

# ACT II, Scene I

## **The People of Omelas**

*[The crusty study room of Hill Hall, Monday afternoon, HANSINI and HER THOUGHTS]*

HANSINI

"Often the young people go home in tears, or in a tearless rage, when they have seen the child and faced this terrible paradox. They may brood over it for weeks or years. But as time goes on they begin to realize that even if the child could be released, it would not get much good of its freedom...It has been afraid too long ever to be free of fear...Their tears at the bitter injustice dry when they begin to perceive the terrible justice of reality, and to accept it. Yet it is their tears and anger, the trying of their generosity and the acceptance of their helplessness, which are perhaps the true source of the splendor of their lives. There is no vapid, irresponsible happiness. They know that they, like the child, are not free. They know compassion. It is the existence of the child, and their knowledge of its existence, that makes possible the nobility of their architecture, the poignancy of their music, the profundity of their science. It is because of the child that they are so gentle with children. They know that if the wretched one were not there sniveling in the dark, the other one, the fluteplayer, could make no joyful music as the young riders line up in their beauty for the race in the sunlight of the first morning of summer."

Everything down to the paycheck sitting in someone's bank account and the simpler pleasures of life take something out of people- time, energy, the mental stability to want to get out of bed in the morning for your 8 AM class. Sacrifice and suffering are in the terms and services of happiness when it comes to being human, and this constant suffering for happiness is alluringly demonstrated by Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas," a

short story about a city letting a child experience great suffering for the sake of their own prosperity. This particular passage impacts the story by humanizing what is perceived to be the cruel inaction of the people of Omelas regarding the suffering of the child, making the audience relate and reflect on their own human experience of sacrifice for the greater good.

As the narrator of the story carries the reader through the dark secret of the city of Omelas, they dig deeper into the perspective of the people of Omelas, providing insight into their own complex feelings and impacting the larger text by creating a connection to the audience's own complex feelings and inner conflict. The story goes "the young people go home in tears or in a tearless rage when they have seen the child and faced this terrible paradox. They may brood over it for weeks or years," directly giving the audience a look into these emotions of anger and sadness that the people of Omelas experience, highlighting the fact that these people are not heartless creatures neglecting a child. They have complex emotions similar to the reader's own initial reaction and emotions about the burden of the child's suffering, creating a humane connection between the reader and the people of Omelas as humans in the real world also experience these conflicting emotions when it comes to having to sacrifice one good thing for something greater- everything down to something as simple as having to give up the comfort of staying in bed to go to class in the morning for quality education. Through this particular insight the passage provides, the reader's outlook on the entire text changes as they develop a deeper connection to the people of Omelas through empathy, shedding a light of humanity on them.

The narrator continues to build on this insight of how the people feel about the child's suffering, going on to convey that the people believe they're doing the child a favor because it's far too gone to know true happiness. The child undergoes extreme conditions of filth and suffering, but it's expressed that the people believe "even if the child could be released, it would not get much good of its freedom...Their tears at the bitter injustice dry when they begin to perceive the terrible justice of reality and to accept it," conveying that the people of Omelas truly believe they're doing a child a favor by keeping it confined to all it knows anymore- pain and suffering. Despite rousing a deeply conflicting viewpoint about letting the child suffer, this justification of the inaction of the people displays their compassion for the child. They genuinely believe the child is far too gone to know true happiness and the true pleasure of life, and this odd display of compassion prevents the reader from entirely viewing them as monsters in the larger text. The very idea of mercy through suffering is even reflected in the reader's own society through parallels of euthanizing beloved pets and even loved ones, and the moral conflict goes as far as administering the lethal injection- an arguably cruel act out of compassion for the betterment of society. The passage basically calls attention to the compassion of the people of Omelas, further humanizing them and making the reader understand and relate to this moral conflict they face in the larger text.

Upon establishing this sense of compassion through inaction in the people of Omelas, the narrator explains that the people of Omelas don't take the child's suffering for granted and the entire goodness of the city depends on the child, further justifying and emphasizing why the society is truly helpless in the face of the child's suffering. The story demonstrates that the child's suffering isn't fruitless by stating "It is the existence of the child and their knowledge of

its existence, that makes possible the nobility of their architecture, the poignancy of their music, the profundity of their science. It is because of the child that they are so gentle with children.”

This brings about the inarguable fact that the entire city’s beauty and goodness depend on the child’s suffering and the suffering is by no means taken for granted at all-they don’t let the child suffer for no reason. The child is there for their prosperity and they compassionately make sure to be grateful for the child’s suffering by staying a peaceful and loving society in turn. This further illustrates the larger theme of sacrifice for the greater good and the audience can reflect on this concept of suffering for the sake of happiness. Even in the reader’s world society has to exploit individuals and larger groups of people for prosperity in a capitalistic society and this deeper develops both the humanity of the people of Omelas and a deeper connection between the reader and Omelas in the larger text.

Through justifying and explaining the inaction of the people of the Omelas revolving around the suffering and pain the child is subjected to, the concept of the child’s suffering essentially reflects the greater idea in the reader’s own world where suffering is a condition of happiness and prosperity in both the individual and society. The people of Omelas are embodiments of our own society where exploitation and suffering are something even we permit for the greater good, and Ursula K. Le Guin masterfully draws moral parallels to the reader's society and reflects through this particular passage that the people of Omelas in the overall text are just as human as the audience.

*[She exits]*