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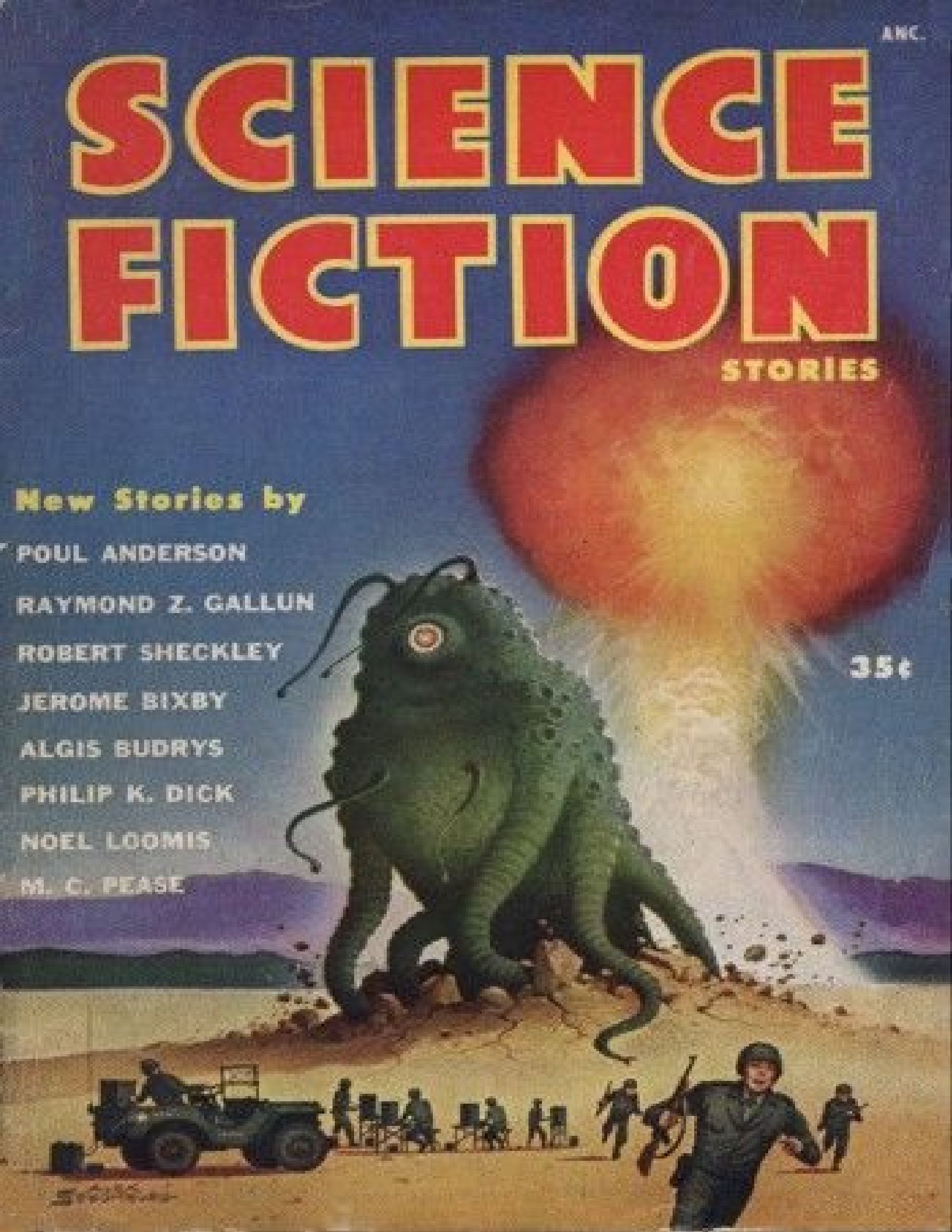
# SCIENCE FICTION

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# **Riya's Foundling**

## By **ALGIS BUDRYS**

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*Now, if the animal we know as a cow were to evolve into a creature with near-human intelligence, so that she thought of herself as a "person" ...*

The loft of the feed-house, with its stacked grainsacks, was a B-72, a fort, a foxhole—any number of things, depending on Phildee's moods.

Today it was a jumping-off place.

Phildee slipped out of his dormitory and ran across the yard to the feed-house. He dropped the big wooden latch behind him, and climbed up the ladder to the loft, depending on the slight strength of his young arms more than on his legs, which had to be lifted to straining heights before they could negotiate the man-sized rungs.

He reached the loft and stood panting, looking out over the farm through the loft door, at the light wooden fences around it, and the circling antenna of the radar tower.

Usually, he spent at least a little time each day crouched behind the grainsacks and being bigger and older, firing coolly and accurately into charging companies of burly, thick-lipped UES soldiers, or going over on one wing and whistling down on a flight of TT-34's that scattered like frightened ducks before the fiery sleet of his wing rockets.

But today was different, today there was something he wanted to try.

He stood up on his toes and searched. He felt the touch of Miss Cowan's mind, no different from that of anyone else—flat, unsystematic.

He sighed. Perhaps, somewhere, there was someone else like himself. For a moment, the fright of loneliness invaded him, but then faded. He took a last look at the farm, then moved away from the open door, letting his mind slip into another way of thinking.

His chubby features twisted into a scowl of concentration as he visualized reality. The scowl became a deeper grimace as he negated that reality, step by step, and substituted another.

*F is for Phildee.*

*O is for Out.*

*R is for Reimann.*

*T is for Topology.*

*H is for heartsick hunger.*

Abruptly, the Reimann fold became a concrete visualization. As though printed clearly in and around the air, which was simultaneously both around him and not around him, which existed/not existed in spacetime, he saw the sideslip diagram.

He twisted.



Spring had come to Riya's world; spring and the thousand sounds of it. The melted snow in the mountaintops ran down in traceries of leaping water, and the spring-crests raced along the creeks into the rivers. The riverbank grasses sprang into life; the plains turned green

again.

Riya made her way up the path across the foothills, conscious of her shame. The green plain below her was dotted, two by two, with the figures of her people. It was spring, and Time. Only she was alone.

There was a special significance in the fact that she was here on this path in this season. The plains on either side of the brown river were her people's territory. During the summer, the couples ranged over the grass until the dams were ready to drop their calves. Then it became the bulls' duty to forage for their entire families until the youngsters were able to travel south to the winter range.

Through the space of years, the people had increased in numbers, the pressure of this steady growth making itself felt as the yearlings filled out on the winter range. It had become usual, as the slow drift northward was made toward the end of winter, for some of the people to split away from the main body and range beyond the gray mountains that marked the western limits of the old territories. Since these wanderers were usually the most willful and headstrong, they were regarded as quasi-outcasts by the more settled people of the old range.

But—and here Riya felt the shame pierce more strongly than ever—they had their uses, occasionally. Preoccupied in her shame, she involuntarily turned her head downward, anxious that none of the people be staring derisively upward at the shaggy brown hump of fur that was she, toiling up the path.

She was not the first—but that was meaningless. That other female people had been ugly or old, that the same unforgotten force that urged her up the mountain path had brought others here before her, meant only that she was incapable of accepting the verdict of the years that had thinned her pelt, dimmed her eyes, and broken the smooth rhythm of her gait.

In short, it meant that Riya Sair, granddam times over, spurned by every male on the old range, was willing to cross the gray mountains and risk death from the resentful wild dams for the thin hope that there was a male among the wildlings who would sire her calf.

She turned her head back to the path and hurried on, cringing in inward self-reproach at her speed.

Except for her age, Riya presented a perfect average of her people. She stood two yards high and two wide at the shoulders, a yard at the haunches, and measured three and a half yards from her muzzle to the rudimentary tail. Her legs were short and stumpy, cloven-hooved. Her massive head hung slightly lower than her shoulders, and could be lowered to within an inch or two of the ground. She was herbivorous, ruminant, and mammalian. Moreover, she had intelligence—not of a very high order, but adequate for her needs.

From a Terrestrial point of view, none of this was remarkable. Many years of evolution had gone into her fashioning—more years for her one species than for all the varieties of man that have ever been. Nevertheless, she did have some remarkable attributes.

It was one of these attributes that now enabled her to sense what happened on the path ahead of her. She stopped still, only her long fur moving in the breeze.



Phildee—five, towheaded, round faced, chubby, dressed in a slightly grubby corduroy oversuit, and precocious—had his attributes, too. Grubby and tousled; branded with a thread of licorice from one corner of his mouth to his chin; involved in the loss of his first milk-tooth, as he was—he nevertheless slipped onto the path on Riya's world, the highest product of Terrestrial evolution. Alice followed a white rabbit

down a hole. Phildee followed Reimann down into a hole that, at the same time, followed him, and emerged—where?

Phildee didn't know. He could have performed the calculation necessary to the task almost instantly, but he was five. It was too much trouble.

He looked up, and saw a gray slope of rock vaulting above him. He looked down, and saw it fall away toward a plain on which were scattered pairs of foraging animals. He felt a warm breeze, smelled it, saw it blow dust along the path, and saw Riya:

*B is for big brown beast.*

*L is for looming large, looking lonely.*

*B? L? Bull? No—bison.*

*Bison:*

bison (bi'sn) *n.* The buffalo of the N. Amer. plains.

Phildee shook his head and scowled. No—not bison, either. What, then? He probed.

Riya took a step forward. The sight of a living organism other than a person was completely unfamiliar to her. Nevertheless, anything that small, and undeniably covered—in most areas, at least—with some kind of fur, could not, logically, be anything but a strange kind of calf. But—she stopped, and raised her head—if a calf, then where was the call?

Phildee's probe swept past the laboring mind directly into her telepathic, instinctual centers.

Voiceless, with their environment so favorable that it had never been necessary for them to develop prehensile limbs, female people had nevertheless evolved a method of child care commensurate with their



comparatively higher intelligence.

Soft as tender fingers, gentle as the human hand that smooths the awry hair back from the young forehead, Riya's mental caress enfolded Phildee.

Phildee recoiled. The feeling was:

<i>Warm</i>	<i>Not candy in the mouth</i>
<i>Soft</i>	
<i>Sweet</i>	
<i>Candy in the mouth</i>	<i>Familiar</i>
	<i>Good</i>
	<i>Tasty</i>
	<i>Nice</i>
<i>The feeling was</i>	<i>Not Familiar</i>
	<i>Not Good</i>
	<i>Not Tasty</i>
	<i>Not Nice</i>

*WHY?:*

*M is for many motionless months.*

*T is for tense temper tantrums.*

*R is for rabid—NO!—rapid rolling wrench.*

*MTR. Mother.*

Phildee's mother wanted Phildee's father. Phildee's mother wanted green grass and apple trees, tight skirts and fur jackets on Fifth Avenue, men to turn and look, a little room where nobody could see her. Phildee's mother had radiation burns. Phildee's mother was dead.

He wavered; physically. Maintaining his position in this world was a

process that demanded constant attention from the segment of his mind devoted to it. For a moment, even that small group of brain cells almost became involved in his reaction.

It was that which snapped him back into functioning logically. MTR was Mother. Mother was:

*Tall*     *"In Heaven's name, Doctor,*  
*Thin*     *when will this thing be over?"*  
*White*  
*Biped*

BL was Riya. Riya was:

*Big brown beast, looming large, looking lonely.*

*BL=MTR*

*Equation not meaningful, not valid.*



Almost resolved, only a few traces of the initial conflict remained. Phildee put the tips of his right fingers to his mouth. He dug his toe into the ground, gouged a semicircular furrow, and smoothed it over with his sole.

Riya continued to look at him from where she was standing, two or three feet away. Haltingly, she reached out her mind again—hesitating not because of fear of another such reaction on Phildee's part, for that had been far beyond her capacity to understand, but because even the slightest rebuff on the part of a child to a gesture as instinctive as a Terrestrial mother's caress was something that none of the people had ever encountered before.

While her left-behind intellectual capacity still struggled to reconcile the feel of childhood with a visual image of complete unfamiliarity,

the warm mind-caress went gently forth again.

Phildee made up his mind. Ordinarily, he was immune to the small emotional problems that beclouded less rational intellects. He was unused to functioning in other than a cause/effect universe. Mothers were usually—though sometimes not—matronly women who spent the greater part of roughly twenty years per child in conscious pre-occupation with, and/or subconscious or conscious rejection of, their offspring.

In his special case, Mother was a warm place, a frantic, hysteric voice, the pressure of the spasmodically contractile musculature linked to her hyperthyroid metabolism. Mother was a thing from before birth.

Riya—Riya bore a strong resemblance to an intelligent cow. In any physiological sense, she could no more be his mother than—

The second caress found him not unaccustomed to it. It enfolded his consciousness, tenderly, protectingly, empathetic.

Phildee gave way to instinct.



The fur along the ridge of Riya's spine prickled with a well-remembered happiness as she felt the hesitant answering surge in Phildee's mind. Moving surely forward, she nuzzled his face. Phildee grinned. He ran his fingers through the thick fur at the base of her short neck.

*Big warm wall of brown fur.*

*Cool, happy nose.*

*Happy, happy, eyes.*

Great joy welled up in Riya. No shameful trot across the mountains faced her now. No hesitant approach to the huddled, suspicious wildlings was before her. The danger of sharp female hooves to be avoided, of skulking at the edge of the herd in hope of an anxious male, was a thing no longer to be half-fearfully approached.

With a nudge of her head, she directed Phildee down the path to the old range while she herself turned around. She stood motionless for a sweeping scan of the plain below her. The couples were scattered over the grass—but couples only, the females as yet unfulfilled.

This, too, was another joy to add to the greatest of all. So many things about her calf were incomprehensible—the only dimly-felt overtones of projected symbology that accompanied Phildee's emotional reactions, the alien structure—so many, many things. Her mind floundered vainly through the complex data.

But all that was nothing. What did it matter? The Time had been, and for another season, she was a dam.



Phildee walked beside her down the path, one fist wrapped in the fur of her flank, short legs windmilling.

They reached the plain, and Riya struck out across it toward the greatest concentration of people, her head proudly raised. She stopped once, and deliberately cropped a mouthful of grass with unconcern, but resumed her pace immediately thereafter.

With the same unconcern, she nudged Phildee into the center of the group of people, and, ignoring them, began teaching her calf to feed.

*Eat. (Picture of Phildee/calf on all fours, cropping the plains grass.)*

Phildee stared at her in puzzlement. Grass was not food. He sent the data emphatically.

Riya felt the tenuous discontent. She replied with tender understanding. Sometimes the calf was hesitant.

*Eat. (Gently, understandingly, but firmly. [Repetition of picture.])* She bent her head and pushed him carefully over, then held his head down with a gentle pressure of her muzzle. *Eat.*

Phildee squirmed. He slipped out from under her nose and regained his Feet. He looked at the other people, who were staring in puzzlement at Riya and himself.

He felt himself pushed forward again. *Eat.*

Abruptly, he realized the situation. In a culture of herbivores, what food could there be but herbiage? There would be milk, in time, but not for—he probed—months.

In probing, too, he found the visualization of his life with her ready at the surface of Riya's mind.

There was no shelter on the plain. His fur was all the shelter necessary.

*But I don't have any fur.*

In the fall, they would move to the southern range.

*Walk? A thousand miles?*

He would grow big and strong. In a year, he would be a sire himself.



His reaction was simple, and practiced. He adjusted his reality concept to Reimannian topology. Not actually, but subjectively, he felt himself beginning to slip Earthward.

Riya stiffened in alarm. The calf was straying. The knowledge was relayed from her mother-centers to the telepathic functions.

*Stop. You cannot go there. You must be with your mother. You are not grown. Stop. Stay with me. I will protect you. I love you.*



The universe shuddered. Phildee adjusted frantically. Cutting through the delicately maintained reality concept was a scrambling, jamming frequency of thought. In terror, he flung himself backward into Riya's world. Standing completely still, he probed frantically into Riya's mind.

And found her mind only fumblingly beginning to intellectualize the simple formulization of what her instinctive centers had computed, systematized, and activated before her conscious mind had even begun to doubt that everything was well.

His mind accepted the data, and computed.

Handless and voiceless, not so fast afoot in their bulkiness as the weakest month-old calf, the people had long ago evolved the restraints necessary for rearing their children.

If the calf romped and ran, his mother ran beside him, and the calf was not permitted to run faster than she. If a calf strayed from its sleeping mother, it strayed only so far, and then the mother woke—but the calf had already long been held back by the time her intelligence awoke to the straying.

The knowledge and computations were fed in Phildee's rational centers. The Universe—and Earth—were closed to him. He must remain here.

But human children could not survive in this environment.

He had to find a solution—instantly.

He clinched his fists, feeling his arm muscles quiver.

His lower lip was pulled into his mouth, and his teeth sank in.

The diagram—the pattern—bigger—stronger—try—try—this is not real—*this* is real: brown earth, white clouds, blue sky—try—mouth full of warm salt ...

*F is for Phildee!*

*O is for Out!*

*R is for Riya!*

*T is for Topology!*

*H is for happiness and home!*



Riya shook herself. She stood in the furrows of a plowed field, her eyes vacant with bewilderment. She stared uncomprehendingly at the walls and the radar tower, the concrete shoulders of the air raid bunkers. She saw antiaircraft quick-firers being hastily cranked around and down at her, heard Phildee's shout that saved her life, and understood none of it.

But none of it mattered. Her strange calf was with her, standing beside her with his fingers locked in her fur, and she could feel the warm response in his mind as she touched him with her caress again.

She saw the other little calves erupting out of the low dormitory buildings, and something within her crooned.

Riya nuzzled her foundling. She looked about her at the War Orphans' Relocation Farm with her happy, happy eyes.

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