

8 • Sighters Are Not Afraid

Croieeee! Croieeee! The horns from the Ranger watchtowers blasted their message. Croieeee! Croieeee! Someone was making Crossing.

Little Child had spent the days since his own Crossing learning the ways of Bright City. Soon he would choose to become an apprentice to a Master Teacher who would show him how to take his place in the Restoration. If only he knew exactly where he belonged. Was he a player, or a dancer, or a song-maker, or a craftsperson? Was he a trader, an artisan, a cabbie, or a crewmate? What was his special place?

Croieeee! Croieeee! the horns blared. “Crossing! Crossing!” workers around him cried.

Little Child hurried to the watchgate that faced the Garbage Dump. Since his own Crossing, he had loved being part of these welcomings. How well he remembered the heartening hurrahs that had greeted him from the walls of Bright City.

From the storage barrels beside the gates, he grabbed a colorful streamer bound around a slender pole. Tucking its handle into his belt, he scrambled hand over hand up one of the knotted hanging ropes, his feet pushing hard against the stonework and propelling him upward. At the top, standing on the wallwalk, he saw a large caravan of carts and wagons lumbering from the Garbage Dump. They were being pulled by great beasts of the forests. A troop of Rangers in working blues plodded beside the buck elks and deer stags, their stately heads of horns bowing and straining mightily

against leather halters and harnesses. From this distance, the cavalcade looked to Little Child like a moving line of greenery. The wooden vehicles were piled high with bushes and trees.

The boy wondered: How in Great Park did they avoid the pit-traps and bog-mires? How did they get all those heavy carts up the mountains of refuse? How many days had they been

traveling across the Garbage Dump? How had they avoided coming under the Enchanter’s power?

“L.C.!” a voice called from below. Hero was vaulting effortlessly up the rope ladder to the wallwalk. “Found you,” he grinned. Wrapping one strong arm around his brother’s shoulder, Hero said, “Ah, you see. Great Park comes to Bright City.”

“But how—but how—?” stammered the lad, still amazed.

“How did they get this loaded caravan across that most perilous path?” Hero threw back his head to laugh at Little Child’s obvious amazement.

“Folks always wonder. First of all, this is not a Crossing Alone. Those are the hardest. This is a Crossing Again—a very different journey, believe me. Second, everything is under Ranger Protection. There are a dozen to fifteen Rangers guarding this Great Park caravan. The forest beasts themselves are canny. They can sense danger. And thirdly, there—” He pointed with his finger. “That’s probably the biggest reason we can move earth and forest across the Dump.”

Little Child spotted a slim figure arched on the outside of a cart, vigorously retying a rope to secure a tree bending far over the side and dragging its limbs in the dirt. The figure deftly

“How did they
get this loaded
caravan across
that most
perilous path?”

kicked back, down and out of the way of the wheels. It brushed its hands, then shook out a wild shock of black hair, which glowed in the sun and could be seen even from the wallwalk.

"Amanda!" exclaimed Little Child. He began to unroll his brilliantly hued streamer.

"Yes, Amanda. Amanda scouts the paths. She knows which are shortest and which flat places are deceptions. The princess is not afraid of the Enchanter or his men, and he knows it."

Little Child was amazed. "She-she's not afraid of the Enchanter?" The streamer on the pole hung limp from his hand and curled on the wallwalk like a bright cloth puddle. Wasn't that dangerous? Wasn't that overconfidence?

Hero's eyes grew pensive. His smile faded, and he became serious. "No. She's not afraid. And I'm not afraid for her. Amanda is one of those rare workers who always sights the King." A slight twinkle flashed in his eyes. "Go ahead—ask her someday. I know what she'll tell you. She'll look at you with deadly seriousness and she'll announce: 'SIGHTERS ARE NOT AFRAID.' As though—as though everyone saw the King all the time in every place. But go ahead, ask her for yourself."

With that Hero turned, caught up the vaulting rope, angled himself backward over the stones and began easing himself down the side.

"Aren't you staying for welcoming?" Little Child called as he descended. The older brother paused, his feet braced against the wall and looked up. "Can't stay. Gotta make sure those sites are ready for all this greenstuff. Tell Amanda hello for me." And he was gone.

Strange, thought Little Child. It was not like his brother to

hurry off without a teasing word of greeting to his old friend. The boy looked over the wallwalk, and there she was. Amanda—striding with sure steps toward the watchgate, brushing dust and soot from her blue garments, stamping her boots on the path.

The other workers on the wallwalk were yelling, "Hurrah!" They waved their pennants. The Ranger horns blew their signal.

Little Child lifted his streamer up and above his head. It curled and unfurled in greeting, catching puffs of wind in its slender sail of color. "Amanda!" he called out, glad to see her.

"Amanda! Up here! Up here! It's me. L.C.!"

She searched the wall with her eyes, spotted his flying signal, then saw the boy. Her face was streaked with smoky smears, but her eyes flashed joy. "Hey, Babykeeper!" she called, teasing him with another nickname from Great Park days. "You're just the fella I want to see."

Carts bumped and jostled beside her, pushed and shoved by the Ranger vanguard into the city. Amanda ducked this way and that. In a great hubbub of bustle and business, workers unloaded the plants and bushes and trees, then unharnessed the great stags and bucks so they could water in the troughs and roll on the grass and graze in the soft

fields outside the city walls.

Amanda hoisted a set of harnesses to her shoulder and called out, "Meet you at the scrub-up," then disappeared beneath him through the watchgate.

He furled his streamer around the pole, clambered down and tucked the banner back in the barrel. When he spotted Amanda again, she was in the crowd of travelers washing at the fountain just inside the gate. Her face and arms and hands dripped from the refreshing scrub. She turned quickly, flicked

"No. She's not afraid. And I'm not afraid for her. Amanda is one of those rare workers who always sights the King."