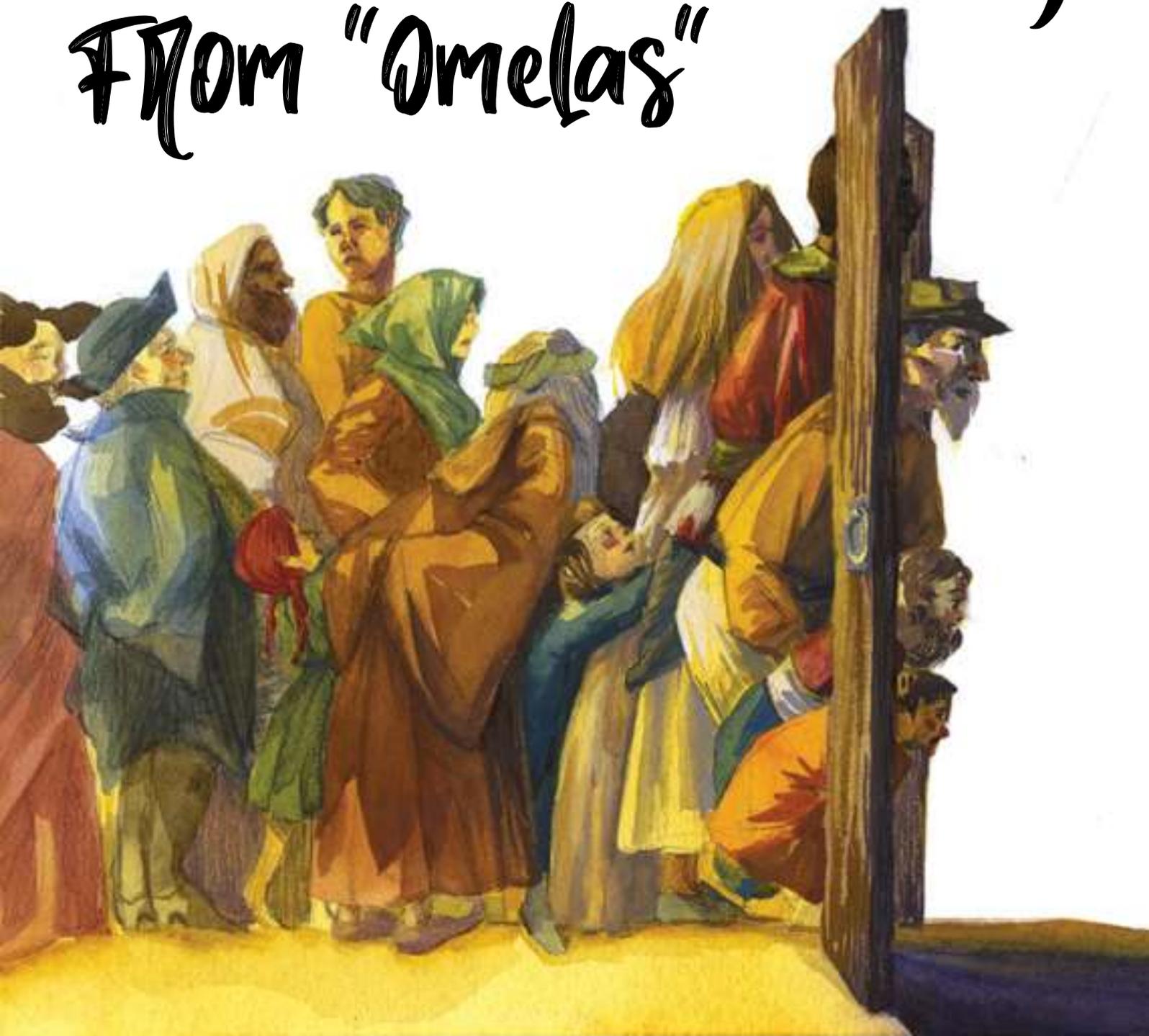


A Closer Look at

The one who walk away From "Omelas"



SPOILER ALERT

“The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” is an award-winning short fiction by the famous science fiction writer **Ursula Le Guin**. It is set in a utopian city named Omelas, where they sacrifice a child’s life to ensure their prosperity. The child must be kept in a cell, barely fed, never leaving the confines of the basement. But this “scapegoating” – the act of punishing an innocent person for the greater good – pushes some people to make a decision: to walk away from Omelas.



The story begins with a joyful depiction of the Festival of Summer. The morning air is crisp. A procession is moving, smiles painting everyone’s faces. The joyous clang of bells rings against the serene background. Yet, this is just a normal day in Omelas. Even Le Guin compares Omelas to a fairytale, “long ago, far away, once upon a time.” But this prosperity comes at a price. A child must be imprisoned, and not even a kind word should be spoken to that kid.

Facing this dilemma, the people of Omelas react in different ways. Most of them adapt to this condition and get on with their lives.



But on the other hand, after visiting the child's prison, we see some people choose to abandon their life in Omelas, and they do not ever come back.

Ursula does not give much information about those who walk away. In fact, she only talks about them in the final paragraph, despite the novella's title. We can't know for sure why they walk away and what they hope to see. However, it's not hard to think of some reasons. In our life, we face the same dilemma. Maybe not of this proportion, but the idea that our happiness is rooted in another one's misery isn't that alien. And some of us may choose to leave, just like those in Omelas, to cope with this moral question. It might be out of self-righteousness, or maybe it is because we seek our absolution – to free ourselves of guilt.

Whatever the case, leaving doesn't answer this dilemma. If Deserters of Omelas act out of defiance, they surely must know that leaving doesn't merit them the desired outcome – which is a city not born from outrageous cruelty. And if they walk away to ease their ever-present conscience, no amount of leaving will ever relieve them of their burden. They all bear a collective responsibility to that child. They owe that kid a life, and bailing out doesn't change anything in the end.

In the end, leaving seems like a rather simplistic answer. And reading too much in it may turn to be futile. Here is an indisputable fact; that a child is brutally tortured. Ironically, maybe those who stay in Omelas have made the right decision. Or perhaps, there is no right or wrong.



They just are.

