

Notes for Podcast: *Stranger in Olondria*, Book 5

Book 5 is long and many important things happen. Jevick and Miros take up residence in an abandoned mansion on the edge of the desert. Miros tells his story. Jevick calls on Jissavet for help and agrees to write her *vallon*. Jissavet helps him find food and medicine. The local people also help, recognizing Jevick as an *aveanyi*. Jissavet tells her story to Jevick and he writes. Jevick tells his story to Jissavet. Jevick falls in love.

Book 5, Chapter Seventeen, The House of My Horse, The Palace

Jevick and Miros approach a house. The door is unlocked. Jevick enters, calling hello, hello, but no one is home. What follows is a common fantasy trope—exploring an abandoned house.

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Jevick cares for Miros, who is still recovering from his wound. Miros tells his story. He is a *balarin*, a young lover of a wealthy married woman. He is infatuated. His behavior causes scandal and his family assigns him to serve his uncle. This is yet another story in this novel about forbidden love going wrong.

Jevick makes a bargain with Jissavet. If she helps them, he will write the *vallon*. He finds pen and ink, but no paper, so he writes in the margins of another book in the library. She tells him her story and he writes in *Kedeti*, an unwritten language but the language that he and Jissavet share. He writes in Olondrian characters. No one would be able to read it but him, or someone else from the islands who could read Olondrian and figured out what he was doing.

Jissavet begins by asserting, “I already knew about writing.” Her basis for this assertion is that her people drew maps. And she begins with what she calls “maps,” which are descriptions of the physical aspects of places or objects. She describes the houses and practices of her people. She tells us myths. She moves back and forth in time. She describes adventures with her friend, including rowing to places they were not supposed to go, running from the *kitnya* man from the caves, eating with sailors on the beach, who called them *chakhet*, meaning brave, clever, or willing to do something that does not need to be done.

She talks about having and not having *jut*, about being poor but also having much. She wonders if she were a witch without knowing it, but reasons that if she were, half the people in the village would be destroyed. She describes complex family relations, always with contempt for her mother and love for her father, who turns out not to be her father. She finds out that her mother was raped by a *kitnya* man, which is how she inherited the sickness.

We get a picture of an intelligent, headstrong, ill-tempered girl who is frustrated by her position in life. And while she has contempt for her mother always, her adventures in her boat could easily have led to a similar fate.

The money that allows this poor family to go to Olondria in search of a cure for Jissavet comes from her father’s sister, for whom HE has contempt. A truly unhappy family.

Book 5, Chapter Eighteen, Spring

Miros is getting better. Jevick, as he hears and writes Jissavet's story, is falling in love. He imagines meeting her when she was alive, before she was sick. He begins reading her story back to her, but she stops him. She says it is a terrible story. He says it is a beautiful story.

That is a question. Is Jissavet's story a good one, well told?

Jevick reads more books to Jissavet, almost as Tialon read to him. They go places together, do things. Jissavet helps him find food and other help. They behave like close friends.

The chapter ends with Auram coming up the path with Jissavet's bones.

Questions:

1. Jissavet's story is the centerpiece of Book 5. It changes Jevick's opinion of Jissavet. Does it change our opinion too? Why does the author wait until so late in the book to make Jissavet more like a human being than a selfish and vengeful ghost?
2. Jissavet's story is told in a scattered fashion with different times and types of stories mixed together. Why did the author choose to do this? Is it because Jissavet is illiterate and doesn't know how to tell a story? Or is the story more effectively told in this way?
3. Throughout much of the novel, Jevick has wanted to receive Jissavet's body so that he can burn it and be rid of the ghost. How does he feel now? Has the author set things up so that when Jevick gets what he desires most, he doesn't want it anymore? Is that the point of this novel?