

CHAPTER 1 Arrival

As Ali stepped into the fresh air, the door to the interrogation room slammed shut behind her, providing a sense of relief. Having been locked up with no windows or natural light for days made the warm sunny cloudless sky exceptionally sweet. She took a deep breath to ease the onset of anxiety, and anger. *How many days was I in that horrible place - some combination of the Spanish inquisition and a prisoner of war camp - naked, grilled, humiliated; 5 days? maybe more.* She backed up against a wall to one of the cubicles as if her negative energy could be absorbed by the porous stone that provided support. *Decontamination, not comfy, but reasonable. But the rest of it – now she was talking to herself. I should be welcomed; is this how I will be treated for two years? Damn it Ali, get a grip. This internship may be the most important step in your career. You will be the first Earthling to be permitted to enter this culture; this is going to give you a leg up on everyone else from your class, and maybe, you will accomplish something phenomenal! If you blow it because you are pissed off by the way they treated you, you will regret it for the rest of your life. After all they didn't torture me, well, not physically; maybe I'm exaggerating. Breathe Ali, breathe.* Her determination to put aside her anger and succeed was more powerful than the anger itself.

She resented having her clothes confiscated, but she had to admit the gray muslin dress and white T-shirt her interrogators gave her were quite comfortable. The shoes reminded her of the ugly but practical orthopedic shoes she was required to wear the one year she went to a private girls' school. She stepped away from the stone wall, determined to turn her trauma into a positive. She focused on the beautiful day; the feeling of freedom, warmth, and comfort was almost overwhelming, enough to quell the anger for the time being.

Ali realized she could explore a bit, as she was not scheduled to see her mentor until later. *Once I meet my mentor, everything will be OK.* She looked down at the small paper with instructions, in English no less - *well that was considerate* - about how to get to her mentor and then to her new home - the place where she would live for 2 years. She carefully tucked the paper into the pocket of her jumper, thinking: *This planet is where I will learn, "in the field" so to speak, my craft, the practice of her chosen career in anthropology. I am the alien life form here, observing my hosts. I may have an opportunity to leave my mark on a culture, on a planet.* She periodically touched her pocket to assure herself the instructions were there; *I will not get lost; not here.* Dangling from her arm was a drawstring bag that contained the few mementos from her home on Earth, the few that she was allowed to keep when she left the interrogation room.

As instructed, Ali turned right, walking down the short platform where the shuttle had dropped her off. Not many shuttles came to this platform. Ali knew very little about this culture, but she did know, interrogation experience aside, they did not welcome visitors; they were isolated by choice and did not even publicize their society in the *Anthropological Guide to Planets* 2176 edition. Even her college professors back on Earth could not give her detailed information. According to her agreement when she took the internship, Ali would be doing original research which would NOT be published outside the planet. This was the most coveted assignment among the anthropology seniors at her university; every year there were fewer and fewer firsts as anthropologists explored more and more unexplored planets. Ali was happy to accept the internship; she was curious by nature, and an adventurer at heart; and this mysterious planet promised to be an adventure. HOWEVER, the agreement was that her specific knowledge about the culture would be erased (an evacuation, they called it) from her mind before she left, leaving her remembering only the skills she had gained about how to be successful in her profession, not how she acquired them.

She walked along the platform toward the town. The cubicles, which she called interrogation rooms, made of large black bricks, were on her right, and on the left at the end of the platform was a rustic wooden box that looked like it might serve as an elevator, and a long narrow flight of stairs going to the village of Paradiqueo, which lay below. The scene reminded her of the quaint and perfectly designed towns that were illustrated on Christmas cards. A park formed the center of the town; dwellings around it were connected like row houses in Europe on Earth. All the dwellings were identical: three stories high. To Ali they looked like they were constructed using Lego blocks made from adobe material. Each story was slightly offset from the one below to present a narrow balcony in the front. Every unit had the same number of windows across the front; they were long horizontally, but quite narrow vertically, a bit like eyes looking out from the dwellings onto the park. At regular intervals there were stairs between the dwellings with a door and one narrow vertical window at each

story on each side of the stairs. The buildings on the east side of town were built into a hill of black rock. Those on the north and south ends looked the same, but without the black rock. On the west side were two long buildings, also 3 stories high with horizontal windows on each of three floors, but in the building to the south, the windows were all shuttered. Ali could not see any streets or cars. *Was this the whole town or just one neighborhood?* She could not see any structures west of the two long buildings, just trees, like a sparsely planted forest; *maybe there are houses on the other side of the black rock hill*, she thought.

The platform was on the North side. At the end of the platform to Ali's right, rising from the village to above the platform was a single 5-story building. The platform butted up against the 5th floor which had ceiling to floor windows separated where interior walls parted the rooms inside. The windows, which Ali quickly deduced were one-way glass, extended across the entire side of the building. On the platform, there was an observation area facing the windows and a railing keeping observers from leaning on the glass.

Standing by the railing on the observation deck was a woman about 5'3" tall - 5 inches shorter than Ali - dressed in a gray jumper and white tee shirt, identical to Ali's. The woman was wearing a white scarf on her head, and gray slip-on, flat heeled shoes like Ali's. Ali noticed that the woman was not carrying any kind of bag or pocketbook and found this a little odd. As Ali approached, she felt that the woman was very tense and nervous, like someone waiting to have surgery. Her eyes were fixed on the building before them, and she was completely absorbed in what was happening inside. Ali could not see her face, but her demeanor seemed neither young nor old. In the Western world on Earth, she might be about 40 in Earth years. Ali stood a few feet behind and off to the side where she could observe what was happening behind the windows without disturbing the distressed woman.

"Oh my." Ali gasped and swallowed hard when she finally focused on what was happening behind the windows. There were three rooms. In each room there was a woman dressed in the same gray jumper, but with a mid-length white vest, like a lab coat. All the women were fair skinned with blond hair and blue eyes. They all had a haircut that looked like the stylist had put a bowl on top of their heads and cut around it. Ali ran her hand down her jet-black hair which fell well past her shoulders; there was something almost religious about her hair style; *will I have to cut my lovely hair?* she wondered. For sure she would stand out in a crowd. The women behind the glass all appeared to be 5'2"-5'4", and they were all slim, not skinny, but slender. *How does one tell them apart*, Ali mused. The rooms themselves were antiseptic, all painted what Ali called asylum green – the color they used in 19th and 20th century hospitals and asylums in her country on Earth, a color used to promote a sense of calm.

In each room there was a naked young man, 16-18 years old, by Ali's Earth estimate; 5'6"- 5'8", short by Earth standards, but so were the women. The boys were also fair skinned and blond with blue eyes. They had crew cuts, none were circumcised. *The Aryan race*, Ali thought. She shivered a bit when she saw that the young men had numbers tattooed on their arms; her memory flashed back to movies in her history class discussion of the 20th century Nazi concentration camps. She also thought about the underground white supremacist organizations still active in the US in the 22nd century, organizations which allowed only pure Aryan members, and allowed marriage or fornication only among Aryans, and indeed were breeding like rabbits in an ill-advised belief that they could regain supremacy. Except for that cult, one would be hard put to find anyone on Earth who looked like these boys or women from Paradiaceo. Perhaps these people were all cloned; a question to be asked when she met her mentor. The sameness in the three rooms painted an interesting picture, almost like a triptych.

Behind the first window, there were several boys, who were perhaps waiting. A woman in a white vest appeared to be conducting medical exams on one boy, using typical instruments and procedures except for measurements that were being taken using an instrument that looked like a caliper: measurements of biceps and thighs and waists and head size. An assistant appeared to be recording the data on some sort of device. *They certainly are thorough*, Ali thought, remembering the very thorough medical exam she had been subjected to by doctors dressed in HAZMAT equipment during her interrogation. And then, the boy being examined began stroking his penis while the woman was holding a device, *a timer maybe?* Ali wondered. She used a caliper to measure the dimensions of the boy's penis: at rest, and at full staff - length and breadth, and the size of his testicles. At the end of this process, blood tests were taken while the boy filled a receptacle with semen, *to produce a sperm sample*, Ali assumed. The flaccid boy then moved to room 2 while another boy replaced him for examination.

The woman in the white scarf leaned over the railing and reached out to put her hand on the glass. *Was She trying to caress the face of the youngster who was being examined, to comfort him?* Ali wondered. The woman withdrew her hand when he started stroking his penis and reached out again as he moved to the next room.

In the 2nd room, the young man sat at a desk while another white vested woman appeared to be conducting an interview and making notations on her device. The woman in the white scarf was gripping the railing as if her life depended on what was happening inside. Ali was not sure what was going on but remained fixated on the events before her.

In the third room, a woman in a white vest was studying her hand-held device, perhaps reviewing data. When the young man entered, he was left standing while she finished her work. Ali brought her eyes back to the woman with the scarf and noticed that her breaths were becoming quick and shallow, *anxiety?* As the minutes passed, even Ali, who had no idea what might happen next, started to feel agitated. Finally, the woman on the other side of the glass put her device down and said something to the young man which clearly did not please him. He stood up and leaned over the desk so she could brand his back side with a number. The woman in the scarf put both hands on the window and began sobbing uncontrollably. Ali had no idea what the number meant, but she was shocked and angered by the branding. *How can they do that to a human being; we don't even brand cattle anymore,* she thought and then chastised herself: *Anthropologists observe and report, they do not make judgments,* she told herself. *That is what you are here to practice.* Even in college, she had had difficulty keeping her strong opinions and values out of her work. One of her Professors suggested she might be better suited to work as a human rights advocate.

Ali had enough culture study for one day and decided to move on. As she passed by, the woman in the white scarf got a glimpse of her and let out a gasp that was almost a scream as she tied the scarf to cover part of her face before running away. Shaken by this experience, Ali distracted herself by taking a moment to create a plan for her day. Her housemates would not be home until “after work” and she also would visit her mentor “after lunch.” *Whenever that might be,* she thought. Maybe lunch would be when the sun was straight up in the sky, but the sun was already straight up and hadn't moved since she got out of the interrogation room. Ali went over to the stairway down and looked at the wooden box next to the stairs, *rather primitive for an elevator,* she thought. On Earth, most buildings were using high speed single pods to transport people up and down on the exterior of buildings. Maybe it was not meant for people, but rather to lower goods delivered by shuttle to the platform. Ali decided she would take the long flight of stairs.

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The growth on the ground in the park didn't look like grass exactly, but it was thick, lush, and green. Some bushes lined the perimeter of the park, and there were play areas for the children, and some flowers. There were no front yards as Ali knew them – she guessed the park served as space for recreation, unlike many cities on Earth where the buildings opened right off the sidewalk, and still no vehicles, only baby carriages.

Ali caught a whiff of something delightful. She realized she hadn't had any breakfast. Along with her new clothes, she was given a card to make purchases before she started making her own money. *A generous gesture,* she mused, *the only one during that horrid ordeal.* Ali noticed that the smell was coming from a small hut-like structure on the west side of the park. It looked like it might be a shop. Walking toward it, Ali's stomach growled, and she hoped her nose did not deceive her. Once inside she saw that the woman working there was wearing the same gray dress as Ali, but with an apron. *Guess this is my wardrobe for the next 2 years,* Ali thought. She hoped she would be given more than one so she could do her laundry without being naked. She again thought about how long she had been here so far. She had tried to keep track, but she never found a way to record anything, so she was only guessing. *Don't think about it, you'll just get angry again,* she told herself.

The woman in the shop was also blond with blue eyes and slender, with a very pale skin tone, and that bowl-on-the head haircut. *Only a few years older than I am,* Ali thought. Ali said hello and asked the woman if she had any food. When she did not understand the woman's response, Ali realized she had switched off her translator. The translator, which was quite primitive, consisted of a small device that fits into one's ears, a lot like a hearing aids, before they were replaced by brain implants. It was accompanied by glasses with a tiny video camera to record events and retrieve them when the wearer forgets something like the name of

someone. Information might come through auditorily in the earpiece or could display in the lenses of the glasses. The hearing device could translate into English and translate English into Lugha, the native language of Paradiaceo so Ali could say it, or she could switch on a small speaker which would make the utterance for her. She apologized, explaining that the translator was off, and repeated her request for food.

"Where are you from," the woman asked.

Ali explained that she was from Earth and starting a 2-year internship in anthropology.

The woman looked concerned, "so, I imagine you have spent some time in quarantine already?"

"Yes, I have," Ali responded. "Starting with the wonderful detoxification room with the chemical shower, and then the very thorough medical exam, followed by psychological tests. I'm all but stamped FDA approved," she said trying to substitute humor for sarcasm.

"Not a pleasant experience," the woman responded.

"Right," Ali said, "sorry for the rant."

"What's an internship, and what's a rant," the woman asked. Those terms did not translate into Lugha.

Ali was beating herself up for forgetting that this planet would not have the same idioms or understandable word for word translations or even concepts as Earth. She knew lists of words that exist in other languages, but not in English. For example, *pena ajana*, meaning embarrassed for someone else in Spanish, does not have an equivalent English word or American concept. But she had no such information about Paradiaceo. She was so overjoyed to encounter a friendly face, for a moment, she forgot she was not home.

"An internship is a period of time when you do the work you studied about in school before you become a professional, and a rant is when you say too much about something because you are upset about it."

"And FDA approved?"

Ali chuckled, calling herself '*dumb shit*' in her head. "Of course, you don't know that. It's a government stamp that lets the consumer know that a piece of meat, for example, has been inspected and is safe to eat."

The woman nodded and started to laugh, mostly at Ali calling herself a '*dumb shit*' but she did not admit that that's what she was laughing at. "That's really a very funny metaphor – you are an approved piece of meat here."

Ali started to laugh too, and her frustration started to diminish.

"And do you know how much a year is in my time?" The woman asked.

"My translator says 1.3 intervals - is an Earth Year?"

"So, you will be here about over 2 and a half intervals. I'm sorry; your entry here was not very welcoming, so let me be the first to welcome you; my name is Kyra, and I'm sure you will enjoy your stay from now forward," she said with a large smile and some dramatic flourish, and then: "Do you like eggs?"

Ali smiled, "I'm Ali and I don't know yet what I like to eat here, but eggs are a good idea. In the interrogation room, the only thing I was given was gruel and bread, so anything will be better than that."

"Ok, we'll try an egg sandwich."

While the sandwich was being prepared, Ali looked around the small shop. There were sweets in a transparent display case which reminded her of a 19th-century general store portrayed in Earth movies and living history museums. There were decorative items made from some sort of dried grass or reed, mostly

woven, some interwoven with yarn that looked like wool. *Did they have sheep here:* she was thinking about lamb chops.

Kyra chuckled: "We do not have sheep, but we have animals whose fur we can use. Those are made by the Wilderness women."

Wilderness women; I wonder who they are, Ali thought.

"It's a bit complicated," was the response: "The short form is that they do not want to live by the norms of our society, so they choose to live away from the Village in the Wilderness beyond those hills."

How did she know I had that question? "That leaves me with lots of questions," is what Ali said out loud.

Kyra responded: "You are curious; you have over 2 intervals, don't try to swallow all of it at once. I have questions too. Why do we need an anthropologist here? Do you plan to publish what you learn about us."

"Ohhhh NO! My memory of your culture will be wiped clean before I leave," Ali responded, "and No publishing."

"So why do it? What's in it for you?" Kyra asked.

"Three things," Ali responded. "Real life practice of what I learned in school for one, then the adventure of exploring a culture no one has been to or knows about..."

Kyra interrupted: "But if your mind is whipped clean, you won't know anything about us, and if you can't publish, you will have nothing to show for your work."

Ali sighed: "This is a bit difficult to explain. On Earth, we have an expression. 'It's about the journey, not the destination.' The fact that you get there is great, but even better is who you are, how you grow, what you learn about yourself along the way. I will keep all that. And I will gain some notoriety when I return home, as the first, perhaps only anthropologist to come here, and who knows, perhaps the one who helped your culture open up."

"You are on a mission?" Kyra's concern was written on her wrinkled brow. "Do NOT tell anyone about that mission; do NOT say it or think it."

Ali was horrified. "NO! No mission. *A mission would violate my pledge as an anthropologist.* I am to observe and not intervene." Then, Ali's voice dropped to almost a whisper, with a faraway look in her eyes, "but wouldn't it be wonderful if Paradiieceo decided to open up, and wouldn't be fun to go down in history as the one who influenced that move." She paused wistfully, "do you think they can hear us?" Ali asked.

"They can. And you can bet they are listening, so let's drop this idea in case they don't realize you are a young dreamer, and I get in deep trouble for not reporting a potential insurrectionist."

Ali's eyes were as big as saucers: "You aren't kidding," she said, with a hint of fear in her voice.

"Sadly, I'm not, that is an unattainable fantasy, please drop it," Kyra said, with a note of sadness in her voice.

Ali was having difficulty understanding her own feelings. *Fear, yes, but mostly not fear of being sent home in disgrace; rather, fear of causing discomfort or harm to this kind stranger.* Up until this moment she had experienced only oppression and abuse from the people of Paradiieceo. Kyra seemed like someone you could hug after a long day. Ali felt a lump in her throat.

This was a rare moment of vulnerability for Ali; she arrived in Paradiieceo a winner; she graduated summa cum Laude, the highest honor you could receive; she was awarded the most coveted internship opportunity; she had scores of awards for everything from writing to music to community service. Even as a child she excelled at everything she touched: her piano teacher thought she should become a musician; her hockey coach

encouraged her to head for a professional career in hockey; she was an accomplished weaver, and the list goes on. Why shouldn't she imagine this culture opening up under her influence; everything else in her young life had.

First the inquisition, and now this lovely woman telling me that if I even think about accomplishing something here, I can cause trouble for her. Ali's lip was quivering, and her breathing was uneven, but her jaw was set. *They didn't get me in the inquisition; they are not going to tear me down,* she resolved.

Kyra heard. She knew the Council was intending to bring an English-speaking anthropologist to Paradiaceo, so she was studying English. She didn't understand all of what Ali was thinking, but she caught key words. She admired this gutsy, struggling young alien, but she feared for her success, maybe even for her survival. And there was something else Kyra felt: affection, and a hope that she would spend some time with the young intern. "Do you know why we want an anthropologist here?" she asked.

Ali chuckled, she liked this woman's straight forward approach and thought of her as wise. "I'm not entirely sure; I think your people can learn from me what anthropologists do on Earth."

Kyra responded, "Yes, but it's more than curiosity; we trade with other planets and if we have the tools to understand them better, we can perhaps make better deals."

"So, you do want Paradiaceo to open up?" Ali asked.

"Absolutely not; if we do business with another culture, and it amounts to more than leave the goods on the docking platform, they must sign an agreement to have their minds evacuated, just like yours will be."

Ali detected an honesty and goodness in Kyra, and something else, trust maybe, a connection she could not identify and did not understand. "Would you have a coffee with me one day when you are not working."

"I'd like that. We do not have coffee; it will have to be tea," Kyra responded.

"So, tea it is." Ali's voice carried a note of excitement; she started to extend her hand, but quickly saw that Kyra's arms were firmly at her side. *Ok, no handshakes in Paradiaceo.*

"I've never been away from home; isn't it scary to be in a place you don't know anything about," Kyra asked.

"A bit terrifying," Ali responded, thinking: *Why am I allowing this woman to see me being vulnerable.* "But I like adventure; I believe that it is by facing our fears that we learn and discover and invent inside and outside ourselves."

The sandwich was ready. "You can sit in the park," Kyra suggested, "but please bring the plate and napkin back to me."

"Certainly. You don't use disposable dishes?"

"No, we are a small community with limited resources, so we waste very little. Do you want some tea?"

"Yes, please." Ali thought to herself: *Okay, two notes: no handshakes and no disposables, ah yes, and no coffee. You are an anthropologist; DO NOT assume their customs are the same as yours!* A tiny smile came over Kyra's round face; Ali's thoughts were more interesting than her words.

"Ok, what do I owe you," Ali asked, fumbling in her pocket for the currency card.

"Nothing, it's a welcome meal," Kyra said.

Ali didn't know what to say; she thought to herself, *what are the customs here: Must you refuse 3 times and then accept like Earth's Middle East, or construct a statement where yes can be the answer like in Japan?* "I don't know what to say."

"Do you say thank you in your culture?" Kyra said with a tiny smirk.

"Thank you," Ali said blushing. She had discovered in the interrogation room that the interviewer was psychic and had heard Ali's every thought. Was Kyra reading her thoughts too? *Perhaps everyone did - maybe only everyone who understands English.* Their ability to read thoughts would pose a huge challenge and put her at a definite disadvantage.

Out in the park, Ali found benches constructed of the same material used in some of the products in the shop, *made by the mysterious Wilderness women perhaps?* They were woven from branches of a tree or bush, each bench in a slightly different pattern. *Quite attractive,* Ali thought. Their seats were woven a bit tighter than the back, and there mats of tightly woven reeds on the seats. They certainly did not match the ergonomically designed or the overstuffed furniture on Earth for comfort.

Ali, turning her attention to food, soon realized that the egg was clearly not a chicken egg; it was a single slice of a very large, hard-boiled egg on a piece of bread. Ali decided not to ask what it was. The bread was very thick and moist with indentations acting like tiny receptacles to catch the grease the egg was cooked in. The texture of the bread was strange and rubbery, and reminded her of the bread at the Ethiopian restaurant in the town near the farm where she lived. The tea was warm and soothing, *must be some sort of herb; not anything I've tasted before,* she thought.

Ali took the plate and cup and napkin back to the shop. "What a beautiful day it is out there today. Days like this are rare where I live on Earth. You should close your shop and enjoy the park today."

"Do you have units that are not beautiful on Earth?" Kyra sounded incredulous.

"Yes of course," Ali replied, "rain and snow, sometimes hurricanes or tornadoes, and Earthquakes, too. Some areas even have volcanoes erupting."

Kyra had heard of rain and snow and hurricanes, but she did not want to admit she had not heard of the other things. They didn't even translate into her language. "It's the same here every unit." Kyra was obviously proud of her home.

Ali's translator said 'day' for unit. *Make note of that.* She decided that if Kyra didn't ask, she would not try to explain the weather on Earth. But she thought the weather in Paradieceo was odd. "No rain? How do your trees and grass and flowers and fruit and vegetables grow?"

"Three times each cycle, we have a gentle rain in the middle of the night, and we grow our food in greenhouses. How did you like it, the egg sandwich?" Kyra asked.

"It tasted good. The bread is very different from ours; it's going to take me a while to get used to the texture. *I hope that isn't offensive,* Ali thought.

"We are not very defensive in our culture," Kyra responded to Ali's thought.

Squelching the feeling that reading her thoughts was intrusive, Ali said: "My translator says a cycle is 14 Earth days."

"12 Units, in our time." Kyra responded.

A unit must be slightly longer than a day. "Does that period of time have some significance?"

"It's a prescribed number of units in a sequence which helps you determine when you must work."

"So, it's used something like a week, but a longer time period," Ali thought. She asked the translator how many Earth hours in a unit. The answer was 28. *OK, longer than our day.*

Kyra, listening in on Ali's discussion with her translator, added: "You will be able to determine a unit from when the big light in the sky comes on until the next time it turns on after having shut off. While the light is off, we sleep."

Ali thought, *what a strange way to describe sunrise and sunset*. But she decided to pursue that curiosity with her mentor.

Kyra continued while Ali's translator gave Earth equivalents, "Some people work 4 units/days, and then have 1 unit rest, and then 6 units before another unit of rest; that is a 12-unit cycle. Other people may work 8 units/days with 2 units of rest and 2 more units of work for a 12-unit cycle. The make-up of work in a cycle varies to make sure all jobs always have coverage."

It will take me some time to figure that out. Another tiny smile from Kyra. Then Ali asked: "Is there something inexpensive you can recommend that I could take as a gift to the women I will be living with?"

"Oh, you don't want to do that," Kyra said strongly.

"Really? Thank you for the advice," Ali said incredulously, "In many cultures on Earth, it is considered rude to go to someone's house for dinner without a gift; there is even a saying in Arabic: 'An empty hand is dirty.'"

"Your housemates are being compensated by the Council for providing housing for you, and they would be greatly embarrassed by the idea that you think you are a guest or that you have to reward them like you would a servant," was Kyra's reply.

"Oh, I see;" *come to think of it, you would not take a gift to the owner of a Bed and Breakfast*. Ali was mostly thinking but realized one does not think to oneself in this culture. Anticipating Kyra's question, she said: "A bed and Breakfast is a place where someone rents out rooms in their house for guests."

Kyra was clearly amused - with compassion - by Ali's attempts to adjust to this new culture.

"I have an appointment with my mentor. They said after lunch. How will I know when it is lunchtime?" Ali asked.

"You will see some children coming out of school into the park with their lunches. The Girls' School is behind us."

"And how will I find 063 east."

"Ok, the numbering system is very logical. There are 3 tiers of houses all around the park.

She must be talking about 'stories,' Ali thought.

Kyra looked puzzled: "I thought stories were in books."

Damn mind reading, Ali thought, *tiers do make a lot more sense*. "You're right; we call them stories, the same word as stories in book; some people believe that the expression started because in the Middle Ages people painted scenes from or characters from stories on windows or walls so the floor you lived on could be identified by the story in the paintings.

"Interesting; we need to stay focused," Kyra said rather sternly; the children were starting to come out of school, and she would soon have too many customers to be able to answer Ali's questions.

Ali was properly reprimanded, but to her surprise not at all offended – something about this woman Kyra. She was liking her, and wanted to just hang out here; actually after the interrogation experience, she felt like hugging her, but restrained that impulse.

Kyra explained: "We are on the west side now, so you can figure out where North and South and East are. Each staircase is numbered on the baluster which faces the park, so you are looking for 06 on the east side and 3 is the flat at the top."

Flat, flat? Ali was searching for the meaning. *Ah, yes, British English: a single-story dwelling in a multistory building, like an apartment, OK.*

"Good job," Kyra said with lighthearted sarcasm. "The door is off the staircase so 063 and 073 will be across from each other. The person inside will sense that you are there and come to open the door."

"I will be living at 081 North which is the first tier on Staircase 8 on the North side." Ali was figuring inside her head and then realized that she didn't know if that was privileged information.

"Exactly, and it is perfectly OK to disclose that information. I know where you live and where your mentor lives," Kyra responded. "We don't want people from outside to know anything about us, but we are transparent within our culture, and we are a small village, so we know each other very well. You will be living with Drotá and Salme. You will like them a lot."

"You said 'she' will sense me; so, you know that my mentor is a woman."

Kyra looked and sounded shocked. "All mentors are women, of course. Do you have boys being mentors on Earth?"

"Men, not boys, but yes, of course."

"Are men and boys different?" Kyra was clearly confused and incredulous and becoming a bit agitated because customers were starting to show up.

"Yes, men are adults."

"So, your boys mature? Mentally, I mean. Ours never do."

"Yes, of course." Later, Ali remembered the old saying: *'Boys will be boys and so will middle aged men.'* She would not have wanted to have to explain that saying. She also did not want to get into a discussion about male maturity. "Well, I already have a lot of questions for my mentor. I guess I had better get myself organized. Thank you for everything."

"I hope I will see you again soon," Kyra replied with palpable sincerity, and with some hesitation, "if you ever want a hug, don't hesitate to ask; they are free of charge."

"You will see me again," Ali replied with conviction, now anticipating her next challenge, meeting her mentor.

As soon as Ali was on her way, Marta, the member of the Paradiqueo Council, (the ruling body on the Planet) who was assigned to manage the monitoring of Ali's thoughts and activities, telepathed Eleanora, directing her to closely examine Ali's possible fantasy about opening up Paradiqueo. Eleanora assured Marta that she had been listening in on Ali's meeting with Kyra, and that her opinion was that Kyra was probably correct; that was just a young girl's fantasy, and that Marta should not raise any red flags to the Counsel until Eleanora could spend some time with Ali. She added.