



TRILOGY

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I

BUGIBBA QUAY

He had struggled so often, and yet fish are caught by a still, patient line. They swim away when the hook fails the sea and anger's shadow grows above. "Are there any fish at all?" the boy asked himself. He noticed the ripple on the sea's belly, and wondered if in some mischievous way, the waters had read his thoughts, and were laughing at him. He looked around him. Good. No one was around, and he spat an innocent shower at the sea. Gleefully, the elements mixed, and nothing but a white froth was left of his revenge. He smiled sullenly. The wind should have flung back the spit in his face, but there was no anger that evening, except his, and there were no fish either, except the one he had dreamt of the night before. It had



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been big, and rainbow coloured. How beautiful it had seemed, and what a joy it had given him. It had struggled and churned the water white, but like a hero of old, he had stood straight and taken it all silently, majestically. How well he had managed the line, bringing the fish to shore imperceptibly, inexorably. How well had he remembered all his grandfather's advice and warnings. It had come to the surface in a shiver of spray, so loathe to join him that even in his dream, he had felt a pang of dismay. Did that fish, a mirror of his glory, know more about the life beyond the quay than he knew? "Why, there are so many wild, exciting things up here," promised the boy, as he coaxed the fish on land, "my parents told me so." And in the dream the sky was red, the sea was blue, and the grass was green. But now, the sun had sunk without a hiss, and all around him the shadows greyed and blurred. His line hung limp from his magic rod, and it bore no splendour but the dying shrimp, a bait untouched.

He spat again, and the sea gurgled at his feet. "I'll come again," he answered, "I'll come back. There must be fish, I know. My parents told me so."

II WARDIJA HILL

The light came on around the island, closing in the darkness, emphasizing the limits of this little world of his. Here and there, among pools of blackness, a circle of lamps muttered their whispers in a language exotic and unknown. What were they saying? Were they too giving him away? Ray would have liked to hear, but there, on top of the hill, he felt immersed and distant all at once: he too was encapsulated in this dome, and, run as he might, as he had often tried, the white light always called him back to this little hill of his. Separate, distinct, he looked at the earthy sores where

people ate and spoke and loved. Now, at least, they were not sun-glazed as any sepulchre fit for kings. Ray liked them better now, as they faded indiscriminately into the soil, and breathed no hurts but sleep. How peaceful lay the valley! If only those white lights would go away, he thought; for their glare and their whispered hubbub reminded him of day, when he too would become a man. Dawn would imperceptibly steal his sensuous cloak of darkness, destroy his narcissistic dream, and envelop him anew in a busy world of words and sounds. How he hated words, for words said things and pierced his brain and challenged his being. Naked as he was, despoiled of all, he felt so vulnerable. Their gaze pierced his soul, for he knew they knew. He had no secrets from them. They would greet him and clothe him with friendliness. As an emerald sea they knew his every hidden bay. They bubbled around him, hemmed him in, and defined him Ray. He walked their streets, fed off their markets, rubbed their closeness on his way to work. How he sweated and trembled under this warmth of humanity! It frightened him, for they knew his wounds and they knew his name. All day long he smiled and struggled to keep off the multitude of words that tumbled on him. He was becoming good at the game now, and underneath his skin he had hidden instruments of darkness which protected him so well. The Knights would have been envious of him, he thought, as he shrugged off with hardly a sound the uproar around him. Very soon he would perfect his skill, and not even the church-tower bells, so strategically knelled, would find a chink in his armour. All around him the crowd pressed and waved and, struggled for breath, he jumped and gaped. "Good for you, Ray. Good for you!" – as he gulped in the last breeze which floated inland from across the sea.

Soon now, very soon, he would leave all this behind. Wounded,

tired, he would drag his burdened self to the foot of the hill and start the climb anew. He had paid his debt to the sun, he had lain on the warmistone and now, his hour had come. He embraced himself and looked, for there the white lights were calling again. Soon, they too would go off, and his revelry would begin.

III THE LULLABY

One night she came. "I have been watching you," she said, "and know that you are here. Your dark dark hair disturbs my thoughts, and your gaze speaks to my soul. Down there, in the valley, I play your game, and see you jostled by. All night long I crave for you. Will you not come?"

Ray did not hear, for the wind blew the song away, and the cloak was very dark that night, and even the lights were still. He had always been alone up here, and as he gazed below, he knew that even then, it was another game he played. "How tall I stand," he often thought. "How easily my eyes ravish the land and sea. My outstretched arms encompass the sky, and in this magic hour I am king." But, like a summer storm, wild desires flashed through the sinews to the bone, and he felt so solitaire.

He reached out.

His arms embraced a foreign land and he shuddered with delight. For here I can roam and breathe and live, and here I can also die. He had gazed at truth, and his heart felt full, and the image echoed his dreams.

The lights came on down there in the valley, and their glare seemed strong today. The silent creatures at the foot of the hill buried deeper, for they liked it not, and the night was cold. She dragged the cloak of darkness close around her, and asked if they would descend. But the wind was strong that night, and it blew the words away.