

Hanako's Heart
Book One of the Kilesa Trilogy
By Tomek Piorkowski

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A note from the Author

This novel represents work done from late 2001 to late 2006, and I consider it, truth be told, an unfinished work. This is the eighth draft/revision of the text. Yet after working it over so many times over so many years, I have grown weary of it, and now I release it onto the internet as is, after a year of ignoring it. I hope that any avid reader of science fiction will enjoy it, if one is not put off by my frequent divings into surrealism (I have perhaps been too much influenced by Philip K. Dick in this sense). Also, I hope the reader will be forgiving of my many experiments in style, which perhaps make the novel uneven in its reading, and the ludicrous amount of references, some of which may come across as bizarre.

This work is released under a Creative Commons licence, and as such this work may be freely distributed provided no payment is asked. In the unlikely event that someone may want to make a derivative work (ie fan fiction), that someone is free to do so, again provided that no payment is asked for in its distribution. The Corporate Universe may still be fertile ground for many more stories.

Although this is the first part in a trilogy, it is unlikely that I shall ever write its sequels, as other projects have long since overcome my desire to work on this 'Kilesa' trilogy; however, the two sequels were meant to be sequels in the sense that they continued the underlying philosophical and moral discussion, rather than being actual continuations of the story. Thus in terms of story this novel is a complete whole.

I hope then, that five years of work has not been totally wasted, and that a few readers will find merit in this little science fiction novel.

October 2007

Part One - The Beating Core

"There are these three roots of unskillfulness. Greed as a root of unskillfulness, aversion as a root of unskillfulness, delusion as a root of unskillfulness."

- The Lord Buddha (The Pali Canon, Itivuttaka III.1)

The student must learn

It was only then that Smuggler Knight realised he was covered in blood.

His breathing was deep but controlled, his heart beat fast but not heavily palpitating. Nevertheless, he felt that his mind was about to slide into panic. To stop this, Smuggler Knight deliberately decided to regroup himself, to carefully reanalyse his situation starting from the most very basic assumptions :

1) What happened?

1-a) Smuggler Knight had walked into a trap.

1-b) Smuggler Knight had managed to fight his way out of it.

2) Where is this place?

2-a) Smuggler Knight was aboard a spacestation. He could feel the gentle, omnipresent throbbing, so typical of spacestations, that tapped the underside of his boots through the deck floor.

2-b) More specifically, Smuggler Knight was in a large and vacant storage room aboard this specific spacestation.

2-c) More importantly, Smuggler Knight was aboard a spacestation which fell under the jurisdiction of a Corporate vassal, the Shareholder Tang Yu-lin¹. Said Shareholder will soon want Smuggler Knight dead.

3) Who is this person, standing here?

3-a) Smuggler Knight was someone who was to be very dead very soon if he did not get out of Shareholder Tang Yu-lin's territory extremely quickly.

3-b) Smuggler Knight had just killed four people, this being the reason for supposition 2-c and also 3-a

4) What now?

4-a) Smuggler Knight would first pray to his Ancestors for guidance.

4-b) Smuggler Knight would analyse his context, decide an action, and follow the action through.

Analysis of the context. Why is context so important? Without context, a moment of time has neither a past nor a future, it has neither an inheritance nor anything to bequeath. Without past or future, the present may as well not exist, the presence of the present moment is obliterated.

Analyse the context carefully. Where is this present moment coming from? Where shall this present moment go to?

It must be studied. It is important. With a careful study, the causality of reality is looked over, and the consequences of actions are hidden behind smoke. It is said that those who study according to a system are those most successful at those studies. One of the most common systems of study is to study the work in chronological order. We shall need to go to the beginning.

In the beginning (a context)

Is there any true beginning to a story? Or a true ending? In truth, there are no beginnings and endings but merely one continuous narrative, cut at certain points for the sake of finiteness, yet still dependent on what came before and what shall come after.

And thus *this* narrative begins long after an ending, but throughout this tale it shall be apparent that the history that ended so long ago permeates this one. And the events of *this* history shall, no doubt, influence another beginning, long after this history has ended. The history of one happening cannot happen in isolation of what preceded it or what shall follow it as a consequence. There is always a context.

So when does this history start? What number of calendar shall we assign to this beginning? What good are calendars? - every time some new prophet comes up, with his own fantastic version of an Almighty Divine, his followers promptly reset the calendar to zero, ensuring that time shall never ever grow too old in years. And as for years, shall we use Earth years? Earth has become an insignificant planet, good only for ones interested in buying slaves to work on factory planets and in finding Abrahamic prophets. There are now various years of more significant orbits.

But in this beginning there are in fact several calendars in use, by the various space faring groups, each with their own version of a year. Attempts at introducing a universal calendar have failed, since they invariably failed in adjusting to local needs. Yet one achievement was made, in that the various types of years now approximated one another in length.

Still, there was this vexing problem of when to pin the year zero. On Earth, this was solved by firmly placing the pin on the death or birth or life of religious figures; but in colonised space, in which religion multiplied and mutated into an uncountable number of forms, there are far too many holy men to choose from.

So, as in the days of the ancient, prophet-despising Hellenes, time was measured from the last significant political event, and in this narrative, that event occurred ten years ago: an ending, a zero-causing event. It was the siege and final fall of the nation of Old Italy to the Corporation.

Old Italy, so named because those people were proud of upholding ancient Italian traditions, had been the hegemon of the colonised galaxy. With defeat, the hegemony of a vast interstellar empire went to the leader of the Corporation, the Chief Executive Officer Czerwon². It was not only a changing of masters, but the spiritual forces governing the galaxy had changed. It was the victory of quantity over quality, of factory over workmanship, of capitalism over dignity.

Yet the Corporation, exhausted from the war against the Old Italians, was not strong enough to assert its control over the galaxy. Even though ten years have passed after the fall of Old Italy, Free Traders still hold out in their Zone, unfearing pirates sail the starscapes and various territories are controlled, not by the CEO Czerwon, but by nominal allies, warlords but referred to as the shareholders. There are many who prefer the new order, as well as many who preferred the old ways and are the Corporation's enemies - of course, the greatest numbers belong to the apathetic, as has always been the case throughout history.

We now have our zero, our context – the fall of Old Italy - the ending before our beginning; and out of this beginning shall arise a new ending. Ever as history goes on, calendars reset due to some occurrence or other, to new zeros. Such a resetting will occur in this narrative.

Now let's narrow the context, to a place aboard a spacestation in a territory under the control of Shareholder Tang Yu-lin, where an out of work smuggler is about to walk into a trap.

The swordfighting stance of the House of Knight

Smuggler Knight had been in many dangerous situations. He had made a name and reputation during the siege of Old Italy, where he had become a part of the Royal Italian navy, running through Corporate blockades. In those great old days, he had made quite a lot of money on various dangerous missions. But he never got himself into stupid situations.

With a quick indrawing breath, Smuggler Knight silently called upon his Ancestors. Smuggler Knight found himself caught in a situation as stupid, as it was dangerous.

He had been looking for work on a spacestation³ on the outskirts of the Corporate empire. The station was within territory under the administration of a Corporate ally by the name of Shareholder Tang Yu-lin. It was an open secret that the Shareholder profited from lucrative trade in various illegal narcotic drugs, and Knight had thought that perhaps he could get a smuggling job or two amidst all the drug running. But smuggler work had momentarily dried up, and Knight had passed his name around so that if anyone was interested they would know who to call.

Unfortunately it just so happened that the son of the shareholder, known as Prince Tang, was fascinated by swordfighting. Swordfighting had experienced a revival back in the days of gun-shy space travellers - bullets used to be dangerous aboard gentle-hulled spaceships - but now was mostly carried on by its few remaining adherents for the sake of tradition. Prince Tang was even an avid student of the history of swordfighting and of the great swordfighters. Now one of the greatest of these men was Knight's great-grandfather, also by name Smuggler Knight. This great-grandfather was perhaps the most famous swordsman of his time, and created his own style, the style of the House of Knight. Knight's great-grandfather's influence was so great that he also to some extent influenced the Smuggler's Code, of which every member of the Knight family swore to uphold as a code of honour and conduct, and which used to be upheld by all smugglers in general.

Raised in luxury and grown arrogant under the sheltering wing of his father's power, the impetuous Prince Tang longed to test his swordfighting abilities against a warrior of skill - as opposed to his servants, who generally lost to him because they were too frightened of the consequences of beating him. When word reached him that a smuggler called Knight had been going around looking for work, he immediately recognised the name. After sending his servants to investigate, they confirmed to the prince that the smuggler in question was a member of the House of Knight.

Soon after, Smuggler Knight, lured by the promise of a lucrative job, walked into a large, empty storage deck of the spacestation. Walked straight into a trap.

The deck was mostly empty except for a few large crates scattered about. The smuggler was walking towards the prince and was about to give a formal salute and polite greeting, when Knight realised something was not right.

"Honourable greetings," said the smuggler, trying to put warmth into his face and words.

"Hmph," replied the prince. He nudged his manservant, an elderly white-haired man who spoke for his master in a crackled voice, "The Most Wondrous Prince Tang, son of the Warlord and Shareholder Tang Yu-lin, wishes to challenge you to a formal duel."

Knight's heart shot a jolt of alarm. He needed work, not bravado games.

"Prince Tang, forgive me, I must respectfully decline," said Knight, carefully toning his words to be somewhere in between 'respectful' and 'forceful'.

Knight heard chuckle sounds from behind. The prince had placed three thugs at the only exit. Prince Tang gave a snigger, something which made it clear that Knight had a good chance of not making it out alive without a fight.

This prince, Knight realised, was willing to duel to death for no better reason than a reckless whim. Formal dueling was a bloody and dangerous sport and either of them could get killed, something that the prince did not care about. So arrogant was the prince that he fancied that he could beat Smuggler Knight without much effort, although the prince had never fought a proper swordfight with someone of blade-skill and furthermore, the prince was not taught by any of the great swordmasters, or even a swordmaster of slight distinction.

In Knight's mind, a mixture of anger and also contempt arose in him, as he looked over Tang. Prince Tang was short and did not seem to have the body of a well conditioned fighter. Tang also looked only about fifteen years old, and the smuggler began to feel utmost contempt for this arrogant boy, the son of a corrupt drug dealing vassal man.

Knight straightened his back, let his shoulders loosen a little. Caught in the trap, he saw no way of escape. "Very well, Prince Tang," acquiesced Knight, "You shall have your duel."

Prince Tang made all three⁴ of his armed guards leave the room and ordered them to wait outside the exit, behind a closed door. The prince was worried that one of them, out of overzealous concerned loyalty, would interfere in the fight - the last thing the prince wanted was for the satisfaction of conquest-victory to be snatched away by his slaves. Only the manservant, an elderly gentleman, stayed behind to act as referee. "For your benefit," the prince sneered, "in case you want to surrender, rather than die by my hand!"

Knight was astonished. This prince, this boy, obviously did not respect the killing power of a bladed weapon. And although Knight himself knew that he would never be the amazing swordsman his great-grandfather was, nevertheless Knight was well drilled in the stances and techniques of the House of Knight and he was a swordsman of merit. Did this child know what he was getting himself into?

"Have you ever fought before?" Knight asked.

"I have fought hundreds of times and I won every battle!" the prince exclaimed.

Knight was not convinced. The boy's body and face did not have any visible scars on it, although to be fair, Prince Tang was fully clothed, in the most expensive attire Knight had ever seen anyone wear to a fight. Knight's own face did not have any scars on it, but that was luck, and for every wound he missed on his face he received one somewhere else on his body.

Knight gave the old man his gun, then took off his coat, folded it and gave it to the 'referee' to put it, and his weapon, in an unobtrusive place. Knight unbuttoned and did the same with his shirt as the coat. As he did so, the many ugly scars that he had accumulated on his chest and arms could be seen.

The prince, his eyes wide, suddenly looked a bit taken aback. Knight gathered that, for the first time, Prince Tang had seen the marks of a warrior. Knight concluded that the prince himself never received a vicious wound, or even had his precious skin broken.

Nevertheless the prince regained his composure and at least the veneer of his former arrogance. Acting impatient, he ordered Knight to take up his blade to fight.

"You want to fight fully dressed?" inquired Knight. The prince was not taking his shirt off.

"I will fight any which way I want to!" the prince retorted.

The elder servant was slow with age, gathering up two swords from the floor, and the Prince kicked him downwards, shouting at his servant, "Hurry up!". The man sprawled onto the floor, then crawled up into a standing position, meekly gave the prince his sword and then held the sword Knight was to use, waiting for the smuggler to take it.

Knight took the blade and raised it up in salute towards the prince. Prince Tang, however, broke protocol by not saluting back and instead rushed into attack.

The surprise attack was clumsily executed and besides, Knight had twinged with the faint intuition that Tang would do something stupid like that. He parried the blow, grabbed Tang's arm and pulled, while stepping out of the way and watching prince being carried forward by inertia. Prince Tang went by so fast that he had no control over his body.

Reflexively, Knight brought his sword downwards to the ground then flicked it upwards into Tang. The blade ate off a chunk of the prince's neck.

The prince stumbled a step further before falling down in a gargling heap. Knight regretted his action - if he had taken a split-second more to think, he could have given a non-killing wound, or perhaps even disarmed the prince without harming him. Now he had killed the son of the feudal lord of the territory he was currently resident in. The prince's own free-willed foolishness that had sealed Tang's fate; but now Knight himself was in trouble.

Tang was gargling about, trying to scream but his torn larynx would not obey. Blood gushed about like vileness. The prince's face was distorted in pain and fear.

Knight did not stop moving after he had dealt the blow. He already knew what he had to do even while considering the consequences of what he did. In a series of fluid movements, Knight stepped towards the prince and brought his sword down, mercifully put an end to Tang's life.

The referee was stunned at seeing his master felled so quickly and with so little respect for the prince's inherent superiority. Before the old man could recover enough sense to call for help, Knight's sword had already withdrawn from the prince's body, a slight stream of blood followed the blade as it swung through the air; then the blade was at the man's throat, cold against his skin. "Do...not...utter...a...sound," said Knight, pausing between his carefully sounded words.

Knight was in survival mode and he had to escape. The elderly man at his sword's end was quiet and whimpering and scared. The armed guards were still waiting at the entrance. If he got past them, he would still have to make his way to his ship the Poet's Whim, get off the spacestation, and then escape this region of space before the shareholder realised that a smuggler had killed his son. Shareholder Tang Yu-lin was notorious for his cruelty and Knight did not wish to know what would happen to him if he fell into the warlord's hands.

The old man had strapped Knight's gun to his own hip, instead of placing it somewhere - it was a way of making sure neither of the competitors could get to it during the fight

(not that it was much of a fight). Knight undid the clasp, took the gun belt of the man. He pulled out the gun, and pointing it at the man, he clipped the gun belt upon himself.

The men outside still did not know what had happened. Knight remembered that there were three of them; he would have to act quickly and precisely.

Knight had an idea. As the old man recovered his wits, and stopped whimpering a bit, Knight commanded him, firstly, to keep his mouth shut. The man agreed, a bit dazed but with enough wits about him to recognise the significance of the gun pointed at his face. Luckily, the old man did not realise Knight was bluffing⁵, and he agreed to do what the smuggler said.

After telling the man what to do, Smuggler Knight walked away and leaned himself against the wall next to the entrance. There was a recess right next to the door into which Knight snugly fitted himself in. After a cue, the old man began to shout for help.

Evidently the guards were not of the exquisitely alert type, for it was only after a few loud shouts that they reacted. The door opened and a single head poked its way through. His eyes looked upon the old man, then moved on to see Prince Tang's body lying on the floor.

A moment of thought had to pass through the thug's head before he came to his startling conclusion. He cried out to the others.

The first thing they did was to hurry over to the prince's prone body - exactly what Knight wanted, as he aimed and fired his gun.

It was a bit dirty to shoot them in the back, although it was a dirty trick to have trapped the smuggler in the first place. The Smuggler's Code, too, had nothing to condemn this action - as long as your opponents were armed, they were fair targets.

Despite the quick and shaky aim, Knight's first shot manage to plunge itself into the back of the nearest foe. One fell down on the floor, two turned and pulled out their weapons from inside their jackets. Knight fired off two shots, one missed one hit, second man down. Third man fired at Knight. Knight dropped down, firing one two three, back and forth back and forth third man missed Knight. Knight hits third man. Third man down.

It was a short gun-battle. Knight suddenly remembered how loud the gun shots had been, ringing acoustic in the warehouse. His alarmed mind considered the possibility that others had heard. The old man, frightened, had immediately ran to take cover as the first shots rang out and disappeared among the empty crates.

The three guards were downed, and Knight was for the moment safe. As for the old man, Knight could do nothing - even if he found out where he was hiding, the Smuggler's Code forbid him to harm an unarmed man, and Knight was not going to break the Code lightly for fear of offending the spirits of his Ancestors⁶.

He cautiously checked if there were no more men waiting outside the storage bay, or if anyone had been around to hear what happened. No one.

Shareholder Tang Tzu would probably want the smuggler's impaled head brought before him for causing Prince Tang's death. Knight had to get out of the station, and out of this sector of space as quickly as possible. The smuggler would have to work his way through the more crowded areas of the station (hopefully the alarm would not be sounded before he was through) and get to the parking bay where his ship, the Poet's Whim, was stored. Then he'd push out at full speed for the border. But he would need to pay off the

Whim's parking fees. Spaceship parking, like all convenient things, was not free. That needed money. Money Knight did not have.

The smuggler looked over to the prone bodies of the men he had just slain. Men carry wallets. Wallets have money. Smuggler needs money. Smuggler get wallets.

Knight cautiously walked over to the bodies. He knew that the thugs were shot to hell, but that didn't necessarily mean they were dead yet.

He crouched down near the nearest, the one he had first shot, in the back. The man had twisted around and was lying on that shot back in a pool of blood draining out of that shot back. One hand pointing gun at head, Knight's other hand searched pockets.

Problem : Man was not dead yet.

The thug suddenly returned to consciousness and with a shriek pulled his gun out. Knight shrieked too, startled delay before he pulled the trigger. Knight's gun made a hole in the thug's head. The newly hole-headed man fired off his own gun but never had time to aim, and the bullet flew past a arm's length away from its target. It hit the walls and clanged off the wall's metal then zipped up and down some more, *kling klang klong* it sang. Knight put his arms over his head and huddle and hoped that the crazy thing would avoid him. Finally he heard a cry of muffled *ugh!*

Frenzied, Knight kicked at the bodies of the three thugs, then kicked at the body of Prince Tang, making sure they didn't grunt or otherwise indicate that they were still living. Satisfied that everyone was dead, he ran to where he thought the muffled cry had come from, his arms outstretched and his gun ready. He spun round an empty crate.

There was the old man, who had been hiding behind the crate. The bullet that had been fired earlier had bounced off the walls and right into his hiding place. A red hole in his shirt indicated where the bullet had gone in. The old man gurgled a red gurgle a bit, eyes blankly staring at the crate. A younger man would have lasted for a while still from that wound but this old man's physiological reserves were all deteriorated with age. Knight saw him tense his legs up a bit, then slacked into death's grace.

Life, and the miserable joke of human circumstances. A unintended bullet randomly flying killed this man's life. Ever the weak shall hide, and yet the context shall chase them. Though the weak run and run past innumerable stars, yet they are still the product of their environment, and that environment shall have power over them, its final vengeance and retribution. And as all human animals must adapt to their circumstances, they must change and alter, till the thing they are is no longer recognisable as human, but has either gone back to beast, or gone on to something better.

Do not think you can lock yourself into your house and keep the world a world's length away, for the world shall find you.

Knight's sympathetic nervous system was winding down, the smuggler's body sensing that the worst was past.

Then Knight suddenly realised he was covered in blood.

Flashback : The thug suddenly awaking and with a shriek, pulling his gun out. Knight's gun then made a hole in the thug's head. The man's head exploded like a pumpkin and blood and brain had been thrown all about, especially over Knight. At that time Knight's brain was so awashed with adrenaline⁷ that the smuggler had not even consciously registered sensory information about it.

For a moment, he felt his heart rate speed back up and his mind about to slip back into panic. Fear : How was Knight going to get off the spacestation while covered in red-red blood?

Stop.

Knight regrouped himself, forced his psyche away from its fantastic imaginings and back to basic questions that plague humanity : What? Where? Who? Pulling his mind back to these basic issues, Knight could figure out what to do from there.

Luckily Knight had taken off his shirt and coat before the fight with Tang and had still not put it back on. His coat would be enough to cover the blood stains on his clothes and skin. The problem would be the smell of his frightened sweat and the brain and the blood and the gunpowder and whatever else; also there was blood that over his face. Either could give away what had happened.

Having finished analysing his context, Knight came up with a course of action.

First, money. Money makes the galaxy go round.

Knight quickly searched all the corpses, found some money chips, and one of the bodyguards had a money comm. A money comm was an access terminal to the Corporate banking system, which allowed a person to remotely manage his finances and also download money into his money chips. Unfortunately the comm was designed to activate only according to a complex recognition system of voice, body odour, skin texture, fingerprints, and numerous other systems that Knight, not being a hacker, knew little or nothing about. The comm, in Knight's present situation, was useless, except to check how much money was on the chips.

Relief, as Knight found that the chips had enough money to pay off his parking fees, with a little bit extra for any incidental bribes or expenses on his way off the station. Unfortunately he got a bit of sticky blood on his hands and on the chips while searching the bodies.

The smuggler looked around the warehouse, found his shirt and coat. Since there was no clean cloth anywhere, he used the shirt to wipe off the blood on his face, his hands and the chips. This stained the shirt, but after he put on the shirt he put his coat over that, effectively hiding the evidence. Knight hoped his face was clean.

He walked over to the exit to the warehouse, stood facing its closed door. He straightened out his clothes, hoping he looked presentable. He took in a deep breath, said a short prayer to his Ancestors, opened the door and stepped through.

It was quiet outside, no one around. Evidently the Prince had planned to kill Knight and then leave the smuggler's body, where it would be only found after some time. Things had worked out differently, but at least the smuggler knew he had a small margin of time.

Czerwon's valuation

Chief Executive Officer Czerwon was a man who, when he put his mind to it, could be far-sighted with regard to the future. It had been a skill of instrumental value in the rise of his Corporation, and in the fall of Old Italy. The CEO's life was dedicated to the pursuit of his own happiness and the expansion of his power through the Corporation, a great personal quest for what was 'more'. But Czerwon, mortal man foreseeing, could see that it was all for nothing if he was going to die and leave everything behind. And so, not

long into his rise to power, Czerwon had put an incredible amount of money and the considerable talent of Corporate Research Division into making him: immortal.

That had been many years ago, even before the fall of Old Italy, even before the place and position of the Corporation could be guaranteed. But it had, at least for the CEO, been worthwhile for now he could reap the various fruits of what he had sowed. For instance, his eyes had been replaced.

His previous eyes, dark in colour, had become too old to see well anymore. He could have had corrective surgery, but that was not good enough. To Czerwon, surgery was a tacit acknowledgement of his mortality, of the imperfection of himself. Instead, he resorted to the solution that had been devised many years ago by his Corporate Research Division. He had a pair of fresh, green eyes teleport-ripped out of a boy who had been genetically engineered for Czerwon's parts. Now he had a pair of young, teenage eyes, from brown iris to green iris.

Czerwon's body was a patchwork of replaced organs, organs taken from genetically engineered test tube children. The children would be grown, their organs harvested, then they were discarded. They were called genelings, and they were considered the property of Czerwon, Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation, since they had been specifically commissioned by and for him, built by his express orders. They were not human beings, but property.

In this way the CEO was kept in a state of perpetual youthfulness, but not only that, his body was at the same time enhanced by the genetic engineering of his body and his replacement organs. The genetic engineers not only designed the organs, but improved on nature's originals. Czerwon was stronger, his reflexes were faster and the metabolic reactions of his cells were more efficient and faster in recovery than that of an ordinary man. His craving for immortality, for that great 'more', had changed his body, its normal human constraints superseded.

Most of his organs had been replaced. His brain, of course, could not be replaced, but it was kept young by the pharmacological wonders dreamt up by his personal physician, the Doctor Fallsoul. Only one old organ still remained, and that was his heart. It had aged before its time, a victim of abuse. Czerwon's heart was an ash-covered dusty shell, nearing its destruction.

"I need a new heart," said CEO Czerwon to his sister, staring out across the expanse of space before him. He was aboard his magnificent flagship, a leviathan known as the Corporate Ship 'Red Claw'. This ship had the largest outer-space viewing room ever built for a spaceship. The transparent dome rounded up over Czerwon's head like a mock night sky.

To Thalia⁸, to whom the remark was addressed, the vista felt like a heavy, near-crushing presence on her; she wondered if her brother felt the same. Of course not; Czerwon's presence had a conquering air, a force capable of holding up that entire sky like an Atlas, embracing it as his own, heedless of the burden.

"The doctor was gracious enough to inform me," said Thalia.

Czerwon turned to look at her, his new eyes raking into Thalia's mind, disturbing her memories of her brown-eyed brother and putting green colours on the orbs. Thalia wanted to shiver under the unnatural gaze, but suppressed this urge within herself. She maintained a grave expression on her face, which was accentuated by her black dress.

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