieur Pierre's establishment in the Street of Crafts.

He was a jeweller by trade, a dehydrated spidery fellow with long bony fingers and a long thin nose on which magnifying spectacles rested. His whole physiology seemed to plead straitened circum-stances, despite the evidence of trays of glinting rings and brooches.

His premises were of stone, with stout shutters for the windows. By day a wary if quiet Spitz hound lay chained to a kennel in an adjacent yard.

How he haggled over the gold. Business was dire, even if he did travel by appointment to the court at Saari with his trays of gems. Frivolous ladies craved jewels to wear, but sensible ones favoured paste.

Sometimes frivolous customers likewise preferred paste since then a jewel could be more ostentatious.

Paste? What was paste? Why, paste jewels were false ones made of glass backed with quicksilver and coloured with metallic oxides. A lot of lead oxide in the glass increased the lustre, so said Missieur Pierre.

Did Missieur Pierre produce this paste himself? No, he bought it all to cut and polish from a verrier in Niemi. A glassmaker.

“Would that be from Mr Ruokokoski?” asked Eyeno. It was a full year since she had watched the peeved glassmaker shatter her paperweight.

So she knew Ruokokoski? Shame about his daughter - not that Missieur Pierre was one to gossip. A visitor (by appointment) to court should be discreet. Still, Ruokokoski wasn't exactly highborn, and now his little poulet never would be noble. In Missieur Pierre's original lingo *chicken* also, aha, meant *love-letter* - not that this charming young one-eyed lady currently visiting his premises would likely know what a love-letter was.

On his sister's behalf Juke flushed at this slur. Temper smouldered in her brother. Anger threatened to flare until the jeweller clarified his meaning: that people generally didn't send *amatory epistles* to each other since they could neither write 'em nor read 'em. Back on Earth - at least when he'd quit that festering, overcrowded world - thinking machines half the size of your palm did most of the reading to people who cared to be read to. If this brother and his sister cared a hoot about the old homeworld.

But Eyeno could indeed read.

And what was this about Ruokokoski's little hen?

The little hen had hatched an egg, if they took Missieur Pierre's meaning. The cock who took advantage of the hen was reportedly none other than the Dame of Niemi's son, Minkie Kennon, just 16 years old and handsome as hell but certainly not intending to be a husband too soon. Nor would his strong-minded mother want her family's honour scratched by alliance with a glassmaker's daughter...

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Later, Eyeno returned on her own to Missieur Pierre's to negotiate for a bright eye made out of paste. A savoury smell wafted downstairs from his apartment.

“It wasn’t by any chance you,” he asked, “who cursed Ruokokoski? He mentioned a one-eyed mutie girl.”

“Cursed? I did no such thing!” protested Eyeno.

“I thought all muties were fearful freaks. You, on the other hand...”  
The dry, spidery jeweller inclined his head gallantly.

“I thought Mr Ruokokoski was affable - at least until he lost his temper after he heard his Ellen’s for-tune.”

“Her pregnancy soured him.”

“And *he* couldn’t be to blame for stupid negligence. So he blames me instead. I see.”

“Whereas you were actually warning him?”

“I was saying the words that came into my head.”

Eyeno had predicted Ruokokoski’s misfortune quite comprehensibly if only the glassmaker could have accepted what he was hearing from her. Possibly - no guarantees, only likelihoods - she could perform a similar service for the jewellery trade. She wasn’t greedy; an eye made of paste would be fine. To carry a real gem in her eye socket could be a risky proceeding, not that any genuine gemstone would be likely to fill up that space.

But if a fine jewel were mounted frontally on a sphere of thin copper hoops? suggested Missieur Pierre. He scented a possible tour de force of crafts-manship.

No, no, she wanted a false jewel for a false eye; and one as big as an eyeball.

In exchange for a simple little piece of prophecy?

However, Missieur Pierre was definitely impressed by the words she had uttered to Ruokokoski. The jeweller would like his fortune told, as comforter or as caution.

Missieur Pierre brooded. “Business is bad. I have to feed the dog and me. And a woman. Do you see how lean I am? So do I really need my



fortune told? Better to have some of the marks back that I lavished on your gold dust.”

Eyeno sniffed the aroma of cookery appreciatively, so that he would be aware she knew otherwise about his finances.

“We had to pay all our community’s tithes to the Saari bailiff’s office, Mr Pierre,” she said. “Our marks are almost all gone.” This wasn’t quite true. There were also marks from goats and cheeses and gloves: some to be spent on necessities for the mocky-folk, some to be taken back and buried safely. “I can only afford one mark, and a fortune. A paste gem’s just glass, you said.”

“I still had to buy the glass from Ruokokoski in the first place. There’s the skill of shaping it. Wear and tear on tools.”

Surely it was a liver casserole which was wooing her nose?

“A fortune might prove invaluable, Mr Pierre.”

“You can’t guarantee it.” She could see he was hooked. “Two marks, and a fortune,” he proposed.

“When you’re getting a fortune, two marks on top is irrelevant.”

“One mark fifty pence, mam’sell.”

\* \* \* \*

And so, early on the morning of their departure from Threelakes, Eyeno presented herself at the jeweller’s. Missieur Pierre presented her with a large imitation gem three-quarters nestled in a protective satin sheath. Bright rays beaming through an unshuttered front window made a glossy pool of the glass-topped counter. Rings and brooches twink-LED like sunken treasure.

The exposed facets of the eye-gem sparkled blue and white and green, the predominant colour being a weak blue. Missieur Pierre held up a silver-framed mirror. Eyeno prised her lids apart and pressed the false eye into place.

One eyeball, perfectly curved. The other, faceted, without any pretence of a pupil or iris.

The effect was subtle and strange as if her left eye had crystallized. In spite of the satin a sense of intrusive bulk discomfited her. Bizarrely she thought of some faceless man pressing his swollen organ some day into the cleft between her legs, invading a different portal of her body intrusively. Bulkily. But beautifully? Small chance of that. She was sure she would never lie with any of the mocky-imals of Halvek or Outo, fine fellows though those might be. As for men from other communities... how would they treat a daughter of the mocky-folk? No, she was wedded to word. To her vision of maidens in a meadow. Might one of those dancing maids be a lover to her, perhaps? Unintrusively? Delicately? The idea thrilled her. The vision of someone very like herself, a twin, embracing her gently and caressing her, beckoned to her as those maidens habitually beckoned. Someone without a rude invasive lump of meat jutting from their loins. Someone unlike a randy billy goat.

She closed her eyes - she tried to shut both - yet she sensed that her lids hadn't come together all the way across the hard gem. Her eye-lashes hadn't shaken hands.

Her inward eye seemed to respond to the complex prism lodged in her orbit. That visionary meadow fractured into a dozen repetitions of itself, spinning around. Gauzy-clad maidens rushed towards her and away. Towards - so that she reached out. Away - so that she gasped in distress.

A thin hand clutched her. Her eyes jerked open.

"Thought you were going to faint," said Missieur Pierre. "It shouldn't feel painful."

"What shouldn't...?"

The gemstone had been affecting her like the fungus drug the mocky-men occasionally used to escape into a confusing kaleidoscopic beauty. She had only once ever tried the drug. The experience had made her inner eye sore for headachey days on end.

"The satin pads it. It's glued tight to the satin —"

"I just felt dizzy, Mr Pierre." Yes, dizzy for the dam-sels...for their cordial soft embraces, for their wild and tender kisses.

\* \* \* \*

She had laid her *Book of the Land of Heroes* on the counter. The jeweller

had chosen his five words, which now cavorted in her head, sum-moning other words together willy-nilly. Eyeno spoke:

*“Flash of emerald and sapphire,  
“Eager fingers would acquire,  
“Fingers black and bodies velvet,  
“Pompous serpents send their pets.”*

“Do you mean,” exclaimed the jeweller, “that Jut-tahats will want to buy gems for the Velvet Isi? That the snakes want sparklers?”

“I don’t mean anything, Missieur Pierre. It’s the verse itself that means something.”

“Why, that’s wonderful news... except that Jut-tahats can’t come into town... There’d be riots. Surely they wouldn’t attack us in force here in Threelakes just to rob my shop! Should I take my wares to them? All the way north of Saari?”

“I don’t know, Mr Pierre.”

“Trade with the Isi? What an idea. I might become rich!”

Eyeno left the jeweller to his excited new dream. She herself felt dizzy as she retraced her steps along the Street of Crafts, clutching her book box to her. Passers-by glanced at the sparkle in her eye.

\* \* \* \*

What happened to you?” gasped Juke.

She hadn’t forewarned him.

Standing guard over several knap-sacks packed with purchases in the panelled lobby of the hostel, her brother seemed as hard and angular as the faces of the false gemstone at which he gawped, befuddled.

“I bought an eye from Missieur Pierre,” she said lightly. “I paid a mark and a half, and a fortune. Do you like it?”

“That’s... a gemstone? So big?”

“It’s just an imitation one.”

“I thought it was a growth from inside you! I thought your secret eye had forced its way out - cut its way out - and that’s what your secret eye really looks like. A blue crystal... Oh Eyeno, have you been yearn-ing for this for all these years?” His voice caught. “I’d have pulled out my own eye if it could have taken root in you.”

She hurried to embrace him. She laughed, even as a sob shook her. How chivalrous he was.

“Then you would only have had one eye, dear Juke.”

Her brother held her awkwardly. His fingers strayed towards her cheek, tracing a route towards her hard false peeper. His fingertips drew back.

“Touch it if you want to, Juke.”

“No, I might put some dirt on it...”

His fingers were sweaty. He pulled away.

They had several knapsacks to shoulder.

\* \* \* \*

One of the mocky-men with whom they rendezvoused in the forest was Pieman. Eyeno’s dream had loaded the boughs of kasta trees with jewels instead of nuts. The crusty-skinned fellow stared askance at her new eye as the waiting trio heard how she had come by it.

“That’s meant to be an aquamarine,” declared Pieman. “I’ve been to Saari where fine ladies like their baubles. I know! Miners can dig up huge crystals just like it. They don’t cost too much at all. So why imitate one in glass? I’m thinking that’s a real one he’s given you -”

“Unlikely!”

Juke glanced at his sister suspiciously, and she flushed. Surely he didn’t imagine for a moment that she had pleased that scrawny jeweller in such a way that he would give her a genuine gem!

“You don’t know what you’re blethering about,” Knotty told Pieman. Knotty’s skin looked as though it was made out of brown rope and string in

which a thousand tangles had been tied, and he wore a tunic of hessian to match.

“I do too! I’ve talked to miners.”

“It’s paste,” insisted Eyeno. “It’s just glass with metals added to colour it.”

“Maybe it was a shot at making glass look like emerald. But the wrong metals got mixed in, or not enough of ‘em. Emerald’s a cousin of aquamarine. I’m thinking your jeweller’s passed off a botch. Nobody would want a fake aquamarine.”

Juke caught Pieman by the collar. “Don’t say that! It’s what my sister wanted.”

“Easy, easy,” intervened Lammas. He only wore shorts and sandals since his body was coated in tufty grey wool a finger’s span thick. Wool sprouted from his scalp. “Aren’t you the know-all, Pie-face? Let’s not spoil the girl’s pleasure.”

Her dream diverged. In the dream she plucked out the glass aquamarine. Clutching the paste gem in her

hand, Eyeno sprinted back into town, arriving there almost immediately. But the Street of Crafts had changed. In place of Missieur Pierre's there stood a money shop — a shop where you could buy coins with coins, which in her dream seemed to be a perfectly just and equitable arrangement. A mark for a mark; a penny for a penny. Consequently coins circulated quickly and the town prospered. This money shop was crowded with richly dressed people all brandish-ing coins. She swiftly found herself in the forefront, clad in a gown which was dingy and raggy. She was facing a brawny apron-clad shopkeeper. Behind his counter buckets and buckets of coins overflowed on to the floor. The man's moon-shaped face was the bronze of a penny, on which his features were merely engraved. His was a crescent mouth. Coin-eyes were miniatures of his whole face. Within those eyes, a tinier crescent mouth and tinier eyes. Would those tinier eyes also contain his whole face in minuscule?

“Mr Penny!” the eager shoppers clamoured. “Mr Penny!”

Eyeno thrust her glass jewel at Mr Penny. She was consumed with a desire to wear a bronze penny in her eye. She wanted a metal monocle of visible value squeezed between her lids. The other customers burst out laughing. They guffawed, they brayed. Mr Penny's crescent mouth cracked open in a grin. He quaked with merriment.

“Gold for glass!” he hooted.

No, she didn't need a golden orb with Lucky's head on it. A bronze penny would be fine. An ordinary penny minted in Saari, stamped with an anchor on front for security and an eye on the rear for prudence. An eye, to fit in her eye, why of course!

She had thought of this before. When she was younger she had several times privately pushed a penny into her empty socket. But unless she kept her head tilted right back the flat coin would never stay there. It would quickly fall out. You couldn't walk round staring straight up at the top of the sky. In her dream she forgot all about such silly contretemps. She flourished her paste gem which had cost a mark and a half and a fortune.

“Please, Mr Penny!”

The keeper of the money shop chortled. “Bronze for a botch, bronze for a bungle!”

“I coin words too,” she cried in appeal. “I'm a poetess.” She realized that her feet were bare. She was a pauper, in rags, with a cheap chunk of

cut glass in her hand.

The bronze-faced man leered at her. “Which word will you pay me,” he asked slyly, “which you can never ever use again? Will you pay me I” — he struck his chest — “or eye” — “and he pointed to one of the coins in his face — “or *love*, or true, or *twice*?”

Horror invaded her heart. She couldn't possibly hand over to him any word that would be lost to her forever. Fighting her way through the crowd, who plucked at her rags and stamped on her toes, she fled.

\* \* \* \*

In reality, the false aquamarine had begun to tar-nish after only a few months. Its initial brilliance faded, so maybe Pieman had been right after all.

Eyeno remembered the fortune with which she had paid Missieur Pierre: Fingers *black* and bodies velvet, Pompous *serpents*... Next year when they drove goats and took those gloves and cheeses as far as Saari, she would travel onward, east by north, into the territory of the Velvet Isi and their black Juttahats to ask the serpents for a false eye. She had tried to obtain one too easily, too frivolously. A daisy paperweight eye, an aquamarine eye... gewgaws! She would get herself an eye made by aliens. *That* would be a worthy one.