

The New Novel from the Hugo
and Nebula Award-Winning Author
of *The Left Hand of Darkness*



URSULA K. LE GUIN

□ □ The Telling



"A pure storyteller at the height
of her powers." —Peter S. Beagle



"Spellbinding." —*The Denver Post*

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PRAISE FOR
The Telling
BY URSULA K. LE GUIN

"In *The Telling*, the long overdue continuation of her classic Hainish cycle, Ursula K. Le Guin combines the gifts of a pure storyteller at the height of her powers with a wise and passionate heart and the disciplined, ceaselessly questioning mind of a true philosopher . . . In her Hainish books she is creating a social anthropology of the future, fascinating and utterly believable."

—Peter S. Beagle,
author of *The Last Unicorn*

"Le Guin has always been ahead of her time . . . Now, with *The Telling*, she makes readers ponder the Pandora's box we may have opened as the technology we have created begins to overtake us. Her viewpoint, lucid and well-wrought, is troubling and thought-provoking."

—*Rocky Mountain News*

"Her clear, simple voice has intensified . . . an American Blake, a Northwestern Willa Cather."

—*Newsday*

"Everything that has been said about Le Guin—that she is a lush prose stylist, that she is a poet in every line, that her books make readers think and thinkers read—is here on display in her newest Hainish novel. It is elegant, elegiac, enormously compressed . . . and simply pulls the readers along. Not in the hobbledehoy pace of major page-turners but in the graceful elliptical manner of one of the Old Tellers."

—Jane Yolen,
author of *Briar Rose*

"Le Guin writes with a deft grace that sweeps the reader along . . . I was enthralled."

—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

continued . . .

"*The Telling* is a signal event in recent SF history . . . the first full-length novel in Le Guin's much-honored Hainish cycle since *The Dispossessed* more than a quarter-century ago . . . As always, Le Guin is wise, judicious, elegant, and *The Telling* is in many ways the mature expression of what nearly all her fiction has tended toward . . . a peerless maker of tales."

—Gary K. Wolfe, *Locus*

"Ursula K. Le Guin's prose breathes light and intelligence. She can lift fiction to the level of poetry and compress it to the density of allegory—in *The Telling* she does both gorgeously."

—Jonathan Lethem,
author of *Motherless Brooklyn*

"On the individual level of memories, hopes, sorrows, *The Telling* is a powerfully moving book. It also works in a much broader perspective, offering insights into the many facets of religion, for both good and evil, that are thoroughly relevant to our times. This is humanist SF at its best, Le Guin in top form."

—Faren Miller, *Locus*

"Le Guin has long been a master of literary science fiction that is both thoughtful and thought-provoking. This novel in her Hainish cycle, which includes *The Word for World is Forest*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and *The Dispossessed*, is no exception . . . Aka and its society, past and present, are impressively visualized, as are Sutt's internalization and slow grasp of what she is seeking."

—*Booklist*

PRAISE FOR
The Left Hand of Darkness

BY URSULA K. LE GUIN

*Winner of the Hugo and Nebula Awards for
Best Science Fiction Novel of the year*

"[A] science fiction masterpiece."

—*Newsweek*

"As profuse and original in invention as *The Lord of the Rings*."

—Michael Moorcock

"What got to me was the quality of the storytelling. She's taken the mythology, psychology—the entire creative surround—and woven it into a jewel of a story."

—Frank Herbert

"Evocative."

—*Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*

"An instant classic."

—*Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

"Unusual and inspiring . . . a groundbreaking book . . . It is immensely rich in timeless wisdom and insight . . . science fiction for the thinking reader."

—L. Blunt Jackson, Amazon.com

Ace Books by
Ursula K. Le Guin

CHANGING PLANES
THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS
THE OTHER WIND
TALES FROM EARTHSEA
THE TELLING

O N E

WHEN SUTTY WENT back to Earth in the daytime, it was always to the village. At night, it was the Pale.

Yellow of brass, yellow of turmeric paste and of rice cooked with saffron, orange of marigolds, dull orange haze of sunset dust above the fields, henna red, passionflower red, dried-blood red, mud red: all the colors of sunlight in the day. A whiff of asafetida. The brook-babble of Aunty gossiping with Moti's mother on the verandah. Uncle Hurree's dark hand lying still on a white page. Ganesh's little piggy kindly eye. A match struck and the rich grey curl of incense smoke: pungent, vivid, gone. Scents, glimpses, echoes that drifted or glimmered through her mind when she was walking the

streets, or eating, or taking a break from the sensory assault of the neareals she had to partiss in, in the daytime, under the other sun.

But night is the same on any world. Light's absence is only that. And in the darkness, it was the Pale she was in. Not in dream, never in dream. Awake, before she slept, or when she woke from dream, disturbed and tense, and could not get back to sleep. A scene would begin to happen, not in sweet, bright bits but in full recall of a place and a length of time; and once the memory began, she could not stop it. She had to go through it until it let her go. Maybe it was a kind of punishment, like the lovers' punishment in Dante's Hell, to remember being happy. But those lovers were lucky, they remembered it together.

The rain. The first winter in Vancouver rain. The sky like a roof of lead weighing down on the tops of buildings, flattening the huge black mountains up behind the city. Southward the rain-rough grey water of the Sound, under which lay Old Vancouver, drowned by the sea rise long ago. Black sleet on shining asphalt streets. Wind, the wind that made her whimper like a dog and cringe, shivering with a scared exhilaration, it was so fierce and crazy, that cold wind out of the Arctic, ice breath of the snow bear. It went right through her flimsy coat, but her boots were warm, huge ugly black plastic boots splashing in the gutters, and she'd soon be home. It made you feel safe, that awful cold. People hurried past not bothering each other, all their hates and passions

frozen. She liked the North, the cold, the rain, the beautiful, dismal city.

Aunty looked so little, here, little and ephemeral, like a small butterfly. A red-and-orange cotton saree, thin brass bangles on insect wrists. Though there were plenty of Indians and Indo-Canadians here, plenty of neighbors, Aunty looked small even among them, displaced, misplaced. Her smile seemed foreign and apologetic. She had to wear shoes and stockings all the time. Only when she got ready for bed did her feet reappear, the small brown feet of great character which had always, in the village, been a visible part of her as much as her hands, her eyes. Here her feet were put away in leather cases, amputated by the cold. So she didn't walk much, didn't run about the house, bustle about the kitchen. She sat by the heater in the front room, wrapped up in a pale ragged knitted woollen blanket, a butterfly going back into its cocoon. Going away, farther away all the time, but not by walking.

Sutty found it easier now to know Mother and Father, whom she had scarcely known for the last fifteen years, than to know Aunty, whose lap and arms had been her haven. It was delightful to discover her parents, her mother's good-natured wit and intellect, her father's shy, unhandy efforts at showing affection. To converse with them as an adult while knowing herself unreasonably beloved as a child—it was easy, it was delightful. They talked about everything, they learned one another. While Aunty shrank, fluttered away

very softly, deviously, seeming not to be going anywhere, back to the village, to Uncle Hurree's grave.

Spring came, fear came. Sunlight came back north here long and pale like an adolescent, a silvery shadowy radiance. Small pink plum trees blossomed all down the side streets of the neighborhood. The Fathers declared that the Treaty of Beijing contravened the Doctrine of Unique Destiny and must be abrogated. The Pales were to be opened, said the Fathers, their populations allowed to receive the Holy Light, their schools cleansed of unbelief, purified of alien error and deviance. Those who clung to sin would be re-educated.

Mother was down at the Link offices every day, coming home late and grim. This is their final push, she said; if they do this, we have nowhere to go but underground.

In late March, a squadron of planes from the Host of God flew from Colorado to the District of Washington and bombed the Library there, plane after plane, four hours of bombing that turned centuries of history and millions of books into dirt. Washington was not a Pale, but the beautiful old building, though often closed and kept locked, under guard, had never been attacked; it had endured through all the times of trouble and war, breakdown and revolution, until this one. The Time of Cleansing. The Commander-General of the Hosts of the Lord announced the bombing while it was in progress, as an educational action. Only one Word, only one Book. All other words, all other books were darkness, error. They were dirt. *Let the Lord shine out!* cried

the pilots in their white uniforms and mirror-masks, back at the church at Colorado Base, facelessly facing the cameras and the singing, swaying crowds in ecstasy. *Wipe away the filth and let the Lord shine out!*

But the new Envoy who had arrived from Hain last year, Dalzul, was talking with the Fathers. They had admitted Dalzul to the Sanctum. There were neareals and holos and 2Ds of him in the net and *Godsword*. It seemed that the Commander-General of the Hosts had not received orders from the Fathers to destroy the Library of Washington. The error was not the Commander-General's, of course. Fathers made no errors. The pilots' zeal had been excessive, their action unauthorised. Word came from the Sanctum: the pilots were to be punished. They were led out in front of the ranks and the crowds and the cameras, publicly stripped of their weapons and white uniforms. Their hoods were taken off, their faces were bared. They were led away in shame to re-education.

All that was on the net, though Sutti could watch it without having to partiss in it, Father having disconnected the vr-propios. *Godsword* was full of it, too. And full of the new Envoy, again. Dalzul was a Terran. Born right here on God's Earth, they said. A man who understood the men of Earth as no alien ever could, they said. A man from the stars who came to kneel at the feet of the Fathers and to discuss the implementation of the peaceful intentions of both the Holy Office and the Ekumen.

"Handsome fellow," Mother said, peering. "What is he? A white man?"

"Inordinately so," Father said.

"Wherever is he from?"

But no one knew. Iceland, Ireland, Siberia, everybody had a different story. Dalzul had left Terra to study on Hain, they all agreed on that. He had qualified very quickly as an Observer, then as a Mobile, and then had been sent back home: the first Terran Envoy to Terra.

"He left well over a century ago," Mother said. "Before the Unists took over East Asia and Europe. Before they even amounted to much in Western Asia. He must find his world quite changed."

Lucky man, Sutti was thinking. Oh lucky, lucky man! He got away, he went to Hain, he studied at the School on Ve, he's been where everything isn't God and hatred, where they've lived a million years of history, where they understand it all!

That same night she told Mother and Father that she wanted to study at the Training School, to try to qualify for the Ekumenical College. Told them very timidly, and found them undismayed, not even surprised. "This seems a rather good world to get off of, at present," Mother said.

They were so calm and favorable that she thought, Don't they realise, if I qualify and get sent to one of the other worlds, they'll never see me again? Fifty years, a hundred, hundreds, round trips in space were seldom less,

often more. Didn't they care? It was only later that evening, when she was watching her father's profile at table, full lips, hook nose, hair beginning to go grey, a severe and fragile face, that it occurred to her that if she was sent to another world, she would never see them again either. They had thought about it before she did. Brief presence and long absence, that was all she and they had ever had. And made the best of it.

"Eat, Auntie," Mother said, but Auntie only patted her piece of naan with her little ant-antenna fingers and did not pick it up.

"Nobody could make good bread with such flour," she said, exonerating the baker.

"You were spoiled, living in the village," Mother teased her. "This is the best quality anybody can get in Canada. Best quality chopped straw and plaster dust."

"Yes, I was spoiled," Auntie said, smiling from a far country.

The older slogans were carved into facades of buildings: FORWARD TO THE FUTURE. PRODUCER-CONSUMERS OF AKA MARCH TO THE STARS. Newer ones ran across the buildings in bands of dazzling electronic display: REACTIONARY THOUGHT IS THE DEFEATED ENEMY. When the displays malfunctioned, the messages became cryptic: OD IS ON.

The newest ones hovered in holopro above the streets: PURE SCIENCE DESTROYS CORRUPTION. UPWARD ONWARD FORWARD. Music hovered with them, highly rhythmic, multivoiced, crowding the air. "Onward, onward to the stars!" an invisible choir shrilled to the stalled traffic at the intersection where Suttu's robocab sat. She turned up the cab sound to drown the tune out. "Superstition is a rotting corpse," the sound system said in a rich, attractive male voice. "Superstitious practices defile youthful minds. It is the responsibility of every citizen, whether adult or student, to report reactionary teachings and to bring teachers who permit sedition or introduce irrationality and superstition in their classroom to the attention of the authorities. In the light of Pure Science we know that the ardent cooperation of all the people is the first requisite of—" Suttu turned the sound down as far as it would go. The choir burst forth, "To the stars! To the stars!" and the robocab jerked forward about half its length. Two more jerks and it might get through the intersection at the next flowchange.

Suttu felt in her jacket pockets for an akagest, but she'd eaten them all. Her stomach hurt. Bad food, she'd eaten too much bad food for too long, processed stuff jacked up with proteins, condiments, stimulants, so you had to buy the stupid akagests. And the stupid unnecessary traffic jams because the stupid badly made cars broke down all the time, and the noise all the time, the slogans, the songs, the hype, a people hyping itself into making every mistake every other population in FF-tech mode had ever made. —Wrong.

Judgmentalism. Wrong to let frustration cloud her thinking and perceptions. Wrong to admit prejudice. Look, listen, notice: observe. That was her job. This wasn't her world.

But she was on it, in it, how could she observe it when there was no way to back off from it? Either the hyperstimulation of the neareals she had to study, or the clamor of the streets: nowhere to get away from the endless aggression of propaganda, except alone in her apartment, shutting out the world she'd come to observe.

The fact was, she was not suited to be an Observer here. In other words, she had failed on her first assignment. She knew that the Envoy had summoned her to tell her so.

She was already nearly late for the appointment. The robocab made another jerk forward, and its sound system came up loud for one of the Corporation announcements that overrode low settings. There was no off button. "An announcement from the Bureau of Astronautics!" said a woman's vibrant, energy-charged, self-confident voice, and Sutti put her hands over her ears and shouted, "Shut up!"

"Doors of vehicle are closed," the robocab said in the flat mechanical voice assigned to mechanisms responding to verbal orders. Sutti saw that this was funny, but she couldn't laugh. The announcement went on and on while the shrill voices in the air sang, "Ever higher, ever greater, marching to the stars!"

The Ekumenical Envoy, a doe-eyed Chiffewarian named Tong Ov, was even later than she for their appointment, hav-

ing been delayed at the exit of his apartment house by a malfunction of the ZIL-screening system, which he laughed about. "And the system here has mislaid the microrec I wanted to give you," he said, going through files in his office. "I coded it, because of course they go through my files, and my code confused the system. But I know it's in here. . . . So, meanwhile, tell me how things have been going."

"Well," Sutti said, and paused. She had been speaking and thinking in Dovzan for months. She had to go through her own files for a moment: Hindi no, English no, Hainish yes. "You asked me to prepare a report on contemporary language and literature. But the social changes that took place here while I was in transit . . . Well, since it's against the law, now, to speak or study any language but Dovzan and Hainish, I can't work on the other languages. If they still exist. As for Dovzan, the First Observers did a pretty thorough linguistic survey. I can only add details and vocabulary."

"What about literature?" Tong asked.

"Everything that was written in the old scripts has been destroyed. Or if it exists, I don't know what it is, because the Ministry doesn't allow access to it. So all I was able to work on is modern aural literature. All written to Corporation specifications. It tends to be very—to be standardised."

She looked at Tong Ov to see if her whining bored him, but though still looking for the mislaid file, he seemed to be listening with lively interest. He said, "All aural, is it?"

"Except for the Corporation manuals hardly anything's