

CHAPTER 17 Boys' School

Ali expected that the Boys' School would not have artwork like the Girls' School, but nothing could have prepared her for the drab dark gray walls and low ceilings and dim lighting behind the gray entry door.

She had passed the building many times and wondered if it was some sort of warehouse because for the entire block, all the windows were shuttered.

The entry room was small and stark. There was a hallway off to the left and a small window next to the entry door: no furniture, nothing on the walls, just a single bare light source protruding from the wall to the left. In front of them was a sliding metal door that reminded Ali of the interrogation room. On the other side of that door was nothing but a small desk in a corner with a communication screen and a chair. In the middle of the room was the first obese woman Ali had seen in Paradiaceo. Her back was to the door.

She was yelling: "This is the second time you were caught talking to while the teacher was talking, so you will get two paddles. Do you understand, you rude stupid boy?"

Ali took two steps to her left so she could peek around the woman to see a child bent over grabbing his ankles just above where his pants had fallen. The woman was carrying something like an antique fraternity paddle. Ali felt herself shrinking and cowering as she moved back behind Eleanora who loudly cleared her throat.

The HeadMaster turned around and spoke gruffly to the boy: "I have company; I'll deal with you later; go back to your classroom."

The child had blond hair grown below his waist, blue eyes, and a slight frame; Ali guessed he was about 8 Earth years old. He was shaking like a leaf, with tears streaming down his face, perhaps two parts cold because the room was very cold, and 8 parts fear.

"And if you cry, you'll be paddled until you stop," the HeadMaster barked.

He pulled up his pants and backed out of the office like one might have done in the presence of a King or Queen.

Ali was appalled. Memories of the interrogation room she was in upon her arrival started flooding her brain; it was a struggle to get those thoughts under control.

The HeadMaster opened a door which led to a cozy office. She motioned for them to sit in chairs much like the ones Eleanora had in her room of secrets. There was a wooden desk and a chair with an animal skin throw draped over it. The throw was made of the skins from several small animals. It attracted Ali's attention in part because she had not seen any animal skins in Paradiaceo and in part because they were not a patchwork of skins like you would see in the US, but whole animals, about the size of rabbits, laid out with their feet and the tops of their heads sewn together leaving large holes in the piece, whatever it was supposed to be. There was no artwork, but on one wall there was a floor to ceiling bookcase with a few books and some taxidermy: birds and small animals Ali could not identify for sure, but they seemed to be mostly rodents, and a few bats.

The woman herself was an anomaly. She was almost as tall as Ali and probably 3 times Ali's weight. Her breasts were enormous, hanging to her waist, badly needing a bra. Even her hands were an abnormal size. Her hair looked as if it had not been washed in a while and there was an unpleasant odor in the room, from the dead animals or from her - hard to tell. She introduced herself as the HeadMaster and directed Ali to call her Master. "Some of these boys are incorrigible," she said. "But we WILL break their tiny spirits; they WILL become disciplined productive members of society."

Ali then made her first tactical error. *Maybe he was asking a question about the Lesson*, she thought, mistakenly believing she did not need to hide that thought.

"It doesn't matter," the HeadMaster said out loud, "he was rude and disobedient."

Oh shit, she knows English; Ali managed to get control over that and the rest of her thoughts.

The interview had no surprises. What teaching experience had she had? Where? What kind of children? What are her aspirations, etc. Ali asked questions like where she would get a curriculum and how large the classes would be and would she be evaluated on the students' academic performance.

The HeadMaster explained: "Our goal here has nothing to do with academic performance. Our goal is for every boy by the time he is 17 intervals/13 EY to be completely compliant with every and anything a woman tells him to do. They need to be able to do some basic reading and simple arithmetic like adding and subtracting 2-digit numbers." The Master had an unusual voice - very low resonance and gruff. She would have been a terrific voiceover for gangsters or monsters.

Ali found the goals puzzling but decided not to pursue the issue so she asked how the boys were prepared for the job they would do. After 17 they are evaluated based on their skills and certain physical attributes and then trained for specific jobs. Ali recalled the selection process for prostitutes and sperm donors. She felt she did quite well in the interview, especially under the emotional strain of the environment and seeing the abuse of that poor little boy. Eleanora seemed to think the interview went OK.

Following the interview, the three of them went to observe a class. It looked like 6–8-year-olds EY. Public enemy #1 from the HeadMaster's office was in the 2nd row right under the teacher's eye. The children sat on benches with no back support and no writing tables. The teacher had a table and a comfortable chair. There was an archaic chalk board at the front of the room and a clock at the rear. On the board were written addition problems which would have been in the kindergarten curriculum in the Girls' School. The teacher called on public enemy #1 again and again and each time he got the answer wrong, and each time he put his hand out so she could hit him with a willow branch.

"I'm certain you can handle the subject matter," the HeadMaster said to Ali: "I'll coach you on how to manage the discipline."

Ali was visibly shaken. She could feel her stomach churning, and her skin crawling. *Thank goodness people do not shake hands; if that woman touched me, I would have felt slimed. But never mind that; this was not school; it was a Detention Center from the 19th century; what discipline; they don't dare breathe.*

"She looks like she is terrified; what makes you think she can teach here, the HeadMaster telepathed to Eleanora, not knowing Ali could "hear" them.

"I did not prepare her properly for this visit," Eleanora responded to the HeadMaster. *"I will take her back to my place for a counseling session and let you know what I advise."*

"You do that, we don't need any pansies teaching here," the HeadMaster telepathed back.

Ali was walking like a Zombie, reciting a mantra in her head *'no thinking, no thinking, no thinking.'* It was an effort to put one foot in front of another.

When she reached the bench near Eleanora's flat, she bent down and picked up something invisible and put it under her arm.

It was Eleanora who was not prepared for what happened next. As soon as the door to the room of secrets opened, Ali began sobbing, bent over, looking like she was in a standing fetal position. The more Eleanora tried to console her, the more intensely Ali cried. Eleanora knew better than to try to get someone in her condition to talk; after she cried herself out would be soon enough.

I have been doing so well keeping it all under wraps, but there's no putting it back in the box now. Eleanora sat quietly and waited.

Finally, Ali picked up the invisible purple box she had put her anger in, pulled off the invisible ribbon and spoke: "That room."

"The classroom?" Eleanora asked.

"NO, the first room where the little boy just missed a beating; the door; it looked just like the interrogation room."

"What Interrogation room;" Eleanora was baffled.

"My first days here."

"You mean the interview room?" Eleanora asked.

Ali's voice was quivering: "How many naked interviews have you had?"

"Naked?"

"Yes, naked." Ali was on a roll now. "For starters, when I left the shuttle, my greeter was a loudspeaker which directed me to go down a hallway to a specific room number, but it didn't tell me I had to face the door for the number to appear and I didn't recognize the Alphas, so I had to use my translator. The door opened – it was just like the door to THAT room, the discipline room, where she tortures children, and what I saw was a monitor and a chair, just like in that room at the school," Ali continued, "again a voice came across a speaker; not Hello or welcome, but 'Take off your clothes.' Then I said I needed to go to the toilet, and one came out of a wall. Then two drawers opened, and I was directed to put my clothes and personal items in the drawers. The drawers then slid shut and locked. Most of my personal things are still there: my gold locket from my great grandmother, with a photo of my grandmother holding my father; what do they want that for?" She was sobbing uncontrollably. Eleanora waited.

"Maybe naked doesn't mean the same thing in your culture as it does in mine. In my culture if you want to make someone powerless; If you want to torture them, you first strip them naked. You make prisoners know they must be submissive by stripping them and putting them through anti contamination, just like they did to me." Ali was sitting on the couch, rocking slowly in a fetal position with her arms crossing her upper body.

"You must have been frightened," Eleanora said using her most nurturing voice.

"Alone, unwelcome, with no escape, in a room that belonged in a surgery, humiliated, having no idea what would happen next; try terrified. I questioned why I needed to be naked and was told that if I wanted this internship I would do as I was told and cooperate with the 'interviewer;'" Ali was making quotation marks in the air with her fingers, not knowing if Paradiaceo uses the custom of putting euphemisms in quotations or for that matter if they use euphemisms. At that moment, she didn't care about being culturally correct. She mumbled: "Probably comply is a better word than cooperate." Ali's pain and fear was turning to anger. "I asked if this was a culture that did not wear clothes. I asked if she was naked; she said no."

"Were you harmed," Eleanora asked, now deeply concerned.

Ali: "Do I look to you like someone who was not harmed?"

Eleanora: "And physically?"

"No." One of the 'interviewers' was gruff, just like the HeadMaster." Ali was calming down a little. Eleanora knew the fear, the anger, the breakdown were all important for Ali's mental health. Ali continued: "And one of the 'interviewers' was Donasse. I recognized her voice on the Wilderness trip. She took great pleasure in asking very personal embarrassing questions: Have I had sex with males, with women; do I masturbate; have I seen my parents having sex. And attitude stuff; how do I feel about males, do I recognize women to be superior. And the same questions were asked over and over. That woman gets off on making people uncomfortable." Ali's eyes were welling up again.

That she does, Eleanora thought, but did not share with Ali. Eleanora stayed calm and cool, with no motherly bubbling up of emotion. She held as how it did sound very uncomfortable and she was sorry Ali had that

experience. She was sure that it was done to assure that the internship would be successful. "They were purposefully making you as uncomfortable as possible to see if you would survive a culture which might be uncomfortable beyond different or strange, beyond interesting."

"Well, they succeeded," she said angrily, then softly between sobs: "I'm not looking like I will survive this culture now; they screwed me up and the Boys' School finished the job," she added sarcastically.

"Do you think you should not teach in the Boys' School," Eleanora inquired gingerly.

"I don't know, I don't know, I don't know," sounding like a mantra as she rocked back and forth.

"Don't try to answer now; try to get some rest," Eleanora said, rubbing Ali's back.

"I need to do some soul searching. May I spend the night here?" Ali knew she looked horrible. She cried so hard she broke blood vessels in her cheeks and nose, making her look like an alcoholic just coming off a bender, and she had no guarantee she wouldn't start sobbing all over again. This was not a state she wanted to be in out walking through the park, or for Kyra or her housemates to see.

Eleanora brought out some mats and blankets so Ali could sleep on the floor. *Blankets, all the time, Eleanora had blankets.* She was probably not the first mentee to need an overnight in private thought. Having never suffered from depression, Ali did not recognize the overwhelming sense of despair that came over her in the Boys' School. She wanted to go to sleep, she couldn't stop yawning and it felt like someone was stacking bricks over her eyes.

"I have a meeting here in the morning," Eleanora said, "you will have to leave then."

Ali cried half the night. Eleanora knew this kind of crying usually signals a serious conflict. Ali was beginning to recognize what a sheltered and privileged life she had lived at home; she wanted her Daddy. It's not that she had never had a personal conflict or been insulted or hurt before; after all she had been a teenager. She thought about what her dad would tell her to do. *Ah, yes. The trick was always to find the underlying cause of the conflict in order to resolve it.* She was beginning to become rational. The interrogation had been front and center in her mind. No conflict there. *They were horrible to me and no matter how good their reasons, I have a right to be angry.* Go home; yes, that crossed her angry mind, but that would be cutting off her nose to spite her face. The conflict here was about being an anthropologist, having as rich and full an experience as possible, living like a native, not being judgmental. For the first time, she recognized the depth to which this culture was not aligned with her personal values. *"Therein lies the Rub," thank you Shakespeare. If I take the job at the Boys' School and do not abuse the boys, I will be violating the rules of teaching boys in Paradiceo as well as the rules of conduct for an anthropologist; if I do abuse them, I will not be able to live with myself.* She tried to remember what she had read about anthropologists on Earth dealing with cultures which engaged in female circumcision and stoning women who had been raped. She recalled that the anthropologists turned the issue over to human rights activists, *but there is no such grand escape for me here, and none of them were ever required to throw the stones.*

Then there is always the adage that one can be more effective in bringing about change from the inside than from without as long as one does not get corrupted. Many politicians went down that brambled path only to become tangled in the underbrush. Not a good analogy; she was unlikely to begin abusing boys. *What if the Council saw that a change in method would produce a great improvement in boys' performance as I anticipate. Refusing to teach would not improve anything for the boys, or provide insight for Paradiceo, or growth for me.* In the wee hours of the morning, Ali decided to try teaching boys. What she did not recognize was how dependent she was on the art of rationalization.

Eleanora was worried about Ali. These kinds of nervous breakdowns are not common in Paradiceo except for women who are forced to choose between going to the Wilderness with a man or giving him up to stay in the Village. It occurred to her that the breakdowns that were most severe were with women who had been subjected to attempts to change their brain function. A violation of one's person and complete loss of personal power, perhaps not so unlike Ali's experience. She was not confident that Ali would be able to successfully

discipline the boys. She decided, regardless of Ali's decision, she would not tell the HeadMaster the extent of Ali's distress.

The HeadMaster was herself a bit wary about having Ali teach but made a very strange decision: to NOT monitor Ali closely, to just leave her alone for a few cycles before observing. She was certain that if Ali was lax with discipline, soon enough she would discover on her own how stupid and unruly boys really are. Ali would be nice to them, and they would take advantage of her, and then she would see why discipline was of critical importance; a bit vindictive perhaps, but not an unreasonable approach.

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At the beginning of the next cycle, Ali started in the early block of the morning to teach arithmetic and reading to the class of 6-8-year-olds (EY) who she had observed. She told them that she was going to review some of the things they had already learned, believing that one does NOT learn in a reign of terror; remove the terror; they would learn what they did not learn before. She brought a bag of dried beans to class. Since there were no desks, she told the boys to sit on the floor behind their benches and line up 10 beans on the bench. Not everyone could count to 10 so she counted with them until she believed every boy could accomplish that task. At the front of the room, she had her beans on a string taped to the blackboard. Her intention was to set up a kind of abacus. She wrote on the board: $1 + 1 =$; She walked them through it. Move 1 bean, now add another bean to it; she moved her beans on the string. Now count your beans.

From the back of the room: "I can't count." Was she being tested, or could this child really not count? She walked toward the offending student who was now cowering at his desk.

She looked at him sternly. "I'm not sure I believe you; what's your name?" He held up the arm which had tattooed on it 753. "Read those numbers."

"I can't."

"You and I will work on numbers after class," she said.

Then she turned to the boy next to him. "Can you count?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Read Numbers?"

"Yes ma'am"

"Ok, you count with him till he gets it. You have successfully moved your beans. You can help him. And your name is?"

"621," ma'am.

"621 what is the answer to the problem $1+1=?$ "

"2."

"Excellent!! go write it on the board."

621 wrote 2 on the board.

"How many of you got two for an answer?"

All the students except 753 raised their hands. In just one lesson, they went all the way to $1+9$. Ali offered a piece of bread to everyone who got all of them right without cheating. That was 75% of the class. She added statements like "look how smart you are!"

The following unit/day Ali wrote the names of the numbers one – nine on the board to add reading to the lesson. Over the next half cycle, each student got 10 additional beans to count to 20. The boys were successfully doing double-digit numbers on the board with the names of the numbers spelled out. When Ali reviewed the lesson from the unit before, everyone including 753 and public enemy # 1 got all the first 10 numbers right and many of the students were accurate up to 20.

Ali used the same methods for reading: small chunks of material to learn, working with partners or groups, affirmation, repetition, and rewards. She did one more very risky thing. She discontinued the mood-control medication, aka nectar. Ali believed the medication, while making them compliant, also made them foggy headed, and less enthusiastic about learning. She believed Kate's theory that over time the nectar would stunt their intellectual development. She was gambling that a more positive and supportive environment would quell rebellious behavior and make it unnecessary to use drugs. She understood that in older boys, the drug also damped the libido. Fortunately, these were not older boys; one step at a time.

The HeadMaster complained to Eleanora that Ali as feared had not sent a single boy to her to discipline. When Eleanora confronted Ali with the concern, she gleefully remarked that there had not been a single incident requiring discipline in her classroom.

Eleanora, incredulous, remarked "not a single boy has said a single word to another while you were teaching."

"Not a one; when I speak, they are quiet as bugs in a rug," Ali replied.

"You must be very entertaining," Eleanora responded skeptically, enjoying yet another of Ali's colloquialisms.

It was true. When Ali was speaking to the class they listened attentively. She used a soft voice so they had to listen hard to hear her, and she threatened that if anyone spoke, they would not be given what she called "team-time:" time when they could talk to one another about their answers.

At the end of four cycles, Ali would be observed by the HeadMaster. She was confident that her experimentation and the students' amazing improvement would change the way the school taught boys.

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When the HeadMaster came to observe, the boys successfully demonstrated their skill with addition and subtraction of two-digit numbers. They were beginning to do some simple multiplication, but Ali decided not to press her luck. They were clearly frightened with the HeadMaster there, so Ali selected the most skilled and confident students (including public enemy #1) to demonstrate how they would approach a problem they had not seen before. They read the words Ali put on the board. (Ali's language level independent of the translator was at about the same level as theirs.) Not one single boy misbehaved in any way, and they got all the answers right. A quarter of the way into the lesson, Ali was elated.

A third of the way into the lesson, the HeadMaster stood up, almost knocking over the bench she was sitting on, and bellowed that she had seen enough, and that she had summoned another teacher telepathically from the break room. When the other teacher arrived, Ali was to leave the class and come to her office. With that, she stormed out.

The HeadMaster was so furious, Ali wondered if she would be beaten, but she received only a tongue lashing: "You may be brilliant at the Girls' School, but you are a total failure here. You have misunderstood or ignored or are too arrogant or stupid to understand our mission here. We are not interested in educating these boys beyond the most basic skills; What would you have them do: Algebra?" Her face was bright red, she was screaming at the top of her lungs and leaning over to pound on the desk, nearly hitting her own breasts: "They will learn their trade when they are teenagers, and they will be under constant supervision. Elementary school is designed to make them compliant, obedient, and fearful of women and authority. I told you that from the beginning, but you were hell bent to change us, to show us your right way."

With tears streaming down her face, Ali managed to choke out, "I have failed as an anthropologist too."

"Not my problem; I want you out of here now, and do not bother coming back begging for forgiveness."

It might have been easier if she had beaten me, Ali thought as she walked into the sunlight outside. No need to contact Eleanora. She would be contacted and might even have overheard. Her major focus at that moment was to stop crying and to pull herself together to greet her enthusiastic 7-year-olds EY for their English Language class at the Girls' School. Ali suddenly realized she was just fired from a job; she had not ever experienced failure at this level before in her life.

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There could have been no greater cure than a group of 7-year-olds EY singing in English. She didn't have a Culture class that afternoon, so she went to Kyra's shop for lunch. Kyra was delighted to see her and created her newest experiment with Earth food. It was something like Humus, but of course, made from some native bean and served with Kyra's attempt at pita bread which looked more like a cracker. "The middle eastern bread you are trying to make is a little tricky without yeast and is made in its native countries in an oven that has heat above and below the bread at the same time. The crackers are very good though and are often served with the Humus in western countries." Ali was terribly calm; Kyra couldn't even tell there was anything wrong.

"So, how's our chief anthropologist doing?" Kyra asked. "I haven't seen you much lately."

"I got fired," Ali's tone was about like: 'I just had my hair cut.'

Kyra decided it might be best to mirror Ali's tone. "Which job?" It sounded like 'which hairdresser?'

"Boys' School."

"Would you like to talk about it?"

"No."

"Would you like more tea?"

"Yes."

Ali continued to sit staring into space, without saying a word. Kyra thought about contacting Eleanora, "Have you spoken to Eleanora?"

"No"

"Would you like me to ask her to come here?"

"NO"

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Get me my HAZMAT suit."

Kyra brought the suit which Ali kept in the shop to have handy for trips to their cave. She thought about asking Ali if she should come too but thought it best to let Ali go alone. "Telepath me if you want me."

Ali took the suit and left without responding. Safe in the cave to think and feel and scream if she wanted to, she realized that while she could remember shutting down her emotions on many occasions on Earth as well as situations like her anger over the interrogation, she could not remember any occasion where she felt nothing at all. The closest she could come was after doing astral travel to Kate's house in the psychic training class. But that was more like feeling she was stuck inside a cloud. This was nothing, nothing, and more nothing. She knew Kyra was worried about her and she was able to talk about the food, so she was aware of

a world outside herself, but she felt nothing. She tried a trick she had seen a psychiatrist use. He asked: "If someone described to you what happened to you today, how would you expect them to feel?" *I don't know; I suppose it depends on how they felt about the job and themselves and the way they were treated.* That didn't do much good; what would the psychiatrist do next? Maybe ask 'how do you feel about that job?' Ali started to cry. *I don't give a shit about their stupid job; Jerod where are you; I need you to hold me and tell me you love me and tell me I'm not a bad person. Jerod, I was making progress, I really was; I could have helped those boys. Why does she hate me?*

Ali fell asleep. When she awoke, Kyra was standing at the door to the cave. "I tried to call; I was worried about you. May I come in.?"

"It's your cave too," Ali responded in a not so welcoming tone of voice.

Kyra thought about asking if she was expecting company but decided to keep her paranoia to herself. She thought about asking for a hug and decided to figure out first if Ali was in a place where she could even engage. She sat down next to Ali, close enough to be touching, hip to hip, arm to arm. Ali did not move away, but it felt to Kyra like picking up an animal that was half dead. After a while, Kyra put her arm around Ali, and held her. Ali accepted Kyra's embrace and her caresses and her gentle kisses, as she snuggled; there was no passion, and she did not talk about the Boys' School.

I have a badly hurt child in my arms, Kyra thought, wondering if Ali might be suicidal.