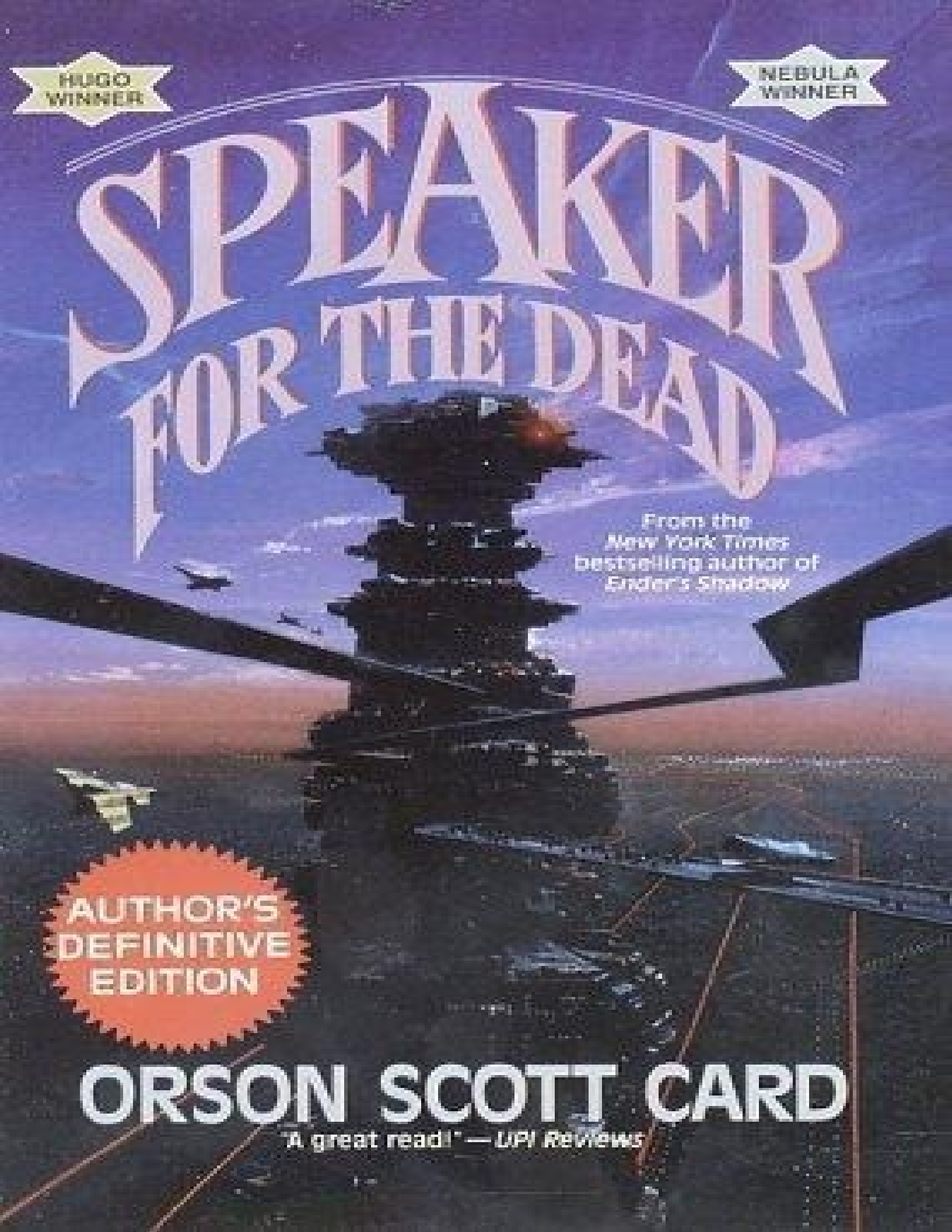
HUGO WINNER
NEBULA WINNER
SPEAKER FOR THE DEAD
From the New York Times bestselling author of Ender's Shadow
AUTHOR'S DEFINITIVE EDITION
ORSON SCOTT CARD
"A great read!" — UPI Reviews

Speaker for the Dead

by

Orson Scott Card

Prologue

In the year 1830, after the formation of Starways Congress, a robot scout ship sent a report by ansible: The planet it was investigating was well within the parameters for human life. The nearest planet with any kind of population pressure was Baja; Starways Congress granted them the exploration license.

So it was that the first humans to see the new world were Portuguese by language, Brazilian by culture, and Catholic by creed. In the year 1886 they disembarked from their shuttle, crossed themselves, and named the planet Lusitania-the ancient name of Portugal. They set about cataloguing the flora and fauna. Five days later they realized that the little forest-dwelling animals that they had called porquinhos-piggies-were not animals at all.

For the first time since the Xenocide of the Buggers by the Monstrous Ender, humans had found intelligent alien life.

The piggies were technologically primitive, but they used tools and built houses and spoke a language. "It is another chance God has given us," declared Archcardinal Pio of Baja. "We can be redeemed for the destruction of the buggers."

The members of Starways Congress worshipped many gods, or none, but they agreed with the Archcardinal. Lusitania would be settled from Baja, and therefore under Catholic License, as tradition demanded. But the colony could never spread beyond a limited area or exceed a limited population. And it was bound, above all, by one law: the piggies were not to be disturbed.

Chapter 1

Pipo

Since we are not yet fully comfortable with the idea that people from the next village are as human as ourselves, it is presumptuous in the extreme to suppose we could ever look at sociable, tool-making creatures who arose from other evolutionary paths and see not beasts but brothers, not rivals but fellow pilgrims journeying to the shrine of intelligence.

Yet that is what I see, or yearn to see. The difference between raman and varelse is not in the creature judged, but in the creature judging. When we declare an alien species to be raman, it does not mean that they have passed a threshold of moral maturity. It means that we have.

-Demosthenes, *Letter to the Framlings*

Rooter was at once the most difficult and the most helpful of the pequeninos. He was always there whenever Pipo visited their clearing, and did his best to answer the questions Pipo was forbidden by law to come right out and ask. Pipo depended on him-too much, probably-yet though Rooter clowned and played like the irresponsible youngling that he was, he also watched, probed, tested. Pipo always had to beware of the traps that Rooter set for him.

A moment ago Rooter had been shimmying up trees, gripping the bark with only the horny pads on his ankles and inside his thighs. In his hands he carried two sticks-Father Sticks, they were called-which he beat against the tree in a compelling, arhythmic pattern all the while he climbed.

The noise brought Mandachuva out of the log house. He called to Rooter in the Males' Language, and then in Portuguese. "P'ra baixo, bicho!" Several piggies nearby, hearing his Portuguese wordplay, expressed their appreciation by rubbing their thighs together sharply. It made a hissing noise, and Mandachuva took a little hop in the air in delight at their applause.

Rooter, in the meantime, bent over backward until it seemed certain he would fall. Then he flipped off with his hands, did a somersault in the air, and landed on his legs, hopping a few times but not stumbling.

"So now you're an acrobat," said Pipo.

Rooter swaggered over to him. It was his way of imitating humans. It

was all the more effective as ridicule because his flattened upturned snout looked decidedly porcine. No wonder that offworlders called them "piggies." The first visitors to this world had started calling them that in their first reports back in '86, and by the time Lusitania Colony was founded in 1925, the name was indelible. The xenologers scattered among the Hundred Worlds wrote of them as "Lusitanian Aborigines," though Pipo knew perfectly well that this was merely a matter of professional dignity-except in scholarly papers, xenologers no doubt called them piggies, too. As for Pipo, he called them pequeninos, and they seemed not to object, for now they called themselves "Little Ones." Still, dignity or not, there was no denying it. At moments like this, Rooter looked like a hog on its hind legs.

"Acrobat," Rooter said, trying out the new word. "What I did? You have a word for people who do that? So there are people who do that as their work?"

Pipo sighed silently, even as he froze his smile in place. The law strictly forbade him to share information about human society, lest it contaminate piggy culture. Yet Rooter played a constant game of squeezing the last drop of implication out of everything Pipo said. This time, though, Pipo had no one to blame but himself, letting out a silly remark that opened unnecessary windows onto human life. Now and then he got so comfortable among the pequeninos that he spoke naturally. Always a danger. I'm not good at this constant game of taking information while trying to give nothing in return. Libo, my close-mouthed son, already he's better at discretion than I am, and he's only been apprenticed to me-how long since he turned thirteen?-four months.

"I wish I had pads on my legs like yours," said Pipo. "The bark on that tree would rip my skin to shreds."

"That would cause us all to be ashamed. " Rooter held still in the expectant posture that Pipo thought of as their way of showing mild anxiety, or perhaps a nonverbal warning to other pequeninos to be cautious. It might also have been a sign of extreme fear, but as far as Pipo knew he had never seen a pequenino feel extreme fear.

In any event, Pipo spoke quickly to calm him. "Don't worry, I'm too old and soft to climb trees like that. I'll leave it to you younglings."

And it worked; Rooter's body at once became mobile again. "I like to climb trees. I can see everything." Rooter squatted in front of Pipo and leaned his face in close. "Will you bring the beast that runs over the grass without touching the ground? The others don't believe me when I say I saw such a thing."

Another trap. What, Pipo, xenologer, will you humiliate this individual of

the community you're studying? Or will you adhere to the rigid law set up by Starways Congress to govern this encounter? There were few precedents. The only other intelligent aliens that humankind had encountered were the buggers, three thousand years ago, and at the end of it the buggers were all dead. This time Starways Congress was making sure that if humanity erred, their errors would be in the opposite direction. Minimal information, minimal contact.

Rooter recognized Pipo's hesitation, his careful silence.

"You never tell us anything," said Rooter. "You watch us and study us, but you never let us past your fence and into your village to watch you and study you."

Pipo answered as honestly as he could, but it was more important to be careful than to be honest. "If you learn so little and we learn so much, why is it that you speak both Stark and Portuguese while I'm still struggling with your language?"

"We're smarter." Then Rooter leaned back and spun around on his buttocks so his back was toward Pipo. "Go back behind your fence," he said.

Pipo stood at once. Not too far away, Libo was with three pequeninos, trying to learn how they wove dried merdona vines into thatch. He saw Pipo and in a moment was with his father, ready to go. Pipo led him off without a word; since the pequeninos were so fluent in human languages, they never discussed what they had learned until they were inside the gate.

It took a half hour to get home, and it was raining heavily when they passed through the gate and walked along the face of the hill to the Zenador's Station. Zenador? Pipo thought of the word as he looked at the small sign above the door. On it the word XENOLOGER was written in Stark. That is what I am, I suppose, thought Pipo, at least to the offworlders. But the Portuguese title Zenador was so much easier to say that on Lusitania hardly anyone said xenologer, even when speaking Stark. That is how languages change, thought Pipo. If it weren't for the ansible, providing instantaneous communication among the Hundred Worlds, we could not possibly maintain a common language. Interstellar travel is far too rare and slow. Stark would splinter into ten thousand dialects within a century. It might be interesting to have the computers run a projection of linguistic changes on Lusitania, if Stark were allowed to decay and absorb Portuguese-

"Father," said Libo.

Only then did Pipo notice that he had stopped ten meters away from the station. Tangents. The best parts of my intellectual life are tangential, in areas

outside my expertise. I suppose because within my area of expertise the regulations they have placed upon me make it impossible to know or understand anything. The science of xenology insists on more mysteries than Mother Church.

His handprint was enough to unlock the door. Pipo knew how the evening would unfold even as he stepped inside to begin. It would take several hours of work at the terminals for them both to report what they had done during today's encounter. Pipo would then read over Libo's notes, and Libo would read Pipo's, and when they were satisfied, Pipo would write up a brief summary and then let the computers take it from there, filing the notes and also transmitting them instantly, by ansible, to the xenologers in the rest of the Hundred Worlds. More than a thousand scientists whose whole career is studying the one alien race we know, and except for what little the satellites can discover about this arboreal species, all the information my colleagues have is what Libo and I send them. This is definitely minimal intervention.

But when Pipo got inside the station, he saw at once that it would not be an evening of steady but relaxing work. Dona Cristo was there, dressed in her monastic robes. Was it one of the younger children, in trouble at school?

"No, no," said Dona Cristo. "All your children are doing very well, except this one, who I think is far too young to be out of school and working here, even as an apprentice. "

Libo said nothing. A wise decision, thought Pipo. Dona Cristo was a brilliant and engaging, perhaps even beautiful, young woman, but she was first and foremost a monk of the Order of the Filhos da Mente de Cristo, Children of the Mind of Christ, and she was not beautiful to behold when she was angry at ignorance and stupidity. It was amazing the number of quite intelligent people whose ignorance and stupidity had melted somewhat in the fire of her scorn. Silence, Libo, it's a policy that will do you good.

"I'm not here about any child of yours at all," said Dona Cristo. "I'm here about Novinha."

Dona Cristo did not have to mention a last name; everybody knew Novinha. The terrible Descolada had ended only eight years before. The plague had threatened to wipe out the colony before it had a fair chance to get started; the cure was discovered by Novinha's father and mother, Gusto and Cida, the two xenobiologists. It was a tragic irony that they found the cause of the disease and its treatment too late to save themselves. Theirs was the last Descolada funeral.

Pipo clearly remembered the little girl Novinha, standing there holding Mayor Bosquinha's hand while Bishop Peregrino conducted the funeral mass himself. No-not holding the Mayor's hand. The picture came back to his mind, and, with it, the way he felt. What does she make of this? he remembered asking himself. It's the funeral of her parents, she's the last survivor in her family; yet all around her she can sense the great rejoicing of the people of this colony. Young as she is, does she understand that our joy is the best tribute to her parents? They struggled and succeeded, finding our salvation in the waning days before they died; we are here to celebrate the great gift they gave us. But to you, Novinha, it's the death of your parents, as your brothers died before. Five hundred dead, and more than a hundred masses for the dead here in this colony in the last six months, and all of them were held in an atmosphere of fear and grief and despair. Now, when your parents die, the fear and grief and despair are no less for you than ever before-but no one else shares your pain. It is the relief from pain that is foremost in our minds.

Watching her, trying to imagine her feelings, he succeeded only in rekindling his own grief at the death of his own Maria, seven years old, swept away in the wind of death that covered her body in cancerous growth and rampant funguses, the flesh swelling or decaying, a new limb, not arm or leg, growing out of her hip, while the flesh sloughed off her feet and head, baring the bones, her sweet and beautiful body destroyed before their eyes, while her bright mind was mercilessly alert, able to feel all that happened to her until she cried out to God to let her die. Pipo remembered that, and then remembered her requiem mass, shared with five other victims. As he sat, knelt, stood there with his wife and surviving children, he had felt the perfect unity of the people in the Cathedral. He knew that his pain was everybody's pain, that through the loss of his eldest daughter he was bound to his community with the inseparable bonds of grief, and it was a comfort to him, it was something to cling to. That was how such a grief ought to be, a public mourning.

Little Novinha had nothing of that. Her pain was, if anything, worse than Pipo's had been-at least Pipo had not been left without any family at all, and he was an adult, not a child terrified by suddenly losing the foundation of her life. In her grief she was not drawn more tightly into the community, but rather excluded from it. Today everyone was rejoicing, except her. Today everyone praised her parents; she alone yearned for them, would rather they had never found the cure for others if only they could have remained alive themselves.

Her isolation was so acute that Pipo could see it from where he sat.

Novinha took her hand away from the Mayor as quickly as possible. Her tears dried up as the mass progressed; by the end she sat in silence, like a prisoner refusing to cooperate with her captors. Pipo's heart broke for her. Yet he knew that even if he tried, he could not conceal his own gladness at the end of the Descolada, his rejoicing that none of his other children would be taken from him. She would see that; his effort to comfort her would be a mockery, would drive her further away.

After the mass she walked in bitter solitude amid the crowds of well-meaning people who cruelly told her that her parents were sure to be saints, sure to sit at the right hand of God. What kind of comfort is that for a child? Pipo whispered aloud to his wife, "She'll never forgive us for today."

"Forgive?" Conceicao was not one of those wives who instantly understood her husband's train of thought. "We didn't kill her parents-"

"But we're all rejoicing today, aren't we? She'll never forgive us for that."

"Nonsense. She doesn't understand anyway; she's too young."

She understands, Pipo thought. Didn't Maria understand things when she was even younger than Novinha is now?

As the years passed-eight years now-he had seen her from time to time. She was his son Libo's age, and until Libo's thirteenth birthday that meant they were in many classes together. He heard her give occasional readings and speeches, along with other children. There was an elegance to her thought, an intensity to her examination of ideas that appealed to him. At the same time, she seemed utterly cold, completely removed from everyone else. Pipo's own boy, Libo, was shy, but even so he had several friends, and had won the affection of his teachers. Novinha, though, had no friends at all, no one whose gaze she sought after a moment of triumph. There was no teacher who genuinely liked her, because she refused to reciprocate, to respond. "She is emotionally paralyzed," Dona Cristo said once when Pipo asked about her. "There is no reaching her. She swears that she's perfectly happy, and doesn't see any need to change."

Now Dona Cristo had come to the Zenador's Station to talk to Pipo about Novinha. Why Pipo? He could guess only one reason for the principal of the school to come to him about this particular orphaned girl. "Am I to believe that in all the years you've had Novinha in your school, I'm the only person who asked about her?"

"Not the only person," she said. "There was all kinds of interest in her a couple of years ago, when the Pope beatified her parents. Everybody asked then

whether the daughter of Gusto and Cida, Os Venerados, had ever noticed any miraculous events associated with her parents, as so many other people had."

"They actually asked her that?"

"There were rumors, and Bishop Peregrino had to investigate." Dona Cristo got a bit tight-lipped when she spoke of the young spiritual leader of Lusitania Colony. But then, it was said that the hierarchy never got along well with the order of the Filhos da Mente de Cristo. "Her answer was instructive. "

"I can imagine."

"She said, more or less, that if her parents were actually listening to prayers and had any influence in heaven to get them granted, then why wouldn't they have answered her prayer, for them to return from the grave? That would be a useful miracle, she said, and there are precedents. If Os Venerados actually had the power to grant miracles, then it must mean they did not love her enough to answer her prayer. She preferred to believe that her parents still loved her, and simply did not have the power to act."

"A born sophist," said Pipo.

"A sophist and an expert in guilt: she told the Bishop that if the Pope declared her parents to be venerable, it would be the same as the Church saying that her parents hated her. The Petition for canonization of her parents was proof that Lusitania despised her; if it was granted, it would be proof that the Church itself was despicable. Bishop Peregrino was livid."

"I notice he sent in the petition anyway."

"For the good of the community. And there were all those miracles."

"Someone touches the shrine and a headache goes away and they cry 'Milagre!-os santos me abenqoaram!'" Miracle!-the saints have blessed me!

"You know that Holy Rome requires more substantial miracles than that. But it doesn't matter. The Pope graciously allowed us to call our little town Milagre, and now I imagine that every time someone says that name, Novinha burns a little hotter with her secret rage."

"Or colder. One never knows what temperature that sort of thing will take."

"Anyway, Pipo, you aren't the only one who ever asked about her. But you're the only one who ever asked about her for her own sake, and not because of her most Holy and Blessed parents."

It was a sad thought, that except for the Filhos, who ran the schools of Lusitania, there had been no concern for the girl except the slender shards of attention Pipo had spared for her over the years.