

# Glory Day

A Yurvanian Transition Story

by Nicole Lieger

There were thousands. The crooked lanes of Old Varoonya were full of unrest and determination, but also of gently swaying lanterns, their colorful lights calling to the evening sky, adding their own harmony to the songs that came from every corner.

The people were out in the streets. Anee watched as the masses gathered and advanced slowly but inexorably toward the palace. So many, so strong! Anee took a deep breath. This was the day. Tonight they would make the Transition happen, and the age of the Feudals would end!

She itched to join them, but it was too soon. She still had to hold out on her perch. Anee leaned against the railing of the roof garden, her legs brown as bark, her purple tunic blending in between the leaves like a blossom.

Then she saw the shadow move.

In the lane below, a gray shape detached itself from the wall and disappeared through a low door that lay halfway underground. A portal to the underworld, to that labyrinth of caves and cellars that lived a life of its own beneath the old parts of town.

Anee descended the winding staircase to a balcony and climbed down the vines from there. With few strides, she had reached the hidden door and ducked beneath its thick lintel.

Gloomy twilight met her eyes. Only one small oil lamp burned way off to her left, just where the narrow passage bent and disappeared into darkness. Muffled silence filled the air. And yet Anee could hear breathing, the slight rustle of human presence, of invisible beings beyond those flickering flames.

She stood motionless, her hand still on the knob of the closed door.

Then she turned right, walking away from the flickering flames. She let her fingers trail along the wall, feeling without fail when she had reached another familiar door. She almost could not discern the picked lock hanging from the latch. But as she peered in through the crack, she could see the woman in the chamber had lit a lantern. Clad in dark leather, she went through the room in swift, purposeful moves. She knew exactly what she was looking for and where to find it. She had already unearthed a short sword from the wooden chest at the back. Now she was pulling daggers from a drawer, making each disappear with a practiced move in her boot, her belt, her vest. The blades slid in effortlessly, a perfect fit, a homecoming.

Anee walked in.

The woman spun around, daggers at the ready. Anee had not even seen them move back into her hands.

"Sennet," Anee said, her voice soft. "Please. Let it go."

Sennet spit on the ground. "Never!" Her eyes were gleaming. "Today, the Feudals will die!"

"It was a joint decision, Sennet. All the Cores agreed."

"Who cares! This is our last chance and I won't let it slip away. Tonight the throne will be covered in blood, and I will step on it with these very boots!"

Anee bit her lip. "Sennet. All the people are already out in the street. Peacefully, as we agreed. If a small group turns violent now, the palace guard will wreak havoc on everyone."

Sennet huffed. "Your problem. And your fault." She advanced toward the door.

Anee stepped in her way, her stance firm but her voice warm and wooing. "Are you a part of our movement? Please respect the will of the people, as it has expressed itself. Please respect their lives. Put your weapons down."

"No! Stand aside!"

Anee raised a hand, but before she could speak again Sennet advanced, poised for fight. "Time is up. It's now or never. Don't try to stop me. I'll cut you down first if I must." Sennet tilted the blade in her hand and a spark of light caught on the edge.

Anee swallowed.

Sennet made one step toward her, daggers drawn, muscles tight. Her eyes were hard as steel.

Anee moved back slowly, her gaze locked with Sennet's. She stumbled and caught herself with one hand against the wall. "Hold!" she cried like a wounded animal.

Sennet scoffed. She pushed the daggers into her boot. As she slid out the door, she sneered back over her shoulder. And walked straight into the shadows waiting for her.

Her fighting instincts kicked in before her mind even knew what was happening. Her foot hit a man in the chest so hard he was sent flying into the wall.

But a dozen hands already held her in an iron grip. Sennet gasped under the tight noose around her ribs. Spinning around, she tore the end of the rope from her captor's hands, all while wriggling the bond loose so she might pull one arm free. But another noose already closed over her body, and another. A mass of people pressed into her, drawing her down to the ground as yet another noose pulled at her foot. Knowing fingers ran over her body, finding every knife in every pocket. Her sword was gone.

Sennet coiled up on the floor and sprung open with the force of a bowstring. Her legs hit a boy in the guts and made him scream with pain.

But all the ropes held. All the ends were in the hands of her captors now, their hold firm and sure. Sennet lay on the ground bound up in a bundle.

“You! Traitors!” she rasped, recognizing the faces. “Have you been lying in wait here for me all along?”

They nodded.

Anee stepped through the door.

Sennet hissed at her. “You false snake! You turncoat! All your sweet talk is just deception.”

Anee shook her head. “It isn’t. If you had laid down your arms, even now, you would have gone free. But you did not.”

“So since you oppose violent attacks on enemies, attacking friends is all you can think of?”

Anee cocked her head. “It seems that the lines between friends and enemies are not always so clear-cut. Not all of our friends are friends, it turns out. I just hope that not all our enemies are enemies, either.” She licked her lips. “We have used force against you, and I’m sorry we had to. We will not ‘cut you down’ however, don’t worry. Neither you, nor the queen. But we will stop both of you from killing other people.”

“How dare you compare me to the queen! That scoundrel!”

Anee’s eyes narrowed. “Who would you have become, if ever you had managed to put your boot on a blood-drenched throne? Another ruler? Ignoring people’s will, and even ready to kill? Another despot, as brutal as any other, just adorned with a new name, the name of the revolution? No.” Anee shook her head. “We need something new.”

Sennet kicked again with bound feet, hitting no one. “Your ways are not new at all. They have been tried before, and see what happened. Our parents peacefully prayed for change, and they were massacred, just like their parents before them.”

"They were." Anee clenched her fingers so tightly the knuckles showed. "But by now, the Transition has taken deep root in society. The rhizome of a new culture has grown slowly and quietly underground, and no one can eradicate it any more. It is everywhere. And ready to push up through the surface, quick and ripe as mushrooms. Even some people in the palace feel the rightness of it, the strength and beauty. And we have the successful example of Zonzelon, of a peaceful Transition right at our borders. We know it is possible. And now the time has come! Tonight, we will make it happen!"

Sennet's face distorted. "You will all be slaughtered."

"Maybe." Anee's lips were pale. "But maybe not."

She turned and stepped out into the street.

\* \* \*

In the throne room, Gureev's fellow officer was presenting the strategy to the queen. His voice carried loud and clear. "We can not get at the rebels while they are spread out over the old city, split into a thousand tiny groups. The lanes are a labyrinth full of archways and hideouts, even above ground. A big army would lose all its advantage on such terrain."

The officer rubbed his hands. "So we will draw them out. They are gravitating towards the palace anyway, and we will encourage that by giving them a first victory: the breach of the outer gates."

The queen arched an eyebrow. The mage by her side grabbed his staff with both hands, as if he was about to banish a demon.

"It will be perfectly safe," the officer assured them. "The second gate will hold. But the crowd will have a vast courtyard to pour into." A twisted smile came to the officer's face. "We will wait as long as we possibly can, until they are squeezed in very tightly, hoping to press on. Then we unleash the fire-spitters. We already have them placed and aimed, to throw both flames and oil into different parts of the

crowd simultaneously. Which means that all the people will scream, and many will die. Many, however, will escape with terrible burns. For the rest of their lives, the scars on their faces will remind everyone of what happens when you disrespect the sanctity of the palace and those who rule there. It will entrench the horror much more deeply than mere corpses could.”

The queen cocked her head. “You think of the long term, as usual. We need to survive this day, but we also need to secure a firm foundation for our future rule, for all the years and centuries destiny lays at our feet.” Her brow furrowed. “Nevertheless. Is this the only way?”

“I am afraid so.” The officer bowed.

A breath of sweet wind came in through the window, but it only rattled the hollow knights, the empty shells of armor lining the walls.

The queen clenched her fist. “War has come to our gates.” She sat up straight on her throne, her spine rigid. “The kingdom is at stake. We have no choice.”

She looked directly at Gureev. “You have your orders. Keep the fire-spitters ready, unleashing them only at the very last moment.”

Gureev bent his knee with a gracious flourish.

He left, a dozen stone-faced palace guards in his wake.

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When Gureev stepped onto the tower, he walked straight out of the castle’s darkness into a sky of gold and lavender. Evening had bathed the world in glorious beauty.

Gureev stopped in shock, unprepared for this sudden reminder of what life could also feel like. He laid a hand on the parapet, but the stone only caressed his fingertips with a memory of ancient mountains.

Gureev drew his arm away and cleared his throat.

He looked down into the courtyard. The small figure of the messenger was already climbing up the stairs into the outer walls. Heavy iron chains began to groan.

The gates opened.

And the crowd poured in.

There was no triumphant howling, no trampling horde, no vandalism. Nothing in these people's demeanor fitted Gureev's imagery of the roused rabble, the ghost of all those tales lodged in his memory. This was not a pillage, but a pilgrimage. A slow and conscious homecoming, a congregation taking possession of what rightfully had always been theirs: their palace, their temple, their creation.

The soft glow of lanterns floated on the tide of colorful robes filling the courtyard. Melodious harmonies rose into the mellow evening air as people spread out over the tidy sand planes, the carefully trimmed gardens. A woman in a purple tunic climbed onto the dais of a statue and began to dance with her, around her. The statute's favor was hard to win, but the woman nevertheless kept on swaying, in the soft meditative moves that Gureev knew all too well. It was the exact same sequence that he himself practiced every morning, schooling himself to calm his mind, to align his senses. He cursed inwardly. What business did that peasant woman have to copy his very own moves? But then of course, they were not his very own. The tradition had been handed down over generations, a discipline for the noble spirit. But not for prancing peons! Gureev huffed. His eyes sought out the woman once again. She was still dancing, and Gureev reluctantly had to admit that her poise was perfect, her every move radiating grace and wakefulness. He turned away. But his gaze only fell on an old man who was going through the same sequence, his limbs thin and shaky, but his focus intense enough to be felt even up on the tower.

Gureev was so caught up in his observation that he did not notice what was happening right behind his back.

Stiff and stone-faced, Zurres stood by the castle wall, the only guard who had not taken position along the parapets. She turned noiselessly and disappeared into the tower.

As soon as she was out of sight, Zurres dropped her solemn formality and began running down the stairs two steps at a time, swift as the wind. She held on to the curve of the outer wall, scratching the precious leather glove as she flew downwards in a spiraling whirl.

She touched ground breathlessly. For a moment she paused, squinting through a spyhole. Then she slid out, closing the secret door behind her before anyone noticed.

Zurres appeared in the courtyard like a ghost, suddenly, out of nowhere. There were no other guards around, as they had all followed orders to retreat before the main gate opened. In her uniform, Zurres stood out among the townsfolk like a beacon. Everyone stared.

Zurres straightened her spine and walked right into the crowd.

Perhaps it was her aura of unswerving purpose that made people feel she was kin. Perhaps old patterns held sway and people instinctively bowed to the air of authority. Or perhaps Zurres was just too fast, walking past before people had fully realized what was happening.

Either way, the sea parted for her.

Zurres soon reached the rear of the courtyard and stepped inside the watch-house. In one swift move, she shoved the cupboard aside, but just as she was about to disappear into the trap door underneath, a hand grabbed her arm and a booted foot blocked the door. Strong arms roughly pulled her back.

Zurres did not fight. Instead, she fixed the bulky man with a hard stare. "You don't want to do that." She lay a finger on his hand, as lightly as someone who did not need to use force to be obeyed. "Let go."

And he did.

Zurres sank into the ground. She locked the ceiling behind her with a sardonic twitch on her face. 'Keep away!' was the command she managed to force onto people most easily. It aligned so neatly with the natural reaction others had in her presence that she was obeyed instinctively.

But today, she meant to accomplished quite a different feat. Her lips tightened.

Without looking back, she hurried through the tunnel until she emerged into a hall of polished marble and gilded pillars. Sentinels with drawn swords and halberds stood by the heavy double door at the far end. All the bolts were locked, the portcullis outside down.

Her back straight, her eyes cold, Zurres approached with the air of the courier she had always been, a messenger from the innermost circle, a bearer of irrefutable orders.

"Open the gates!"

\*

The courtyard had filled up to the point of bursting. Even the hindmost corner by the inner gate, where a moment ago one might still have found space to walk, was now crammed full with people. The crowd could not possibly grow any bigger. There was no point in waiting any more.

Gureev looked over at the fire-spitters. They were all poised and ready, wooden arms bent backwards, strings drawn tight. The soldiers at their feet were on edge, closely watching over cauldrons with the kindling flames. The huge ammunition balls of cloth and oil could not be lit one moment too soon. Only when the sign came, when the strings got cut. Only that very second.

Gureev briefly wondered whether people on the ground had noticed the fire-spitters, and whether they could tell the difference between a fire-spitter just standing there and one being strung down and readied. He shook his head, throwing off the thought. With furrowed brows he listened to the people's song drifting into the evening sky. The queen's banner fluttered imperiously over their heads, like the narrowed eye of a god, an ever-present command.

His arms wrapped tightly around his chest, Gureev turned and walked to the dais at the center of the tower. He took a deep breath and stepped up, shoulders squared.

All the soldiers tensed, their attention riveted on him.

But then Gureev's eyes widened. He stared back down into the courtyard.

The inner gates had opened.

The crowd was pouring into the palace, into the sanctuary they had never been meant to breach.

Gureev spun around. "Messages?" he snapped at the guard behind him.

"None, my lord!"

Gureev bit his lip. Below, the crowd was thinning where it flowed from the courtyard into the palace halls. Soon the moment would have passed. It was now or never.

Gureev hesitantly raised an arm.

Just then, he noticed the tiny spider on the back of his hand. She bent her head to the ground before his eyes, kneeling down on delicate front legs. Raising her body to the sky, she let an invisible thread float out into the air, a lifeline as tender and strong as silk.

Gureev's hand tightened into a fist.

The spider flew away.

The fist came down in a long, slow circle. All the soldiers exhaled. In perfect synchronicity, they covered up the cauldrons, stifling the kindling flames.

Anee was swept up in the tide of people pouring into the palace. She was unsure what had happened. Had they been invited in? To a parley? But there was no one here to meet them. The marble hall lay empty before them, polished floors gleaming, gilt pillars shining.

Cautiously, Anee walked on, deeper into—perhaps—the lion's den. Or the heart of freedom.

A flicker of movement caught her eye. Up on the gallery, where no one from the crowd could have gotten yet, lived the swish of a robe, the shadow of a staff. Mages.

Before Anee had gathered her wits, all hell broke loose.

A demon tore through the wall, his bared fangs sharp as a dragon's, his wings raised up in menace. A wall of fire flared up behind him, barring the way into the palace.

The crowd stood frozen in shock. Then the demon's war cry hit them like a bolt of lightning. Screaming in panic, people turned to run back out the gates, scrambling and jostling before the crammed doorway.

But others held their own. Like Anee, they found the crystal in their pockets and pulled closer together. Anne took her place in line, wrapping one arm around her neighbor, raising her shiny stone high above the head. People shuffled and stumbled, trying to find the right position, and very quickly the lines closed, the crystals aligned.

Anee was in the wrong place, one too many in her line, and she let go, only to get pulled in by another, pushed forward, moved on. And when finally all the crystals were set, when the perfect wedge had formed, this was where Anee found herself: at the apex.

She felt the power lines converging behind her, from the crystals or from sheer determination, from a deep life force creating a whole that was much larger than the sum of its parts. Much stronger. Strong enough to take on a demon.

Or so their reasoning had been, beforehand.

But now Anee was facing the devil for real.

Her knees were shaking. Yet the power behind her held firm. Anee raised her chin, and in the pose of natural grace that she had practiced morning after morning all her life, she advanced.

The demon narrowed his eyes and snarled at the glinting crystals. He rose up like a tidal wave, drawing back only to crush ashore later with all the more devastating force. But when the demon bore down, it was not into the crowd, but into the floor right before Anee's feet. The earth trembled and broke. A black rift opened up, a fathomless pit that swallowed the demon whole and would do the same to Anee if she took one more step.

Anee shuddered, staring down into the abyss. Black smoke rose in poisonous curls from the deep, winding around her ankle, her throat. She coughed.

But the crystal clearness behind her cut in. Or the crowd pushed. Anee stumbled forward over the edge, her footing on the marble floor lost, all her weight falling onto soot and mist. And the vapors held. Anee was walking on clouds.

Her lungs cleared. She could breathe freely again.

Behind her, the people began chanting a hymn of freedom and love, as they walked on smokey waters, drifted over a hellish sky.

They bridged the abyss.

But the smoke rose up to follow.

Anee's vision blurred. She could barely make out the corridor that had lain so clearly before her just one moment ago. It seemed to be branching off in many different directions at once, taking turns, bending backwards, shivering in uncertain twilight.

Anee advanced, but the corridor disappeared. She tried to trap it with her foot, but it twitched and slithered. She wanted to hold on to the wall, but the wall wasn't there.

Anee took a deep breath and focused. Her mind found the lines of energy flowing through the crystals, and projected their beam out into the fog like a beacon. And it worked!

Anee could see the corridor right before her, and a great hall beyond the doors at the end. She started walking, her mind deeply intertwined with the crystal lines. The corridor did not disappear, it only writhed and shivered. But finally it began to contract, the walls moving noiselessly, narrowing the space.

Anee hurried. Miraculously, the whole group was still right behind her, the formation intact. But the walls were closing in. Anee could see the doors at the end beginning to twitch, to slowly close.

She raced down the corridor. Ornate pillars rushed past the corner of her eye, silk tapestries and ancient oil paintings. Anee could see the candles of the great hall before her – and slammed right into a stone wall. The group washed up against the slabs in a bloody mess of bruised skulls and battered limbs. The wedge disintegrated. The crystal lines fell. Anne could feel the power draining from her veins.

The corridor with the double doors had vanished. There never had been candlelight or a great hall. A disheveled heap, people found themselves lying at the foot of a completely different wall.

Anee tasted blood on her lips, a tribute of her broken nose. She numbly touched her head.

Then the hair at the back of her neck rose.

From inside the wall came an echo of hollow laughter, eerie and disdainful. Dark specters oozed from the stone, gathering in nooks beneath the ceiling. With an ear-splitting screech, they descended onto a group on the fringes, driving them into a corridor that disappeared directly behind them.

The haunt turned around, targeting another fringe group, and another, until the whole crowd was falling to pieces.

“Keep together!” Anne shouted. It sent a lightning bolt through her battered head. But her words were lost among the ghostly howl.

Nevertheless, people near her had felt her purpose, or found the same wisdom within themselves.

A much smaller wedge was forming, taking position once more behind Anee. The power returned.

But Anee's head was reeling. She could barely see through the pain. She wiped the blood off her face and staggered forward, but all around, halls were still wavering, bending and shifting.

Anee helplessly swayed between them.

Then she felt a shiver in the human lines behind her, a jostle that moved up until it was right next to her. A cloaked man appeared by her side and pushed her away, taking her place at the top.

Anee gratefully settled in.

She stepped in line behind him, raising her crystal, letting all the power focus on that one man.

He started moving. And suddenly, the ease and certainty was back. Anee had no idea how he did it, but the man was walking through ghosts and vapors, through walls that were not there, and into corridors that only showed themselves once he was already inside.

For a moment, Anee closed her eyes, and all the figments and chimeras disappeared. What a relief! Nevertheless, she would have wanted to hold out a hand before her to keep from running into a wall once again.

Anee squinted over at her guide and finally realized what he was doing, and how. With the natural ease of a blind person, he walked over the polished stone floor, lightly running a stick back and forth to check his path. Everyone's path. He knew! Practiced and experienced, he could sense. And easily bypass the mage's illusions.

Anne would have had a hard time finding the throne room in the palace at the best of times. But this way, they might actually stand a chance! With a sigh of relief, Anee let her eyes fall shut once more and entrusted herself to the blind man moving so assuredly before her. With the distractions of her vision gone, Anee's other senses slowly gained ground. She could still hear the screeching ghosts, but also feel the press of bodies behind her, the focused energy of people

united in their goal. She was aware of the smoothness of the floor, the fabric of the cloak she held on to.

And there, her subconscious paused. Touching, squeezing. Her fingers twitched. What was it that... Sudden realization shot through her. She knew those braids, those tell-tale bulges underneath the cloak! This was a uniform! The man leading them all was a royal servant, in very thin disguise!

Anee jerked her arm away, stumbling. Not knowing whether to trust or to scream in alarm.

But it was too late.

Her guide stopped and slunk away into the shadows.

The whole wedge had come to a halt before gilded double doors bearing the crest of the queen.

All the ghosts had disappeared.

In the utter silence they left behind, the doors swung open.

\*

The throne room stretched before Anee, unbelievably long, impossibly high. At the far end, three steps led up to a dais that held the imperial seat, ornately carved and blackened with age. The queen fixed the disheveled lot at her gate with an arrogant eye.

Anee saw the poison in her gaze. And the guards in her back. There were so many. An entire battalion seemed to be standing behind the queen.

Anee walked in. Her whole group came to a halt in the middle of the room. She licked her lips. In their planning, the Cores had not known who would finally make it to a parley, and so they had elected many spokespersons. Anee was one of them. And she was here now.

She glanced back over her shoulder. Uniforms had appeared in the doorway.

Anee resolutely turned toward the queen.

“Your Majesty. Turennamin.” She called the queen by her name, like an equal among equals. “You know why we are here. We mean no harm.”

The regal eyebrow rose just the slightest disdainful fraction.

Anee carried on. “We wish to live in peace, equal and free. There can be a good life for all, if only we put our minds to it. Please do join us. Or at least let us continue. Let the cruelty of the past lie behind us. There is a brighter future ahead, if only we walk toward it. Please come with us. Choose peace.”

The queen’s lips curled just the slightest bit at the corner, never enough for a sneer. She raised a languid finger, and only the fire in her eyes betrayed the bored elegance of her move. With one flick of the wrist, she condemned Anee.

A shiver ran through the guards. They drew closer together, the breath of a move, barely visible to the naked eye. And yet the energy cursing between them was palpable. All their gazes were intensely focused, homing in on just one person.

But it was not Anee. Nor the queen.

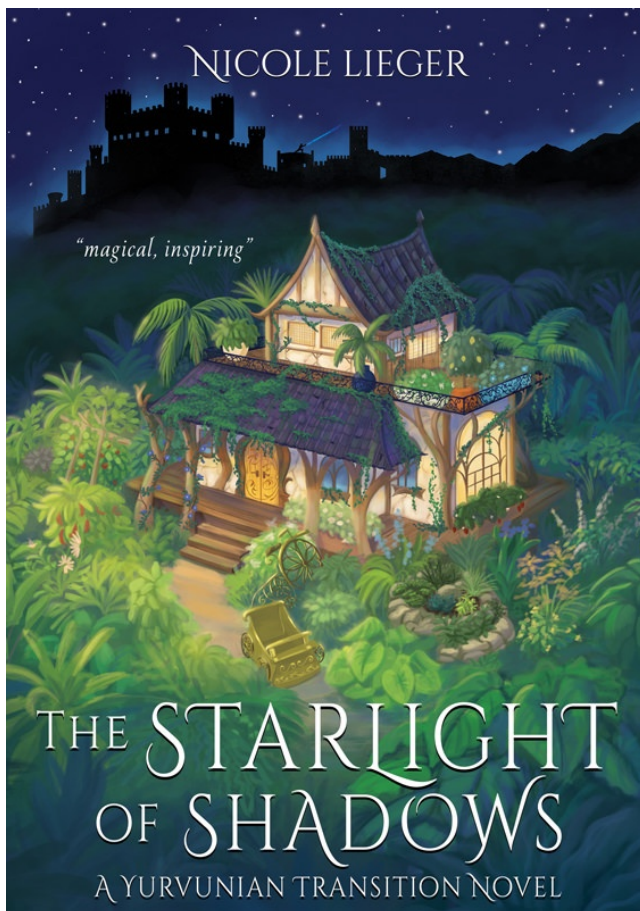
A bulky man had pushed through the doors, his uniform torn, his arm covered in blood. His breath came heavy and he did not say a word. But his gaze found that of the guards and he nodded, with one curt jerk of his head.

The guards exhaled. At the same time, a tremor seemed to run through them, like through a herd of horses on the brink of a gallop.

The captain of the guard stepped forward, hand on his hilt. “Your Majesty,” he said. “The army is disbanding. The palace guard stands with the people. I have the honor of informing you that the monarchy is abolished. We will escort you safely to your new home. Please come quietly.”

**Dedicated**

**to all the people in Eastern Europe  
who brought about the peaceful transition of 1989.**



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EIN YURVANISCHER WANDELROMAN

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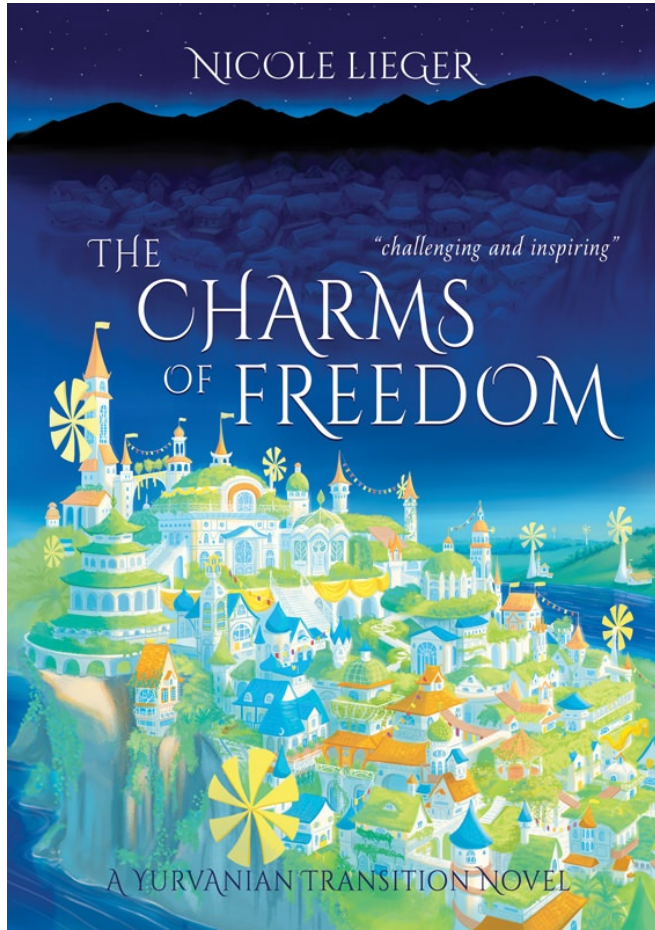
THE STARLIGHT OF SHADOWS  
A YURVANIAN TRANSITION NOVEL

# THE STARLIGHT OF SHADOWS

“A song of a lush, convivial world. A gripping vision.”

Amalai lives fully in the sensuality of this breathing earth. One day the rustling leaves lead her to a mysterious stranger, to a song of fay... But then a youth is found dead in the forest. Is a demon threatening the town? Already the soldiers start marching, foreboding a return of warlords and violence. But Amalai's friends will not take it. They will defend the hard-won freedom of convivial life. With force? Or precisely not with force, but with powers enchantingly different? A young rebel and a misplaced prince, a no-nonsense magician and a shimmering dreamer band together to save the town, facing an uncertain truth full of fear and love and the beauty of starlight...

“A temptation for fans of Becky Chambers,  
Ursula K. LeGuin and Studio Ghibli.”



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# THE CHARMS OF FREEDOM

## “Enchanting Visions”

Windmills, community spirit, rooftop gardens – that is what young magician Enim knows. But when he travels out to the mountains, misery hits him in the face. Before he knows it, Enim gets adopted into a found family that is determined to take on the powerful owners, free the miners, and bring on a good life for all. The exact steps to saving the world are still a little unclear. But that won't stop anyone from rushing ahead!

Between the politics of the capital and the instruments of magic, a tangled love-tie and a popular uprising, their snug group of orphan kids and the inner strength to ban a demon – will they finally make it happen?

“An inspiring tale full of gentle humor, vibrant zeal and ludicrous optimism.”

# About the Author

Nicole Lieger has a background in social sciences and humanities. From campaigning for human rights she moved into management of NGOs and research institutes, then into supporting more ephemeral structures of civil society. Her topics include restorative justice, deep ecology, uniting means and ends in political action, social progress, material simplicity and a rich inner life.

When she is not teaching at university or writing novels, she is passionately cultivating everyday practices of living in alignment with a breathing earth and a mind-boggling humanity.

And she's happy to hear from you – Do get in touch!

