

CHAPTER 19 Journey into the Wilderness

Since being fired from the Boys' School, Ali spent more and more time sleeping either in Eleanora's room of secrets or in the cave she shared with Kyra, on the pretext that she was grappling with her career choice. Very believable since her failure to put her judgments aside and conform to Paradieceo norms were serious violations of the principles of her profession. Ali needed to do her thinking in secret because she was not questioning her career choice; she already knew she must seek another career path, possibly teaching, but she was afraid if she disclosed that, she would be sent home.

She was at first, grappling with the unfamiliar feelings she had whenever she was with Jerod, and the longing she felt when she was not with him. And why was she seeing so much less of Kyra; why didn't she feel like fireworks were going off when they kissed; why was she so often busy when there was time for them to have an evening in their cave; why did she feel so wretchedly alone. She couldn't talk to Eleanora, fearing she would put her in an awkward position, and she certainly could not talk to Aunt Elma. She couldn't talk to Kyra because Kyra was part of her problem. She couldn't talk to Drota or Salme; they were not much for soul searching; Kate was a possibility, but she had enough to deal with and their interactions were wrapped up in the survey, and..... It just didn't feel right.

And the biggest problem – she didn't know what the problem was! And then, she woke up in the Kyra cave having a dream in which she was smuggling someone into the Wilderness, no idea who, and then the scene changed, and she was in the night club getting married. She was wearing a white dress like the Kifu wore for her ascension and the groom was heavily veiled, so she did not know who it was, except that it was a male. Then even out of the cave, she was having dreams, bits and pieces of dreams, dreams that made no sense, men running naked, men being beaten with clubs, children playing in caves, Ali weaving in a cave; bits and pieces of dreams weaving themselves into a tapestry that was hidden from her, dreams she knew she had to suppress: Kyra sitting in a corner weeping, Ali and Jerod riding on a road, Jerod having tea in Kate's kitchen; Jerod playing with children, his children; Ali making love with an unknown man under a blanket. Ali woke up in the middle of the night, fortunately in a cave, when pulled the blanket off the lover in her dream, it was Jerod - *my shoeshine is turning into a love affair.*

That very night, Ali began plotting how to get Jerod to go away with her to the Wilderness; *so he can be my husband*, she found herself thinking. She knew she was probably not thinking clearly, in part because she was trying to logic her way through emotions. Ali had curtailed her contact at the Club in order not to risk having the ban on seeing the same man too often reinstated, so she was like a starving person trying to tell herself to just wait a couple months and then she could have a meal. Several of the persona, who lived in her head were whispering in her ear: "Don't do this; this is stupid; you'll be sorry;" while she would not admit so to herself, Ali was at some level NOT 100% certain this was the best path for her life to take. She was sane enough to realize there were likely many unknown obstacles.

To make matters worse, there was no way to communicate with Jerod in the Village because he was never out of 'mind shot' of the authorities. Another problem with discussing her plan with Jerod was that she simply did not trust him to make a decision and stick with it, or for that matter to keep his mind shut for the couple of months they would have to wait for her to finish her teaching assignment at the Girl's School.

Finally, one moonlit evening roughly 12 cycles (6 Earth months) before Eleanora's Celebration, shortly after her teaching assignment was finished, and after Glynda had reviewed the report from her survey, Ali wrote Jerod a note to meet her by the exit station where they get the vehicles to go into the Wilderness. The note told him he must keep his mind empty.

Ali had been awake much of the night before planning what she would say if she and/or Jerod were caught. They wouldn't like it, but she would tell them she wanted to go deep into the Wilderness to see stars and moon and she did not feel safe going alone. They would want to know why Jerod, why couldn't she go with Kyra. They would not understand or believe, but she would have to convince them that Jerod continues to give her new insights into the culture from a male perspective and that she considers him a friend and

protector. So why the clandestineness, they would ask - fear that someone would say no – an uncharacteristic behavior for Ali, they would think, but it might quell their suspicions.

It was Ali's intent to take a vehicle, but if she failed, they would go on foot. As she suspected, the vehicle station was not manned, or better to say womaned at night, so it was likely a vehicle would not be missed until morning. Her housemates would think she was late at the Club or with Kyra or Eleanora and Eleanora would think she was with her housemates or Kyra. She felt like a teenager putting her parents off her trail to sneak out to see the boyfriend. Ever since she started teaching at the Girls' School, she had become more independent in her decisions and comings and goings, being less likely to tell the housemates or Eleanora where she was going. No one thought too much about it. They loved having her be with Kyra and they knew Jerod was no threat.

When Jerod arrived, she handed him a written note: "DO NOT THINK. We will drive into the Wilderness." Jerod was shocked and distressed but followed her directive. She was, after all, a woman, to be obeyed at all costs.

They drove without lights in the moonlight to a cave about a quarter mile from where Kate lived, then parked the vehicle off the road and went into the cave.

"I want you to marry me and live with me here in the Wilderness," Ali began. "If you do not want to do that, you can take the vehicle and return to the Village. No one will notice it's gone till morning."

Jerod looked like a prisoner who desperately wants to run, but knows if he does, he'll be shot. Obey the wishes of this woman and be punished for going to the Wilderness or disobey this woman and be punished for that. "No, Jerod, if you leave, you are not disobeying me, you will not be punished; you tell them I made you drop me off here, and sent you back, and I will swear your story is true." Ali believed Jerod loved her, but she was not so out of touch with reality that she would be unable to understand if he refused.

She pressed on: "Do you want to marry me? Do you want to stay here and play with the children and to have children of your own? Or do you want to return to your life in the Village?" Ali was firing questions faster than Jerod could think about them. No one had ever asked him what he wanted; he simply did not know how to think about that. He understood obey; not want; he understood punishment, and fear, not decision-making.

Ali continued: "If you stay here, they cannot punish you; you will be out of their reach." Jerod did not know about "out of their reach." He, perhaps for once, knew more than a woman; Ali did not know that there is no "out of their reach" from the Council. Jerod went with her out of obedience, not desire. Going with her released him from making a decision, a skill he had never developed.

They brought the vehicle out onto the road where it could be seen and set out on foot. The moonlit night enabled them to follow the road with no difficulty. It was just before daybreak when they reached Kate's house, in a rare moment of aggressive behavior, Ali tiptoed into the house and got Kate up without disturbing her husband or children. Kate put on shoes and led Ali and Jerod to a cave some half mile from their enclave. They walked in silence without thought.

Once inside the cave, Kate, a bit annoyed by being roused out of bed before dawn, asked: "What are you two doing?"

Ali replied: "Getting married; living here." It didn't occur to her that she would not be welcomed by her friends in the Wilderness.

"Jerod, do you want to stay in the Wilderness and marry Ali?" Kate asked.

Jerod: "I will obey." He was shaking and his voice was quivering.

"Swell," Kate said under her breath, her eyes rolling back in her head. Kate knew that Ali was getting an answer through a translating device. Kate knew what that word "obey" really means in their language. It isn't

the love, honor and obey that Americans use. It is a word used only by males; It means I understand that if I do not do what you tell me to do, you will beat me within an inch of my life.

“Ali, I think that’s the best you will get, he is not choosing to go with you; he is complying with your wishes; I hope you have thought this through. I think you are crazy; I think you have no idea the risks you are taking for your chances to return to your home, for Jerod and quite honestly for the safety of me and my people.”

Ali replied: “I gave him a choice, he can go back and say, I made him drop me off.”

After a long silent pause, Kate responded: “We do not have time to debate this, so I am going to take you to a different cave. You will be safe there as long as you do not venture outside, and you must never under any circumstances disclose its location; do you understand?”

Ali nodded. It was her first inkling of the drama that would follow.

“After you are settled, I will send a message to the Council that you have arrived and indicated that you want to stay and that I have given you maps with locations of caves. I will give them the maps, but not the location of the cave you will stay in. They will be coming immediately and harassing everyone in the enclave,” Kate was giving directives in her language so Jerod could understand while Ali’s translator supplied English. Kate’s voice was steady and firm; she sounded like she was giving directives to first responders at the site of an earthquake.

Ali looked like a deer in headlights; it’s doubtful that Jerod understood enough to be any more frightened than he already was. “I’m so sorry,” Ali’s voice was trembling as she began to detect the magnitude of what she was doing, but not sorry enough to change her mind.

“Keep your minds completely empty, both of you.” Off they went in complete silence almost a half mile to a place in a field overgrown with foliage. Kate went to a spot about 3 feet square with a lot of fallen foliage on the ground. She removed large branches which covered an opening to an underground cave.

Once on the ground below, she picked up a torch and lit it with a wand sitting beside a stack of torches, and then she stood on a short ladder and from underneath, pulled the branches across the opening. The cave had several rooms. Kate indicated the room that was for sleeping – it had some mats and a blanket, and another room with a small table and a couple of chairs for eating. She laid down some mats to sleep on and said she would bring more blankets and some food for them when it would be safe to do so. She did not know how long that would be.

“Here’s the deal,” she told them. “You hide out here; I tell those who come to find you that I do not know which cave you went to. No one in my community will know that I know where you are. I will help you as much as I can, but I will not put myself or my community at risk to protect you.”

Ali was now terrified: “Whatever you say, I can’t thank you enough for helping us.”

Oh, to be so young and Naïve, Kate thought as she disappeared in the opposite direction from which they came. She soon returned with two blankets and a couple of sandwiches, cold tea, and a map of caves in the vicinity. “You will want to go out in a few days to contact your aunt because the Council may alert your parents that you have disappeared.” Here was another aspect of what was starting to look to Ali like a fiasco, an aspect she had not thought about at all: her family back home. “Please go to near one of these caves so you can duck into the cave after your conversation. The authorities will be constantly listening and looking for you. You need to lead them somewhere other than here and keep changing position so they will look for you anywhere except here. You must swear that you will allow yourself to be captured rather than disclose this place. Do you understand?” Ali nodded, tears welling up in her eyes; she was starting to understand all too well.

“Now get some sleep,” Kate turned and left in the direction from which she had come.

Jerod was still trembling, in part because the cave was cold like a crypt – the locals called it the crypt - but mostly Jerod shook out of fear. Ali laid down more mats and the two of them stayed close together under the blankets to stay warm.

Ali was too exhausted to sleep. Jerod was not asleep either. “I want to make love,” Ali said.

Jerod did not know what “make love” meant in this context. He stammered, “a woman and a woman make love, but a boy and a woman can only fuck.” Ali was standing on the rim of the Grand Canyon looking down at the chasm between them. *He does not understand making love, but he will provide sex on command. How will I ever know if he cares for me?* She had not listened closely enough to the answers from her interviews.

Ali explained that in her culture people who loved each other can make love regardless if they are two women or two men or a man and a woman. Jerod had no way of imagining what she meant by two men. Ali decided to leave that a mystery.

“I can’t,” Jerod replied.

“Can’t what?”

“Fuck, or make love.”

“Why not? You’re angry with me?”

“I don’t have my pills.”

“What pills?”

“The pills to get a proper erection, and not make a baby.”

Of course, he would not bring pills; his command performance was to go to a cave and not think. Ali started to laugh and couldn’t stop. Jerod had no idea what could possibly be funny, and she knew he would not understand the absurdity of this predicament.

OK, Ali mused, always resourceful, *let’s see what an improper erection looks like.* A bit of stroking produced a fine-looking erection. The ‘improper’ he was talking about amounted to premature ejaculation.

Jerod was mortified: “see what I mean.”

“Let’s try a little trick,” Ali said, stroking him again with just as fine an initial result, except this time the length of his performance matched his exquisite cock.

Jerod was breathing heavily from his exertion and from experiencing perhaps for the first time, the intensity of an unmedicated ejaculation, and thinking, *perhaps this Wilderness experience is not so bad.*

“From now on this is your medication: ‘Cum once and then cum again,’ she laughed. The activity seemed to provide stress relief. They embraced, and in their postcoital serenity, fell asleep.

When Ali awoke, she heard commotion from above. It frightened her because if she could feel and hear them, they could, no doubt, hear her and Jerod and read their thoughts. Later when Kate brought more food, she assured Ali that her thoughts were safe. You can hear them, but they cannot hear you. We’ve had babies crying down here while the authorities searched. Ali realized that while she could hear the commotion, she could not read anyone’s thoughts. The commotion had been due to the arrival of a team of searchers who had come to the enclave to capture Ali and Jerod and return them to the Village. Kate admitted she had seen the two fugitives. After all, it was she who had contacted the Council. She gave the searchers a copy of the same maps she had given to Ali and Jerod. And she assured the team that she understood the urgency and immediacy of the mission to find them, but no she was too busy to take part in the search.

Other members of the enclave could in absolute honesty say they had not seen the couple and did not know where they were hiding. They believed Kate when she said she gave them a map, imagining that Kate thought it too dangerous to put them in the crypt where most of them had hidden from the authorities when they first arrived. The following morning, Kate held a secret cave meeting to discuss the situation. The members of the community knew who Ali and Jerod were from the interviews, and they liked them. The consensus was that the couple would be welcomed into the community at whatever time they were able to surface. No one asked if they were in the crypt and Kate implied that they were not. Kate had protected many gathered for that meeting and had protected the community by withholding knowledge of the whereabouts of anyone who was in hiding. The only difference here was that Ali was high profile and dangerous because of the information she could take back into the Universe if her departure was not controlled. They had no idea how long the search would continue.

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It was the 2nd night in hiding; moonlight shown through the thatched opening of the crypt. Ali crept out, being careful to keep her mind blank, and went to the nearest cave. Outside the cave, she telepathed Eleanora. She was shaking, and very formal: *"I needed to live among the Wilderness people for a while to better understand them; this is a common practice in anthropology, as you know" - stupid thing to say, damn. "I brought Jerod along to I talk to the men, I mean males."*

Eleanora was uncharacteristically irate and confrontational, delivering her thoughts in a staccato cadence. *"You are lying, maybe not to me, but to yourself. You cannot collect data in hiding. You want to screw your lover in the Wilderness. You intend to remain there with Jerod. You are selfish and brazen. You are hurting a lot of people."*

Ali had never seen and did not expect that demeanor: *"Who will I hurt?"* The question was half genuine curiosity because she had not thought about anyone being hurt except perhaps Jerod and herself, and half cynical because she thought Eleanora, in her ire, was intentionally playing with her emotions.

Eleanora's thoughts had the even-tempered cadence of someone carefully controlling their anger. *"Jerod will be disoriented and frightened and when he is finally brought back, he will lose his status and be severely punished. The members of the Wilderness community will be badgered and harassed, possibly even tortured by the authorities until they can find you and bring you back. Not that it matters, but I will be euthanized in disgrace. You think you will have what you want, but you will be sorely disappointed, and you will be found and sent home censured and disgraced; a black mark that will be on your record for life."*

Ali was sobbing and could not think straight. Maybe Eleanora was right about being sent home in disgrace. She had not thought about losing all her honors from college because of failing at her internship. *OK point taken, but how could they punish anyone but me; it is all my doing.* And then she remembered the Boys' School, the blond-haired blue-eyed child with his pants around his feet, holding his ankles with the HeadMaster determined to "break their tiny spirits," and the terror in Jerod's face when she was not prepared to lose her virginity, and her own interrogation. Eleanora was not playing with her emotions; she was pointing out that these people were capable of cruelty even without just cause.

Eleanora concluded: *"You need to come back and confront what you have done; Contact me when you make a decision."*

She is profoundly disappointed in me, Ali thought tearfully. As she entered a cave directly behind her, she started sobbing, her whole body shaking. *How could I be so stupid and selfish.* She realized that she needed to get back to the crypt empty brained before the authorities sent out a search party to look for her. She ran, gulping for breath, stumbling on debris that was underfoot and with pure will power, holding back tears and thoughts. Once inside the crypt, she again broke down, sitting in a corner sobbing. She was certain she was evil to put these good people in harm's way. She should go out into the night, leave Jerod in hiding and surrender herself to the authorities. But she couldn't..... she just couldn't. She didn't know why; perhaps she was a coward, but she could not turn herself in, at least not right now.

Ali didn't know how long she had been sobbing. She could see Jerod cowering in another corner of the cave, holding on to his blanket. She should be soothing his anxiety, giving him hope, giving him her love. Love... hope... at that moment, she had no love or hope to give. *Everyone would be better off if I was dead.* Again, there was commotion above. *They have come to get me, and these good people are protecting me. I'll slit my throat before I will expose Kate and the others.* This was metaphorical, of course; Ali had no implement to slit her throat with. She spent that night crying. Jerod was still clutching his blanket the next morning.

When Kate came down with food, she could hear muffled sobbing and she could see Jerod with his blanket. She put an arm around Ali and asked her what had happened; Ali just kept saying over and over, "I'm sorry; I'm so sorry."

Kate had listened in on the conversation with Eleanora. "Look Ali, except for the character assignation, it's all true what Eleanora said, but there is absolutely nothing to be gained by you beating yourself up. You could not have known how desperate the authorities are to maintain control. Perhaps you could stage your communications a bit earlier. Last night they got everyone out of bed including the children, and they went from house to house, searching closets and bathrooms, but you should notice: no bruises or broken dishes or furniture." Kate was chuckling, trying to lighten things up a bit. "I reminded them that I gave them a map of caves so they can look for you. Please adopt that story and stick with it." Kate was no longer the drill sergeant; she was the compassionate person Ali had known.

Ali asked Kate if she knew why Eleanora would be euthanized as a failure. Kate had a long ago, faraway look along with some small tremors: "You are Eleanora's failure because she did not convince you to stay in the Village as a lesbian; she didn't succeed in remaking you in their image. You are a threat to their beliefs, their very existence: you don't beat up boys; you like males and consider them human; you challenge their deepest beliefs about the inferiority of males, you appear to embrace our living hell: the Wilderness. Eleanora allowed you to be that while it was her duty to see that you adopted their beliefs. And you are her 2nd failure."

"What was her first?"

"Me," Kate replied, tears welling up in her eyes, "me."

"How? You left 34EY ago; she wasn't a counselor then."

"She was my teacher when I was deciding to be with a male; She took on the role of counseling before she was ready or assigned; she did everything she could; she even sent me to reconditioning. She was overconfident that she could save me. She failed. She was devastated when I went to the Wilderness. Apparently, she did not learn her lesson."

Kate left; there was nothing more she could do to help; Ali would have to deal with her guilt alone.

Several units passed before Kate showed Ali (not Jerod) that at one end of the crypt, there was a stone wall. Removing some specific stones gave access to a hall which led to the place where excrement was treated biologically below the toilet in the bathroom. There was also a stone staircase. At the top of the staircase, one could push on a wooden door which was the bookcase in the bathroom. The set up was very much like a Hollywood depiction of an 18th century English mansion with a secret staircase behind library walls. The underground cave was where the first settlers of the Wilderness hid from their pursuers who were intent on returning them to the Village for reconditioning. Kate and her husband built the house around the cave and have been sheltering escapees from the Village ever since. The citizens of the Wilderness do not ever mention the crypt. Nothing short of threatening to kill their children would cause them to reveal the existence to the crypt.

"Would they kill children?" Ali's looked like she was watching a horror movie.

"I don't think so, but I suppose you could find yourself running a rescue facility for children down here," Kate said sarcastically.

Ali was exhausted from crying, from thinking, from being.

It was a couple more units/days (time had no meaning in the crypt) before Ali had the strength to go out and attempt another communication; she knew she had to try to reach home in case the authorities decided to communicate with her family. Having chosen a different cave from the one she had used to contact Eleanora, she sat on a rock outside the entrance, fixed the loom in her mind and summoned Elma. Elma did not answer, but her psychic mentor and best friend Elvira did. Elma was not feeling well; she was having dizzy spells which put her at risk of falling and the doctor wanted her to rest while they did some tests to find out the cause. *"I caught your transmission, so I thought I had better let you know Elma is too weak to use telepathy."*

Ali panicked on two fronts; her beloved aunt must not die while she is away, and she needed support from home right now. *"Elvira, can you help me?"*

"I can act as an intermediary," Elvira responded.

"Elvira, I've done a very bad thing; I violated a cultural norm here. I know this is crazy, but you know I cannot disclose what it is because of the non-disclosure agreement."

"Yes, I know about that," Elvira said, *"it makes our beloved curious Elma crazy."*

"You see, I broke a rule without realizing that others besides me would be hurt, and now I am hiding out until I can figure out what to do. I am concerned that the authorities will call my parents and tell them I am missing. Please tell them that they must trust that I am OK."

"You have never been one to hurt anyone," Elvira replied, *"this must be very painful for you. Why, I remember when you were just a little girl....."*

"Oh shit," Ali interrupted, *"I must go right now. I'll be in touch tomorrow."*

The lights from the vehicles coming from the Village were too close for Ali to get back to the crypt. *They must have been waiting halfway here. They would have heard me and knew where she was transmitting from.* She did have time to get to a different cave. She went further and further back into the cave, feeling along the side walls with her hand. She could hear voices so they must have traced her to this cave. She came out without her translator so she couldn't tell what they were saying, and she didn't dare turn on a flashlight. *Ok, let's not panic.* She was sure her heart was beating at the speed of a rabbit. For all she knew, she could have been walking back toward the entrance, into the arms of her captors. *Don't think.* If they were inside the cave, they could hear her thoughts. *Remember how to meditate and think in the background. Maybe I should just stand still and hope they would walk by me, but they would have lights.* She stopped and leaned up against the wall and meditated for a few moments, trying to make her breathing shallow. *If they catch me, I will tell them I left Jerod in a cave back in the hills, and I will surrender.* The voices were getting further away, not closer. Then she saw a small ray of moonlight in a corner of the cave. The opening was narrow, but Ali managed to squeeze through it. The lights were moving away from the cave toward the enclave. When she looked behind her, she realized she had been walking through the cave toward the entrance to the crypt.

Now the trick was to avoid the searchlights on the way back to the crypt. She had seen movies of military people crawling on their bellies with guns to avoid detection. The lights searched the field leading to the cave. Slither a few feet and lay flat, a few more feet, and flat. She calculated the pattern of the lights so she could get under the brush cover and into the cave on her belly, diving into the cave headfirst, and catching herself on her hands while folding her legs under to get her feet on the floor - not graceful, but successful. Inside the crypt, she was gasping for breath, laughing, and crying, elated that she had made contact, relieved to be back in her safe place, and devastated by Elma's illness.

Jerod was holding his blanket, terrified whenever she was gone.

Oh, how I need him to protect me and love me and cherish me. I wonder if this is how a woman feels living in a war zone, minus her husband with a five-year-old to care for, Ali thought.

"Come here big guy," she said. She put her arms around him. "The rules of the Village don't apply here. I can kiss you." It was sweet; she remembered in Jr. High School, the first time a boy tried to kiss her. It was like

that at first. He tried to imitate her, putting his arms around her like she was holding him. She slid her hand down his back, grasping his butt and pulling him tight against her; he followed her lead. *No need for the pills he left behind.* The encounter went a long way toward calming Jerod's nerves. *"I guess this is not quite like having a 5-year-old,"* she thought.

It was not long before the commotion upstairs started again. It lasted longer than the last time, and it sounded like something heavy was being thrown against the walls and the floor.

Kate was doing her best to not let Ali know just how brutal the harassment was and how terrified the children were, but when she brought food the next morning after Ali's second telepathic communication, the one with Elvira, she described a somewhat understated version of the commotion above. Her guess was that when they detected Ali's telepathic communication, they went to the cave, and when they didn't find her, they came to Kate's for information. Ali had to go out after dark to remain unnoticed. She decided if her communication was triggering the searchers, she should stop communicating altogether. Her parents would be more and more worried if they didn't hear from her. *There's no end to the unintended consequences of this decision,* Ali thought; *harassing the members of the Wilderness community, had to stop.*

What Ali did not understand was that, especially beating the males, like beating boys in school, was so satisfying to the search team that they did it even after Ali stopped sending messages.

The searchers, made up of 3 women and 3 males came every night. Each time, the children would be dragged out of bed and lined up in the cold to be interrogated. They knew nothing so they had nothing to say; the older children were slapped repeatedly, and the younger ones were terrorized, not harmed physically; but they were able to see that the men, who also knew nothing, were randomly selected to be beaten with handmade clubs hewn from the trees in the Wilderness. The women in the search party believed that the Wilderness men, like all males, were weak and frightened and would tell all in response to the abuse. Some of the men cried and begged the abusers to stop, but they had nothing to tell. Their emotional state was much like people in prisons or concentration camps subject to random reinforcement threats and punishment. The children were anxious and frightened, and many were not able to sleep.

What a freakin mess, Ali thought. *I made what I felt was a reasonable decision and now people are being harassed and abused and no matter how I look at it, it's my fault.* She cried herself to sleep, but she did not surrender to the authorities. The community members were angry about the disruption, angry at the Village searchers, but not angry at Ali or Jerod. Everyone, including the leader of the search team, just wanted it to end.