



Changing Planes

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Imagine a modern *Gulliver's Travels* and you will have the flavor of the sixteen stories gathered in *Changing Planes*, ten of which are original to this volume. The first tale, "Sita Dulip's Method," relates how a bored traveler from Cincinnati, trapped in an unpleasant air terminal by a delayed flight, "discovered that, by a mere kind of twist and a slipping bend, easier to do than to describe, she could go anywhere—be anywhere—because she was *already between planes*." The method spreads quickly. "The following reports and descriptions of other planes," the narrator tells readers, "given me by friends or written from notes I made on my own excursions and in libraries of various kinds, may induce the reader to try interplanary travel; or if not, they may at least help to pass an hour in an airport."

Le Guin's work has always occupied the social/cultural end of the spectrum of science fiction writing, rather than the blazing rockets, hard science portion that garners the greater attention. Her novels are justly acclaimed for their detailed, carefully thought-out anthropological explorations of imaginary creatures and cultures. In this collection of wry satires and cautionary tales, however, she exploits the brevity of the short story medium to indulge in airy imaginings that would collapse under any longer treatment: There is Islac, a world of runaway genetic modifications in which people sprout feathers, leaves, fur—whatever they wish to order for themselves—and their descendants. There are the natives of Ansarac, who all dwell together in the cities of the southern continent in winter, making, building, and conducting businesses. In the long summers, everyone travels to the northern continent to their ancestral family "homesites," where they grow crops and couples dance their elaborate mating dances. And then, inevitably there is Great Joy, The Holiday Plane, an island of shallow warm seas and scattered islands where natives and visitors can pay to bathe year-round in the bliss of their favorite holiday celebration.

Of course, even the best travelogues pale next to the reality of the traveler's real experience. However, since on this particular plane readers are still waiting for Sita Dulip's method to be revealed, Le Guin's reports will have to suffice for now.

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