



## Sister Light, Sister Dark (The Great Alta Saga)

By Jane Yolen

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**Sister Light, Sister Dark (The Great Alta Saga)** By Jane Yolen

**A warrior woman and her dark twin are destined to remake the world in this “powerful” tale, the first in a trilogy by a World Fantasy Award winner (*Newsweek*).**

Legend foretold the child named Jenna, who was three-times orphaned before she could crawl, a fate that would leave her in the hands of women who worshipped the benevolent goddess Great Alta. In this world without men, Jenna comes of age, learning quickly the skills of close combat. But her most powerful gift lies elsewhere: a mirror sister who emerges only in the darkness—a twin named Skada—and shares the soul of the young, white-haired warrior who might well be the goddess reborn. But if Jenna is, in truth, the one whose coming is awaited, there is cause for great alarm among those who rule the Dales, for the prophecy speaks of upheaval and change, and a devastating end of all things.

An incomparable world-builder and one of America’s premier fantasists, the remarkable Jane Yolen begins a three-part saga as inventive, intelligent, and exciting as anything that has ever been produced in the literature of the fantastic. Brilliantly contrasting the “true” story of Jenna with the later myths, poetry, and so-called scholarship that her coming engendered, Yolen creates a culture as richly imagined as those found in the acclaimed novels of Ursula K. Le Guin. A truly magnificent work, *Sister Light, Sister Dark* takes fantasy fiction to wondrous places it has never gone before.

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## **Sister Light, Sister Dark (The Great Alta Saga) By Jane Yolen Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #238752 in eBooks
- Published on: 2016-04-05
- Released on: 2016-04-05
- Format: Kindle eBook

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“The powerful tale of the events that ended a culture and created a new mythology. A tour-de-force fantasy for adults from the Hans Christian Andersen of America.” —*Newsweek*

“Excellent!” —*Locus*

#### About the Author

Jane Yolen is a novelist, poet, fantasist, journalist, songwriter, storyteller, folklorist, and children’s book author who has written more than three hundred books. Her accolades include the Caldecott Medal, two Nebula Awards, the World Fantasy Award, three Mythopoeic Awards, the Kerlan Award, two Christopher Awards, and six honorary doctorate degrees from colleges and universities in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Born and raised in New York City, the mother of three and the grandmother of six, Yolen lives in Massachusetts and St. Andrews, Scotland.

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#### THE MYTH:

*Then Great Alta plaited the left side of her hair, the golden side, and let it fall into the sinkhole of night. And there she drew up the queen of shadows and set her upon the earth. Next she plaited the right side of her hair, the dark side, and with it she caught the queen of light. And she set her next to the black queen.*

*“And you two shall be sisters,” quoth Great Alta. “You shall be as images in a glass, the one reflecting the other. As I have bound you in my hair, so it shall be.”*

*Then she twined her living braids around and about them and they were as one.*

#### THE LEGEND:

*It happened in the town of Slipskin on a day far into the winter’s rind that a strange and wonderful child was born. As her mother, who was but a girl herself, knelt between the piles of skins, straddling the shallow hole in the earth floor, the birth cord descended between her legs like a rope. The child emerged, feet first, climbing down the cord. When her tiny toes touched the ground, she bent down and cut the cord with her teeth, saluted the astonished midwife, and walked out the door.*

*The midwife fainted dead away, but when she came to and discovered the child gone and the mother dead of blood-loss, she told her eldest daughter what had happened. At first they thought to hide what had occurred. But miracles have a way of announcing themselves. The daughter told a sister who told a friend and, in that way, the story was uncovered.*

*The tale of that rare birthing is still recounted in Slipskin—now called New Moulting—to this very day. They say the child was the White Babe, Jenna, Sister Light of the Dark Riding, the Anna.*

#### THE STORY:

It was an ordinary birth until the very end and then the child hurtled screaming from the womb, the cord wrapped around her tiny hands. The village midwife echoed the baby’s scream. Although she had attended

many births, and some near miraculous with babes born covered with cauls or twins bound together with a mantling of skin, the midwife had never heard anything like this. Quickly she made the sign of the Goddess with her right hand, thumb and forefinger curved and touching, and cried out, "Great Alta, save us."

At the name, the babe was quiet.

The midwife sighed and picked up the child from the birth hide stretched over the hole scraped in the floor. "She is a girl," the midwife said, "the Goddess' own. Blessed be." She turned to the new mother and only then realized that she spoke to a corpse.

Well, what was the midwife to do then but cut the cord and tend the living first. The dead mother would wait for her washing and the mourning her man would make over her, with the patience of eternity. But so as not to have the haunt follow her down the rest of her days, the midwife spoke a quick prayer as she went about the first lessons of the newborn:

*In the name of the cave,  
The dark grave,  
And all who swing twixt  
Light and light,  
Great Alta,  
Take this woman  
Into your sight.  
Wrap her in your hair  
And, cradled there,  
Let her be a babe again,  
Forever.*

"And that should satisfy her," the midwife mumbled to herself, knowing that to be a babe again, to be cradled against the breast of the eternal Alta, was the goal of all life. She had faith the quick prayer would shrive the poor dead woman at least until the candles could be lit, one for each year of her life and an extra for her shadow-soul, at the bedfoot. Meanwhile, there was the child, blessedly a girl, and blessedly alive. In these past years of hard living it was not always so. But the man was lucky. He had only to grieve for one. Once cleansed of the birthblood, the midwife saw the babe was fair-skinned with a fine covering of white hair on her head and tiny arms. Her body was unblemished and her dark eyes looked as if they could already see, following the midwife's finger left and right, up and down. And if that were not miracle enough, the child's little hand locked upon the midwife's finger with a hold that could not be broken, not even when a suck was made for her using a linen cloth twisted about and dipped in goat's milk. Even then she hung on, though she pulled on the makeshift teat with long, rhythmic sighs.

When the child's father came back from the fields and could be torn from his dead wife's side long enough to touch the babe, she was still holding the midwife's finger.

"She's a fighter," said the midwife, offering the bundle to his arms.

He would not take her. It was all he could do to care. The white babe was a poor, mewling exchange for his lusty redheaded wife. He touched the child's head gently, where beneath the fragile shield of skin the pulse beat, and said, "Then if you think her a fighter, give her to the warrior women in the mountains to foster. I cannot bide her while I grieve for her mother. She is the sole cause of my loss. I cannot love where loss is so great." He said it quietly and without apparent anger, for he was ever a quiet, gentle man, but the midwife heard the rock beneath the quiet tone. It was the kind of rock against which a child would bruise herself again and again to no avail.

She said then what she thought right. "The mountain tribes will take her and love her as you cannot. They are known for their mothering. And I swear they will bring her to a stranger destiny than her tiny gripping hand and her early sight have already foretold."

If he remarked her words, the man did not respond, his shoulders already set in the grief he would carry with

him to his own grave, and that—though he knew it not—soon enough, for as they said often in Slipskin, *The heart is not a knee that can bend.*

So the midwife took the child and left. She paused only long enough to cry out the village diggers and two women to bathe and shroud the corpse before it set badly in the rigor of death. She told them of the child's miraculous birth, the wonder of it still imprinted on her face.

Because she was known to be a stubborn woman with a mind set in a single direction—like a needle in water pointing north—none of them gainsaid her going to the mountain clans. They did not know she was more frightened than even she herself knew, frightened of both the child and the trip. One part of her hoped the villagers would stop her. But the other part, the stubborn part, would have gone whatever they said, and perhaps they guessed it and saved their breath for telling her story afterward. For as it was said in Slipskin, *Telling a tale is better than living it.*

And so the midwife turned toward the mountains where she had never been before, trusting Great Alta's guardians to track her before she was gone too far, and clutching the child to her breast like an amulet.

\* \* \*

It was luck that an early spring melt had cleared most of the paths to the mountain foot or the midwife would never have gotten even that far. She was a woman of the towns, her duties bringing her from house to house like a scavenger. She knew nothing of the forest perils or the great tan-colored cats that roamed the rockslides. With the babe swaddled and wrapped to her breast, she had started out bravely enough and managed surprisingly well, getting to the mountain foot without a scratch or slip. Many a strong hunting man had not done as well that year. And perhaps it was true, as the villagers said, that *Fish are not the best authority on water.*

She sheltered the first night among the twisted roots of a blasted tree, giving the child suck from a milk crock with a linen teat dipped in. Herself, she ate cheese and brown bread and stayed warm with half a skin of sweet wine she carried. She ate unsparingly, for she thought she had but a single overnight to go before she reached the holds of the mountain clans. And she was sure the women of the mountains—whom she had long desired to visit, that longing compounded of envy and fear—would give her plenty of food and drink and gold to sustain her when they saw what it was she carried to them. She was a townswoman in her thinking, always trade for trade. She did not understand the mountains or the people who lived there; she did not know that they would feed her independent of all else but her need and that they had little use for gold so never kept it.

The second day was bright and pearly. Clouds lined only the horizon. She chose to walk along the bank of a swift-flowing stream because it seemed easier than breaking a new trail. If she had noticed the scat and could have read it, she would have known this was a favorite run of mountain cats, for trout were plentiful in the stream, and foolish, especially in the evening in the presence of bugs. But she was a woman of the town and she could read print only, a minor learning, and so she never heard the cat on her trail or noticed its scratchy warnings on the trees.

That second night she stashed the babe in a high crotch of a tree, believing it quite safe there, and walked down to the stream to bathe in the moonlight. Being a townswoman and a midwife, she valued cleanliness above all other things.

It was while she was bent over, dipping her hair in the cold water of the stream and muttering aloud about how long the trip was taking, that the cat struck. Swiftly, silently, surely. She never felt more than a moment of pain. But at her death the child cried out, a high, thin wailing. The cat, startled, dropped its prey and looked about uneasily.

An arrow took it in the eye, its death more painful than the midwife's. It whimpered and trembled for several moments before one of the hunters cut its throat in pity.

The babe in the tree cried out again and the entire wood seemed to still at the sound.

“What was that?#8221...

## Users Review

### From reader reviews:

#### Michael Quintanar:

This book untitled Sister Light, Sister Dark (The Great Alta Saga) to be one of several books that will best seller in this year, here is because when you read this guide you can get a lot of benefit on it. You will easily to buy that book in the book retailer or you can order it by means of online. The publisher with this book sells the e-book too. It makes you easier to read this book, because you can read this book in your Mobile phone. So there is no reason for you to past this publication from your list.

#### Coleman Bailey:

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#### Donald Sigman:

This Sister Light, Sister Dark (The Great Alta Saga) is great guide for you because the content which is full of information for you who have always deal with world and have to make decision every minute. This specific book reveal it information accurately using great organize word or we can declare no rambling sentences within it. So if you are read the idea hurriedly you can have whole data in it. Doesn't mean it only provides you with straight forward sentences but tough core information with attractive delivering sentences. Having Sister Light, Sister Dark (The Great Alta Saga) in your hand like finding the world in your arm, facts in it is not ridiculous 1. We can say that no book that offer you world in ten or fifteen small right but this e-book already do that. So , this is good reading book. Heya Mr. and Mrs. hectic do you still doubt in which?

#### William Ward:

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