

CHAPTER 13 The Girls' School Part 1

The time had finally arrived for THE INTERVIEW. Ali woke up early and nervous. *You are going to do fine in this interview; you are going to do fine.* Ali repeated the mantra all the way to the Girls' School. She already had the tattoo which let her in the door. She went straight to Glynda's office and found Dolorosa waiting for her in the outer office. After her first visit to gain access to the library, Dolorosa appointed herself Ali's personal assistant, helping her with unfamiliar technology as well as directions around the town and the school, and occasionally with the pronunciation of a word in the Paradiecian language.

Dolorosa seemed a little Jittery, telling Ali that Glynda was a bit delayed, and so she would take Ali on a tour of the building. *Is it possible Dolorosa is nervous on my behalf,* Ali thought, *how sweet.* The first part of the school they visited, the lower school, was what Ali would have called elementary and middle school. There were no classrooms, just a large space with children sitting in groups, some on the floor, some having tables to write or draw on. The 'desks' were made of fibrous material from the Wilderness with a sheet of some clear substance on the top to create a smooth writing surface. The room was brightly lit and, on the walls, pinned to a background of undulating shades of blue and green that looked like Earth's Caribbean Sea, there were pictures painted by children, some more talented than others. The pictures spoke of creativity. They reminded Ali of an Earth song by Harry Chapin from the 20th century – "Red Flowers are Red and Green Leaves are Green." She explained to Dolorosa that the song tells a story of a teacher who stifles the creativity of a young boy who wants to use all the colors in his crayon box in his artwork without deference to reality. The teacher punishes him. Ali's teacher played the song in an education class to remind would be teachers of the need for freedom and creativity in art. Paradieceans were not art collectors, but these educators understood the importance of artistic freedom for children. Clearly there was no stifling of creativity at The Girls' School.

Dolorosa invited Ali to sit in on one of the learning groups. Ali looked around and decided against the group where the teacher was reading a children's book and asking for comments and interpretations. She decided against math class where the students were bringing problems in arithmetic to the class and asking for solutions. Ali quietly asked Dolorosa: "do teachers ever lecture?"

"Yes, but only in combination with an interactive approach." Dolorosa responded and led Ali to a group of probably 11-year-olds who were studying literature. The students had two electronic devices: one with the lecture material and the other with a short story. The teacher, Jelena was her name, presented the idea that literary devices enhance the reader's experience. She then presented a half dozen literary devices like metaphor and symbol and alliteration, all with examples and each defined on their electronic devices. The students then read the short story and picked out the devices from the story. The lesson was laced with affirmation of the students' effort even if the answer was incorrect.

I so hope I will pass the interview and be able to work with these children, Ali thought.

"You will," Dolorosa said, "I look forward to your culture classes." Then she blushed and apologized for listening in to Ali's thoughts.

"Not to worry," Ali replied, "I'll be delighted to have you in my class, but I haven't passed the interview yet." Dolorosa chuckled: "I have a question; most of the girls in those classes have very long hair. Is there some reason for that?"

"Yes, there is." Dolorosa replied. "The women in the Wilderness use the hair in their weaving so girls before the age of 15/12 EY, grow their hair to be used in weaving."

Practical, Ali thought.

The part of the school, called upper school, which would be high school on Earth, was quite different. There were separate rooms including the library Ali frequented, and a large well-equipped lab used for the sciences. In the labs, students were working in pairs or small groups and there were older college students consulting with the groups and occasionally calling the teacher to help. The college classes also used the same facilities.

The Paradiician philosophy of education was consistent with the culture, valuing a high degree of teamwork and cooperation as well as dedication to one's studies and profession.

The atmosphere was more challenging and serious, and there were fewer works of art on the walls, but the "bright colors" and lighting were still abundant and the classes that Ali observed were interactive, inviting and requiring student input. While the citizens of Paradiiceo did see art as a conduit to creativity - some adults took up art when they felt their creativity or inventiveness was drying up - there were no professional artists and no art majors in high school or college.

Between the location of the lower classes and upper classes was the lunchroom. It was just a large room with few cooking facilities. Lunch usually consisted of an egg or vegetables or fruit with a piece of bread, or the ubiquitous granola bars. The lower and upper classes had separate lunch times and often the mothers of the youngest children would pick them up and eat at home or in the park. The older children could choose to eat in the park, but there was a short time for lunch, so most stayed in the cafeteria. Ali noticed some chairs and tables stacked around the perimeter of the room. Dolorosa explained that they traded out the furniture to accommodate little people or big people when the lunch time changed from lower to upper classes. There were tables to seat two or four. The girls could configure the table arrangement to suit who they wanted to eat with. There was a counter against the wall with the windows in case someone wanted to eat alone or gaze out a window.

The lunchroom also served as an auditorium by installing a temporary modular stage. There were no gym classes, but there were some clubs that used the lunchroom to practice yoga or Karate or group exercise. Similarly, music was not in the curriculum, but a few students studied music from instructional devices and traded to obtain instruments or fashioned a primitive wind instrument, string instrument, or drum or used glasses of water to produce sound. They occasionally held concerts or dances in the lunchroom.

After the tour, Dolorosa took Ali back for her interview with the Headmistress. Glynda met them in the outer office where she and Ali thanked Dolorosa for the tour. Ali remarked that the tour had given her a good feel for the philosophy of education practiced at The Girls' School.

The inner office was furnished much like Eleanora's room of secrets. Even the desk was made of the reeds from the Wilderness. The walls were hung with artwork, and bookcases displayed sculptures, created by students. "Most children take their artwork home. It is a privilege to have a piece of your work chosen for my office," Glynda explained, offering Ali a seat.

"How would you describe our philosophy of education," Glynda asked.

Ali gulped; *how stupid to put myself in test mode with that remark about philosophy of education.* She thought she detected a slight smirk on Glynda's face, but she responded with all the confidence she could muster. "The environment is cheerful and bright and casual, a place where it can be fun to learn. The focus appears to be on cooperation and helping others. The older students seem serious about their work, but not stressed about making mistakes." Ali was thinking about her friend on Earth who had a nervous breakdown after failing a test. "I saw teachers in higher level classes entering data on devices, but I could not tell if they were researching or evaluating student responses, and I do not know if individual accomplishments are recognized."

"You got all that from a short tour?" Glynda remarked.

I'm either going to blow it or I'm not. "Maybe I'm telling you what I am hoping based on what I saw," Ali responded.

Glynda: "You are very observant. Don't criticize yourself for opening the door to that question; I would have asked it in one way or another even if you had thought nothing. The teachers are recording on the devices what the students know and do not know so they can assess which misunderstandings need correcting for the class, and which concepts need to be retaught to a particular student. There is no such thing as failure, only learning."

Glynda then explained: "Based on your resume and performance in college as well as Eleanora's input, I am interviewing you to teach 2 classes: one in the lower school in English language, and one for final interval upper school students and perhaps to include some interested college students. The topic would be Earth culture and history."

"Earth Culture is for the last year of school before college, right? I'm only here for two Earth years; 2.6 intervals," Ali blurted out.

"The class will last 14 cycles." Glynda was smiling. "It will be six afternoon blocks in each cycle."

"In Earth time, that's about 2 semesters of contact hours, over about 5 and half months," Ali calculated with the help of the translator.

"Many teachers would give lectures to deliver the most information in the least amount of time. We do not want that. Can you teach like our teachers do, interactively?"

"Yes, I prefer interactive methodology," Ali responded.

Ali asked: "May I ask students to read and do research or prepare written or spoken presentations outside of class?"

"Yes, of course, homework, to present inside of class. Don't be too ambitious. Yours is not the only or the most important class they are taking," Glynda responded.

"Do you have any specific topics you want or do not want?" was Ali's next question.

"We'll talk about that and class size after we agree that you will teach the class."

Ah yes, this is an interview; Ali managed to block that thought.

"Now the English Language class," Glynda continued. "How do you feel about working with 9 interval-olds."

"That's 7-years old for Earthlings. That's a great age to learn a language. I enjoy children and hope to have some of my own someday," Ali responded.

"What do you know about teaching young children or teaching language for that matter?" Glynda asked.

No point trying to fake it; they'll find out soon enough, Ali thought. "Truthfully, not much, only that it is easiest to learn language orally and when we are very young and by singing. I think grammar and spelling are not necessary at this age. I would speak in English only and I would need assistance from a Paradiceo teacher to discover equivalent sounds in your language. My translator will help me find equivalent words," Ali answered.

"That sounds pretty good for someone who doesn't know much. You will have a coach - our language teacher. She will also tell you some basic things about the grammar of our language and other languages they are studying so that you can make comparisons where appropriate. I agree that grammar and spelling are of little importance at this age. The language classes will meet every unit/day for half a block in the morning for 6 cycles."

Ali responded: "That's 1 hour and 15 minutes, Earth time. There should be a lot of activity." *Pretty long time to hold the attention of that age group,* Ali thought. *Six cycles is 3 months, not very long, but every day is good.* "I have been studying your language a bit; I think I understand the Grammar, but I don't have enough vocabulary to be able to use the language yet."

"That will be more of an issue in the culture class. Now what questions do you have for me?" Glynda asked.

"How do you assess the progress of the students?" Ali asked.

Glynda explained that cultures which test students to determine how much has been learned by whom and as taught by whom generally report failure. “We don’t need that. Our girls are all bred to be very smart, and the culture simply expects high motivation. Our culture values education, our parents help their girls with homework. We don’t teach the same thing over and over again, so the students don’t get bored. The first time a concept is taught, it is practiced and reviewed. They generally get it the first time and move on. All but the youngest students self-monitor. They keep a checklist of what they have learned. If they feel unsure of something; let’s say percentages in math, they ask to attend that class when it is given to a new group, or they have a session with an upper-class student who has been designated to be a tutor. We group by concept, not grade or age. Your language class will be mostly 7-yr-olds in Earth time, but there could be a few older students as well. It is essential that you understand that if there is no failure, there is no embarrassment in needing an extra class or help to learn something, no need to hide mistakes.”

Ali was nearly shaking with excitement. She leaned into every word Glynda uttered, her mind racing unchecked with teaching ideas “Who will write the curriculum?” was her next question.

“You will - with the guidance of one of our Senior teachers, and with the expectation that you will leave your lesson plans here when you leave. We agree that we will not give or sell your intellectual property to any other professor or culture; and that you can take them with you as long as any comparisons or references to our culture or language are removed. Would you like a contract to that effect?”

Ali replied: “Intellectual Property is a big deal to a lot of the Professors at my university, but there was one teacher who taught at a satellite college in a very poor country. She had a broad background, so she designed and taught a lot of classes, but one of the objectives of the university was to develop local instructors. When a new teacher came in, she was happy and proud to hand over all the materials she had developed, and to coach the new teacher in how to use them. I would be proud and pleased if you found my lessons worthy of use by others, and if you gained some benefit beyond what the students learn. And, yes, I would appreciate it if you didn’t sell my materials in trade. Who will evaluate me?”

“Since your school requires an evaluation, we will follow your protocol. The Council Head, Eleanora and I will collaborate on a general evaluation of your internship here. I will observe your teaching as will your Senior teacher-coach, and we will discuss any suggestions we have with you periodically so there will be no surprises when it goes into your record to send to your school.”

Ali remembered: *Donasse’s term is almost finished! Yeah!*

Ali was pretty sure she had blocked that thought, but Glynda, with a knowing smile said Donasse’s term would be up in 4 cycles.

Glynda laid out what Ali would be paid - somewhat less than experienced teachers. Ali had no idea what money was worth, but the concept seemed quite fair, especially since many internships were unpaid, and she was living and eating for free.

A fleeting thought: *What would I do if I had leftover money? I could take some home as a souvenir – the money they used was not a secret – but there was not any direct exchange with Earth. Perhaps some research would turn up a country Paradiceo does business with that also does business with an Earth country – a question for much later - FOCUS Ali!*

Glynda asked Ali a few more questions about her educational background and what kind of teachers she admired. They were not difficult questions to answer. The trend toward independent study on computers which became so popular in the 21st century partly due to rising costs of sitting in a classroom, aided by the Covid-19 pandemic, and exacerbated by advances in AI, had gone too far in Ali’s opinion. Her own University in the USA, over 400 years old with its beautiful rotunda in its enormous library of books from across the centuries had grown exponentially in the 20th century and had made huge capital expenditures to add living space for students and to add elaborate sports facilities to compete with other Universities. Tuition costs soared out of reach for many US citizens while Europe and other parts of the world kept university education free or at low cost. Universities offered fewer in person-classes, and rented out space, including the sports facilities to cover their maintenance costs. At Ali’s university, Anthropology was eliminated in the early 21st

century but reinstated in the early 22nd cen., due to an increase in space travelers encountering cultures they wanted to understand. The program required face to face classes. It was expensive, but the government and private space exploration companies worldwide helped fund the education of these students to help industries offering space tourism or exploring other planets for acquisition of resources or trade to understand what to expect in those cultures, and how to approach cultures newly encountered from interplanetary exploration. Ali far preferred the interactive face-to-face teachers who were honest in their criticism and generous with affirmations. She liked teachers who were confident about their subject matter and honest about what they did not know. The teachers who had a breadth of knowledge and experience were much more valuable in her opinion than those who were bound by prescribed lesson plans and textbooks, which was often the case in US high schools which were restricted by state regulations and boards of education.

Glynda was impressed beyond Ali's knowledge and analysis, with her enthusiasm and apparent openness and honesty.

"I have one issue," Glynda began.

Ali braced herself; she imagined she knew what that was.

"If I claimed I was not prejudiced, I would be lying," Glynda said, "what is your position on sexual orientation."

Ali responded: "I can support your lesbian lifestyle without hesitation; on Earth we have all forms of hetero and homosexual lifestyles, and all have been fully tolerated in the US for decades, stages in your world, but not in all cultures on Earth. I have no need to proselytize about gender equality. I am a strong proponent of recognizing the importance of the societal norms of one's culture, and I would promote that. What I cannot do is become a lesbian; I believe one's sexual orientation is a part of one's individual physiology and emotional development, but my personal beliefs will remain private."

Glynda responded: "You know that hetero behavior is forbidden except for entertainment at the club; therefore, it is dangerous for a woman to choose a heterosexual lifestyle. We worry that you might encourage an impressionable young woman to follow what she believes is her physiological and emotional inclination."

Ali: "That's a fair and reasonable concern. I can tell you that I am trained to observe and describe the culture I observe and to NOT impose judgements and values on the cultures we observe. I think I can put your mind at ease for several reasons: first I am a strong believer in knowing the consequences of one's actions, second, I would not want any young girl to be censured and ostracized; and 3rd I am very capable of describing the Wilderness in a way that will remove any romantic notions of living in nature. I do not intend to address sexual orientation or historical prejudices in my curriculum, but I cannot prevent students from discovering that all Earth cultures support heterosexuality. I will not be dishonest about the facts, historical or current. "

Glynda: "Can you refrain from revealing or espousing or defending your lifestyle, and with a straight face support the punishment of that lifestyle."

"I am perfectly happy to live with the assumption that I am gay because everyone here is, but if I am asked a straightforward question, I will not lie about my sexual orientation. I do not expect to be marrying anyone," Ali said with a note of amusement in her voice. "I am expecting to counsel and advise girls to not participate in a heterosexual lifestyle, but only when asked. Hopefully, it is enough that I support the rule of law and expose the dire consequences of making the wrong choice in this culture. There should be no reason to support or not support those consequences; they simply exist." Blocking her thoughts, *I hope she doesn't ask me about supporting the treatment of males.*

Glynda could see that Ali was struggling but making an honest effort to avoid any controversy concerning their cultural norms. "Will you talk about slavery?"

Ali responded: "It is not my intention to introduce slavery as a topic, but again if I am asked, I will answer questions with documented facts, not opinions. *I can't prevent students from seeing the similarity between slavery and the treatment of males here,* she thought.

“And if they discover slavery and want to know what you think about our treatment of men,” Glynda asked.

“Professors and human rights advocates, and religious leaders, and politicians are allowed to have opinions about how cultures treat groups of people. I am an anthropologist. In my profession, opinions are not allowed. I can describe to you how various cultures on Earth or not on Earth, deal with groups of people. In Nazi Germany, Jews were murdered en masse; in some religions women are circumcised to prevent them from enjoying sex and therefore being unfaithful to their husbands, and women who are raped are stoned to death; in one African tribe all men are circumcised at 15 intervals; Many cultures circumcise male infants. At one time in my country, homosexual men and women were put in jail. We have international laws against the killing of civilians in war, but mass graves of civilians are often found. In ancient times, people of the Christian religion were thrown into a theatre with lions while crowds watched them be torn apart. In my country abortion and doctor assisted death were outlawed and doctors were thrown in jail. In every instance, the people making the laws and performing the acts in their minds had good reasons for what they were doing. When we had slavery, the population considered slaves to be like animals; now a person can be punished by law for treating an animal the way we treated slaves. I cannot decide for you what practices in any culture to approve of or condemn.

Glynda was impressed and Ali was proud of herself. She told Eleanora later that she thought she had done well in the interview.

She was right; she would start teaching culture at the beginning of the next cycle, and language to 7-year-olds EY mid cycle. She was very excited about her assignments.

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The goal for the language lessons was that the students would be able to speak and read some basic words in English. That meant knowing how to pronounce the alphabet, numbers, the days of the week directions, basic foods, and how to find words and phrases in a dictionary on their devices. That was a big order for what on Earth would be three months, but it would be total immersion; Ali would speak only English to them in class for one half block (1 hr. 15 min) per day. A lot of the methods Ali intended to use like singing songs came from children’s shows on Earth.

The students were eager to learn, and Ali encouraged them to teach their parents and siblings at home based on the pedagogical principle that one internalizes information most strongly when one teaches it. For 40 Earth minutes per Earth week, the children “taught” a lesson of their making to the Headmistress, or a teacher she would designate or to parents they invited. The lessons were so much fun, often with songs and dances or puppets or costumes, parents and women who did not have a student in class started to request invitations. The strongest of learners were picking up a lot of phrases, and even the slower students were able to order lunch from Kyra for the Headmistress. Ali had never known work could be so rewarding and exciting, and after 6 cycles, the class was extended for several more cycles. She doubted that she would ever find a learning environment for her future children on Earth that would be more supportive or rewarding.