



PLANET EARTH

WELCOME TO THE RED PLANET MARS

Planet Earth

“BOOM.”

What a storm out there. And it's dark—a dark, dark night.

“FLASH.”

Strange. I saw something when the lightning lit up the backyard.

“BOOM.”

Wait. What was that “boom?” Was that thunder or what? What was it? Something's out there by the window. And what's that orange glow? Something's moving around glowing orange.

“Tap.” “Tap.” “Tap.”

And it's tapping on my window. Oh my gosh. What do I do?

And there's a sign that glows:

“Do you want to go for a ride?”

“What?”

So, I go to the window and before I can do anything, an orange man takes me through the closed window, waves his hand and the rain stops.

“Hello Amy. My name is Blank. Let's go for a ride.”

“How did you stop the rain? And how do you know my name?”

“I’ve known about you for a long time,” says Blank, “your blond hair, your blue eyes, you’re always looking for adventure.”

Well, I’m thinking, Blank is a different looking guy, about my height, real cute. He has long wavy light blond hair, gorgeous blue eyes, a long nose and a sexy kinda mouth. And he glows orange.

“Where’s your car?” I ask.

“What car?” he says. “We’re riding in my personal spaceship.”

“What?” Where to?”

“To my pad.”

“Wait a minute. What the hell is going on? And where is this pad?”

“On Mars.”

“What? I’ve heard plenty of lines, but this is the best one yet.”

“Wouldn’t you like to see Mars? You didn’t get into college. What will you do? Besides, you can go to college on Mars...What’s the matter? Don’t you trust me?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“I don’t trust anyone who glows orange.”

“OK.”

Then all of a sudden, he starts glowing blue.

“OK.” I say. “I’ve got to see this for myself. I’ll take that spaceship with you. We’ll go to Mars.

So, there in the backyard was the spaceship, glowing blue, and the size of an SUV, but without wheels. Blank opens the door and in we go. And we sit down in real comfortable seats.

“Let me punch in the directions on the dash. It will take a minute.”

Then, next thing I know, the spaceship rises straight up.

“How long a trip is it?” I ask.

“It’s a long trip,” says Blank. “Four hours.”

“What? Four hours to go to Mars? It takes a lot longer to go from New York to California.”

Then Blank asks, “Would you like dinner?”

“OK,” I say. “I really had dinner and I’m supposed to be in bed sleeping now, but another dinner sounds great.”

“Open the drawer in front of you,” says Blank.

And we both open our drawers. And there’s dinner.

“What is this?” I ask. It smells like eggs.

“It’s marshmallow omelet with chocolate syrup dressing.”

“Oh, I’m glad I ate already.”

“Try it,” says Blank.

“OK...Ymmm, this is good.”

“I have the same,” says Blank. “I love it for dinner.”

And we both eat. Then afterwards:

“Do you want dessert?” says Blank.

“OK. What’s for dessert?”

“Baked potato.”

“No thank you,” I say.

So Blank picks up his baked potato from the drawer with his hand and starts eating.

“Why are all those holes in the potato?” I ask.

“That’s where they stick in the chocolate chips.”

“Chocolate chips?” I say.

“Yes, chocolate chips with caramel.”

“Maybe I’ll have dessert after all.”

“OK,” says Blank. “Open your drawer.”

Then we both sit there enjoying dessert.

Afterwards Blank says, “That was a good dinner.”

“Yeah,” I say. “And I’m afraid to ask what comes next?”

“BOOM.”

“Well, now we are on Mars,” says Blank. But you have to glow. Do you want to glow orange or do you want to glow blue?”

“What about purple?” I say. “I like purple.”

“No,” you can’t glow purple.”

“Why not?” I ask.

“Because purple is the enemy. Blue and orange do not get along with purple.”

“Do blue and orange get along with each other?”

“Yes,” says Blank. We are very open-minded. But I’ll make us both glow orange.”

“OK,” I say.

“And you will need a mask,” says Blank.

“Oh, you have the pandemic here on Mars?”

“Absolutely,” says Blank. “But here we don’t call it panDEMIC. We call it panDAMNIT.”

“Oh, DAMNIT, that’s good.”

“Please,” says Blank. “Don’t curse.”

Then the two oranges mask-up and leave the spaceship, which now also glows orange.

“Look at all these people.” I say. “And they are all rushing somewhere. Where are they rushing?”

“Oh, there is a rally tonight,” says Blank. “Let’s join them.”

“OK,” I say. “But nobody is wearing a mask.”

“Oh,” says Blank. “No one wears masks at rallies.”

“Why not?” I ask.

“Because,” explains Blank. “We must be independent.”

Then we start rushing to the rally. We get there and decide to sit in the back, away from everyone.

“What’s going on?” I ask.

“It’s a tug-of-war between the yellow team and the green team, each pulling on a rope. Sometimes the rope goes one way. Sometimes the other way.”

“And when does it end?” I ask.

“Oh,” says Blank. “It ends on Election Day.”

“And what does the winner get?” I ask.

“Oh,” says Blank. “The winner gets to run the country.”

And we both watch the event while the audience screams. And they scream. And they scream. Every time the rope moves, they scream.

“And this ends on Election Day?” I ask. “When is that?”

“In one month,” says Blank.

“And why is there a band playing?”

“Well,” says Blank, “to keep pace with the screams and put it to music.”

“And who are those men walking around?” I say pointing to the men.

“Oh,” says Blank. “Those are the bouncers. They throw out anyone who is disruptive.”

“Let’s go,” I say. “Too much screaming.”

So, we leave and then put on our masks. And we walk and we walk on the red dirt path on the red Planet Mars.

“We’ve been walking and walking.” I say. “And all I see is this big fence. What’s it for?”

“To keep out intruders,” says Blank.

“But I don’t see anyone here.”

“Don’t you see all these holes in the fence?” says Blank. “You don’t see any intruders because they already came here through the holes. They were at the rally.”

“Oh,” I say.

And we walk and we walk.

“Wait.” I say. “I hear some noise.”

“That’s where we are going. That’s where I live.”

And we walk and we walk. And the noise gets louder and louder. People in the distance are throwing rocks and they are landing near us.

“What’s going on?” I ask.

“There’s a peaceful protest going on,” explains Blank.

“What are they protesting?” I ask.

“They are protesting law and order,” Blank explains.

“I think I’d like to go home,” I say.

“Are you sure?” says Blank. “There’s a thunder storm where you live.”

“Yes, Blank, but you can stop the rain, remember?”

“OK, Amy. Let’s go.”

So, we go back to the orange glowing spaceship. Blank opens the door and in we go.

“I just have to punch in directions on the dash,” says Blank.

Then, like before, straight up we go, then off to Planet Earth. By now I am exhausted.

My seat goes back and off I go to sleep...Later:

“Wake up Amy. We’re here on Earth. I’ve landed in your backyard. And look—no rain.”

“Wait a minute, Blank. This isn’t my house. My house is brick. This is stucco.”

“Are you sure?”

“It does look like my house but completely redone. And why is it all purple?”

“Yes, Amy, we had better change everything to purple glow and then try to figure all this out. Let’s see, purple glow done, and what? You know what I did? We landed at your house, all right, but instead of the year 2020, it’s your house in 3020. Wow!”

“Let’s get out of here, Blank.”

“The dials on the dash are stuck. We can’t move.”

“Now what?” I yell. “And what’s all this purple stuff flying around outside?”

“Take it easy, Amy. Take it easy.”

“Take it easy?” I yell. “Take it easy. What the hell should we do?”

“I’m calling Mars…”

“So…What do they say?” I ask.

“Can’t get them—It’s all static. Let’s get out of this spaceship.”

So, we leave, glowing purple. We start walking.

“Look at that wall, Blank. A purple wall with holes. And look at all these funny looking purple rocks all over the ground.

“ATTENTION.” “ATTENTION.” Goes a loudspeaker from somewhere.

“ATTENTION.” “ATTENTION.” “Rally in one hour.” “Rally in one hour.”

“However, there is no one here on the street, Amy. They must all be at that rally, wherever it may be. Do you want to try and get there?”

“No, Blank. No.”

“So, let’s go back to the spaceship in your backyard,” says Blank. “Maybe I can start it this time.”

We walk back to the backyard for the spaceship, but when we get there—

“Where’s the spaceship?” cries out Blank. “Where is it?”

“It’s gone,” I say. “Where will we eat? Where will we sleep?”

“My gosh,” says Blank. “At least I’m wearing this special watch. It will tell us where the spaceship is. Let’s see...We have to walk in this direction.”

And off we go. We walk and we walk and we walk. Finally, we come to a park with a woods. We start walking in the woods and—

“Look, Amy, there’s the spaceship. And it’s glowing purple. Let’s go in.” But—

“It’s been broken into,” cries out Blank.

We go inside.

“We’ve been robbed,” says Blank. Things are missing. Where’s the Time Machine?

Where’s the engine?”

“What does this mean?” I ask.

“It means we’re not going anywhere,” says Blank. It means we are stuck here on Planet Earth in the year 3020. But we can still live here in the spaceship. We have a home.”

To be continued.

Anne Cohen

WELCOME TO THE RED PLANET MARS

Part I

Chapter I

Hello, I'm Alice and I'm 15 and a junior in high school.

You know, maybe I should say “yes” to Jon. He wants me to go steady and wear his ring around my neck. We go out—sort of. We go dutch to the movies. We meet after lunch on Sunday. Sometimes we sit in the back row of the theater and make out. Anyway, we are going to see a sci-fi movie Sunday—in two days. Can't wait. We both love sci-fi—which means we won't sit in the back row and make out. We'll sit in the third row with nobody in front of us so we won't miss one second of the movie. The movie is WELCOME TO THE RED PLANET MARS.

“Ring...” Off I am to math class—the most boring class of all. Rush, rush, rush to our seats. What for? Just to sit and be bored to death. Can't wait 'til I'm out of this school. But I'm only a junior.

There's the teacher, writing something on the board—all kinds of numbers. And what's that note the guys are passing around to all the girls? And then the girls read it, turn red and giggle. Now the note is passed to me. It reads, “If you got laid last night, smile.” Oh, embarrassing! And I can't help cracking up!

More listening to the teacher: “Blah, Blah, Blah, Blah...”

“Ring...”

Finally, the bell. Now to meet Jon in the hall.

“Hi Jon.”

“Hi Alice. Remember Sunday. Meet you in the movies in front of the candy counter at 12:30.”

“Won’t forget. See you then Jon.”

Sunday morning arrives:

“Oh, Mom. Just spoke with Jon. I’m taking the bus to the movies at noon.”

“OK, Alice. Enjoy.”

I think to myself: Got to rush so I don’t miss the 12 o’clock bus.

Some time passes:

Made it. Made the bus in time and paid my fare. Another ten minutes or so and I’ll be there. I’ll be there a little early and buy some popcorn and soda. Got a seat by the window on the bus. Not too cold out. Everyone is wearing light winter clothing. I like wearing my jeans and this jacket.

I pass the next few minutes looking out the window. Then—OK. I’m almost there. I’ll ring the bell and stand by the door. OK. I’m here and getting off the bus.

Oh, look, I know some of these kids outside of the movie.

“Hi Alice. Your boyfriend is inside.”

“Hi Jane. Hi Jack. See you later.”

I buy a ticket and go inside. Let me go to the candy counter—“Jon, hi!”

“Hi Alice. Let’s buy some popcorn and soda. We’ll split it and split the cost.”

“OK Jon.”

We get our stuff and find our seats, third row on the aisle.

“We have to sit through all those coming attractions,” says Jon. “Can’t wait for WELCOME TO THE RED PLANET MARS. Should be really cool.”

“All those commercials and coming attractions—‘blah, blah, blah, blah’” I say.

Then—WELCOME TO THE RED PLANET MARS.

A spaceship from Mars is blasting toward Earth:

Enoon and Owton are inside and say,

“What do I see? What do I see?”

I see stupidity

I see a planet whose riches galore

Are used for violence—

What for? What for?

And what creatures are these?

Creatures who always do as they please

Creatures whose heads are filled with zero

Who just want to see the next TV show

Will they welcome us

Maybe so

If we are on their next TV show

But we cannot

Go as we are

We have to be driving

A new fancy car

But they don't want our help indeed

They just want to sit

And smoke their weed

But why don't we take some wiser ones back

And teach them how to live

They will have so much to offer

They will have so much to give

This idea

Is not bad

And I see out there

A lass and lad

A lass and lad

Of good choice

They can lead others

With their pen and voice

A lass and lad

Who will be just right

They can speak and sing

And also write

And besides all that

They will live

Not just to speak

But to give

I see who I want

What do you know

They're out there watching

A movie show."

Just then the theatre lights up with different colored lights coming from the screen.

“This is weird,” I say.

“Very weird,” says Jon.

“Look around,” I say. We are now on the spaceship with the Martians”

“You have been selected,” says Enoon to Jon and me. “We’re taking you to the red planet, Mars.”

“Wow! How cool!” I say.

“I’m scared,” Jon says.

The colored lights keep bouncing around the spaceship ‘til, plop. We land on Mars.

“Let’s go,” says Enoon. “I’m your contact if you need any help. We are now leaving the spaceship and will enter the Great Cave.”

“This is the Great Cave,” say I pointing to the Cave.

“Let’s go in,” says Enoon.

“I’m scared,” says Jon.

“You will learn to love it here,” says Enoon as we enter the Great Cave. Look around and take what you need, but no more. If you are hungry, you can take yummy salads and chicken. If you are thirsty, there is coconut water. If you are cold, there are all kinds of sweat shirts. There is everything you need and want. But I give you one

warning. Don't go out the door that says, "exit." It is treacherous out there and you will not be able to come back in."

"Come on John," I exclaim. "Let's look around and see what we can use. I'm hungry. Let's get something to eat."

"I have a stomach ache," says Jon.

"Don't worry," says Ennon. "When you relax, you will love it here and your stomach ache will go away."

"Jon," I say. "Let's go to the salad bar. Where is it Ennon?"

"Straight ahead."

"Thanks Ennon. Come Jon. Let's get a yummy salad. Maybe they have one with papaya and coconut."

"OK"

"Look at all these great booths Jon. We'll walk around and look at them after we eat...Here we are. Everything looks so yummy."

"Would you like a salad or a wrap?" says the Martian in charge.

"Would you like a salad or a wrap?" says the Martian serving.

"May I please have a salad in a multigrain wrap with turkey breast and mustard. Would you like the same Jon.?"

"OK"

“Coming right up,” says the Martian serving. “What would you like in your salad?”

“A little of everything, please.”

“OK,” says the Martian. “Would you like some coconut water to go with it?”

“Yes, please,” I say.

The Martian makes up two meals and gives one to Jon and one to me.

“Let’s go sit down Jon and just relax and enjoy our meals.”

“Mmmm,” this is good,” says Jon.

“Yes, this is good,” say I.

We both enjoy the meal and afterward: “Let’s go look around,” say I. “Look at all the great clothes.”

“And the electric trains,” says Jon.

“Look Jon, the Little Red Schoolhouse. Let’s go inside.”

“I don’t want to go to school Alice.”

“But it looks so pretty Jon. Let’s go in.”

“OK,” says Jon following me into the Little Red Schoolhouse.

“Oh, look Jon, a math class.”

“Please sit down and join us,” says the teacher. “If you have any questions, just raise your hand. You make six students, a nice size group.”

After 45 minutes the class finishes.

“That was fun Jon. I didn’t know math could be so much fun.”

“Yes Alice, it was fun. And look—there’s a bowling alley. Let’s go bowling.

“You go. I’m not in the mood right now,” I say. “I’m going over to the make-up counter. I’ll meet you later.”

“OK Alice.”

Jon goes into the bowling alley. I start walking toward the make-up counter. Then...

Look at that “exit” sign. If I go out I can’t return. It’s nice here, but what’s out there? When no one is looking, I can sneak out. I like it here, but what’s out there? Maybe it’s better out there. Maybe not. But MAYBE it IS better. Look—the door is opening by itself. I know. I’ll put my shoe in the doorway, so the door can’t close all the way, and I’ll come back if I want to. There—now to explore and enter a new world. Oh, look how busy it is. I’m hungry. Let’s see what I can eat. Oh my, everything here costs money and I have no money on me. And I’m hungry. And I’m cold and all the sweat shirts cost money. Where’s that “exit” door. I’m going back. It disappeared. There is no door. And I’m only wearing one shoe. Now what do I do? Everything is so busy here. And no one to help me.

Oh look, a window. And it is night outside. And look—the first star. They say if you make a wish on the first star, your wish will come true.

“Star light

Star bright

First star I see tonight

Wish I may

Wish I might

Have the wish I wish tonight.”

“I wish to be back in the movies with Jon.”

Just then the lights go on in the theatre.

“That was a good movie Jon.”

“Yes it was Alice. Alice, will you go steady with me and wear my ring around your neck?”

“I would love to Jon.

“Here’s my ring with a chain. I’ll put it around your neck.”

“I love you Alice.”

“I love you Jon.”

And we leave the theatre—but I am wearing only one shoe.

Chapter II

Wow! That was close. Mom didn't catch me wearing just one shoe. I'll just stick this one shoe under the bed and put on a pair of sneakers.

"Alice, how did you like the movie?"

"Really cool Mom. Really cool.

"Time to do some homework before dinner. Tomorrow there's school.

"Sure Mom."

Let's see. Maybe I'll try and do some math...Wow! I used to hate this stuff. Now I'm catching on.

Later:

Finished my math. Now, let's see. I'll do some English. I love reading for English.

"Alice—dinnertime"

"Coming Mom."

I just have a little reading to do and that's it. I'll do it after dinner. Everything else is done. And what are all those colored lights outside my window? Better go to dinner. Getting hungry.

Mom, Dad and I sit around the table to eat dinner. There is one empty chair at the table—for my late brother, Fred. Fred died in a car accident two years ago. He would have been eighteen now, three years older than me.

“This food is really good Mom, fried chicken and potato salad.”

“And don’t forget the broccoli Alice.”

“OK Mom.”

“How was your day Alice?” asks Dad. “Did you go to the movies with Jon? What did you see?”

“WELCOME TO THE RED PLANET MARS and it was awesome.”

“What was awesome—the movie or the planet?”

“Both.”

“And I see you have a ring around your neck. You and Jon going steady now?”

“Yeah.”

We eat our dinner and then Mom says, “Baked apples stuffed with apricots for dessert.”

“Good,” exclaim Dad and I together.

After finishing our baked apples Mom says, “it’s 7 o’clock now Alice. Time to finish your homework, then get ready for bed. What homework do you have left?”

“Reading for English.”

“Go to it,” Mom says.

“OK,” I say.

So I go upstairs to my room and sit down with my book. I can’t believe this. The book is titled WELCOME TO THE RED PLANET MARS. I wonder if they made the movie from this book. Look at these pictures. Just like the movie. Look at that long hallway—all red. And there is a red light over every door and I’m walking past each of them. What?! I’m walking down the hallway on the RED PLANET MARS?!

Wow—I am!

I am!

I am!

Wait—a door opens!

“Hello. I’m Hector,” says a little four-foot tall green man with a black moustache and black hair with pink streaks.

“I’m Alice.”

He’s kinda cute, I think to myself. Only I’m wearing Jon’s ring around my neck. Gotta be true to Jon.

“Want to go see the latest spaceship take off?”

“OK,” I say while thinking—guess it can’t hurt to do that.

Hector grabs my hand and starts walking with me. My heart is beating faster and faster.

“Where is the spaceship?” I ask?

“Not very far. Just a few minutes’ walk from here,” says Hector as we walk outside.

“It’s really dark here,” I say as Hector puts his arm around me. “Oh look at those colored lights in the sky.”

“That’s where the spaceship is,” says Hector, walking in that direction. The name of the spaceship is LOVE TO ALL. Want to go on board before it takes off?”

“I’d love to. Where is it going?”

“Around Earth,” says Hector. “We Martians want to learn all about Earthlings.”

“I’m an Earthling,” say I.

“I know. And I want to know all about you,” says Hector pulling me closer to him.

“Oh Hector. I’m scared.”

“Don’t be Alice. Everything will be all right. I’m right here with you.”

“Oh,” I say. “Here we are at the spaceship.”

“Yes Alice, LOVE TO ALL. Let’s climb on board. I’ll help you up the stairs.”

“Oh look at all those lights surrounding LOVE TO ALL. It’s beautiful.”

“Yes, just like you are Alice.”

“Oh Hector, I feel a little dizzy.”

“OK Alice. We’ll sit down in these seats and watch the lights from the window.”

We both sit down and look out the window.

“Oh,” I say. “LOVE TO ALL is moving.”

“Yes Alice. We’re taking off.”

“But I have to go home. I have school tomorrow.”

“Don’t worry Alice. We’ll be circling Earth. When we get to your house, you can travel by yellow light beam through your window. Meanwhile let’s relax,” says Hector, pulling me closer to him and kissing me on the mouth. My heart beats faster and faster.

Knock—knock—knock.

“Alice, did you finish your English homework yet?”

I wake up over my English book. Oh, I must have fallen asleep over my English book.

“I’m almost finished Mom.”

“Good,” says Mom, opening the door. “When you’re finished get your clothes ready for school tomorrow and get ready for bed.”

“OK Mom.”

Mom then leaves and closes the door.

I wonder what I’ll wear tomorrow, I’m thinking while looking through my closet and dresser. I like this outfit with these jeans and this t-shirt. I wonder what shoes I’ll wear, I’m thinking while looking under the bed.

What! That one shoe I had under the bed! Now I have them both!

Chapter III

The Next Morning:

“Ring...” The alarm clock wakes me up.

Oh, it's time to get up already! Better get out of bed!

I take my shower and get dressed. You know, I'm wearing my sneakers from now on. That bit with those shoes under my bed is just too weird.

“Would you like scrambled eggs for breakfast?” calls Mom.

“OK,” I say. Be there in a few minutes.

I rush downstairs and have breakfast.

“Gotta get the bus Mom.”

“Go to it,” says Mom.

Ten minutes later I arrive at the bus stop.

“Hi guys.”

“Hi Alice.”

“Here's the bus,” someone says. I get on the bus and sit down with Jane.

“I hate this bus,” I say to Jane. “The kids in back are always smoking weed and I get to school with a headache. Good thing I carry aspirin with me to take when I get to school.”

“Yeah,” says Jane.

The bus finally arrives at school and the kids get off.

Off to math class. But this time I think I'll like it. Jon also has math—same period but different class. “Ring...” Everyone rushes to his or her seat. The teacher is up front teaching and writing on the board. I'm really catching on to this. You know, this stuff is really cool.

Later:

“Ring...” Class is over and everyone rushes out into the hallway.

“Hi Jon.” I say running into Jon.

“Hi Alice.”

“Jon, math was awesome today.”

“Oh I thought it sucked,” says Jon.

“Jon, remember the Little Red Schoolhouse in WELCOME TO THE RED PLANET MARS? Remember the math lesson? Ever since then I love math.”

“What on earth are you talking about Alice? What Little Red Schoolhouse? What math? Are you crazy?”

Am I crazy? Am I crazy?

“Ring...”

“Gotta run, Alice. Meet you at lunch,” says Jon.

Later Alice and Jon are eating together in the lunchroom:

“We both got wraps,” I say. “They’re good but not as good as the ones on THE RED PLANET MARS. What do you think John?”

“What are you talking about Alice?” says Jon. WELCOME TO THE RED PLANET MARS is a movie. We weren’t in it; we watched it. Are you OK Alice?”

“Sorry Jon. My imagination is running away with me,” I say shivering.

“Please stay with it Alice. OK?”

“OK Jon,” I say thinking about the pair of shoes under my bed but afraid to say anything.

We finish the rest of the meal in silence.

“Ring...”

“Lunch is over Alice. Gotta go,” says Jon.

“Me too Jon. Gotta run to English class.”

Well, I’m thinking to myself as Jon and I walk to together, I wonder if we will be discussing WELCOME TO THE RED PLANET MARS in English class.

“Ring...”

Everyone enters the class and sits down.

“Class,” says the teacher. “Today we will be discussing GREAT EXPECTATIONS by Charles Dickens.”

I look out the window and see bright colored lights in the sky.

Chapter IV

Later...

“Whew!” I sigh walking in the front door of my house after school. What a day! Glad my parents aren’t here to see how upset I am. Now I’m home and I’m seeing those bright colored lights again out the living room window.

“Come here.”

“Who said that?” I say.

“I did—Hector.”

“Hector, where are you?”

“I’m here—on LOVE TO ALL, the spaceship. Come on board with me Alice.”

“How do I do that?”

“See the yellow light beam?” says Hector. “Just climb it to me.”

“I see the yellow light beam going through the living room window. I’ll climb it to you Hector. I’m climbing it now. I’m climbing the yellow light beam. I’m climbing the yellow light beam.”

“Come to me Love,” says Hector as I reach him. We embrace and remain locked in each other’s arms for a long time.

“It’s wonderful to be with you Hector.”

“Do you want to see my planet and go for a walk on Mars?”

“Yes, but I must be home before six. My parents come home at six.”

“Don’t worry Alice. It’s only 2:30. You’ll be home at 5:45.”

“OK Hector.”

“Here we are on Mars.”

“All ready?!”

“Yes Alice. LOVE TO ALL is very fast. Let’s leave the ship and go to the Magic Garden.”

“OK Hector,” I sigh. And we walk to the Magic Garden.

“Why are you trembling Alice. Everything is fine. Look at these beautiful gardens.”

“I never saw such beautiful flowers before, Hector. Is the rest of Mars so beautiful?”

“It is Alice. It is. And you are the most beautiful flower in this garden,” says Hector pulling me closer to him.

I’m thinking to myself now—should I give Jon his ring back? Should I give Jon his ring back?

“Alice, let’s walk through the little town where I grew up. Then we can go to my family home. You can meet my parents and some of my brothers and sisters.”

“I’d love that Hector. How many brothers and sisters do you have?”

“Ten,” says Hector.

“Wow! That’s a whole lot. I had a brother once, but he died in a car accident two years ago. He was three years older than I.”

“I’m sorry Alice. That is tragic. It will be hard for your parents, then, when you want to leave home. They may not want you to leave.

“Oh, I never thought of that, Hector.”

“Here, we have arrived at my little town, ‘Nwot.’ And there is the one-room schoolhouse where I went to school ‘til eighth grade.”

“That must have been confusing Hector, eight grades all in one room.”

“No, I liked it. You learned more, by listening to the teacher teach all the grades.”

“Wow! I never thought of that. And I love these houses and all the farm land. Did you grow up on a farm?”

“Yes I did Alice.”

“Wow! I never met anyone who grew up on a farm before. What do you do now Hector?”

“I’m a nuclear engineer Alice.”

“Oh I know nothing about nuclear engineering, but I’d love to learn.”

“Well you certainly can. We have excellent schools here on Mars. And, voila, here we are at my family home. Come inside and meet everyone.”

Hector and I walk into Hector’s family home.

“Hello everyone,” says Hector. “I’d like you to meet my girlfriend, Alice.”

“Hi Alice,” the five people in the room say in unison. “I’m Mom, I’m Pop, I’m Eno, I’m Owt, I’m Eerht,” say each of them.

“Well,” says Hector, I’m afraid we can’t stay. Alice has to get home soon.”

“Bye Alice,” they all say. “Nice to have met you.”

“Bye everyone,” say I. “Nice to have met all of you.”

We then leave Hector’s family home.

“OK Alice,” says Hector. “We’ll go back to LOVE TO ALL and fly back to Earth. Then I’ll light beam you back home through your living room window.”

“Hector, I’m going to miss you when I leave you. And what do I do about Jon? I’m wearing his ring around my neck.”

“Alice, I’m jealous of Jon. He is with you a lot when I’m not there. But here we arrive at LOVE TO ALL. Let’s get on board.”

LOVE TO ALL flies back to my house and Hector light beams me through my living room window. I then sit down at the dining room table and open my book.

“Ring...”

“Oh, there’s the doorbell. I must have fallen asleep. Wow! What a dream!”

“Ring...”

“Coming...” I answer the door.

“Alice what took you so long?” says Jon when I open the door.

“I fell asleep Jon. I just woke up. Come in.”

Just then my parents arrive home with dinner.

“Hi Mom and Dad,” we say.

“Hi Alice and Jon.”

“Oh, I’d better go home,” says Jon. I didn’t know it was so late. My parents are expecting me home for dinner. I’ll come over later, Alice, and we’ll do homework together.”

“OK Jon.”

“Let me put dinner on the table,” says Mom.

“Well, Alice,” says Dad. “What’s new and exciting?”

“Same old,” I say. “Same old.”

My family sits down for dinner together.

“This chicken pot pie is good,” I say.

“How is school coming along?” asks Mom.

“Really good,” I say. “I’m catching on to math and I love it. And I’m reading GREAT EXPECTATIONS for English. Love it too. I’ll read some more when Jon comes over.”

“I see you still have Jon’s ring around your neck.”

“Yeah Dad.”

We eat the rest of the meal in silence. Can't stop thinking about Jon and Hector.
And then the spaceship and the RED PLANET MARS.

Later Jon comes over...

“This homework isn't so bad Jon. I'm catching on to math and the English is interesting. And those are the only two subjects I get homework in.”

“I only get homework in math and English also,” says Jon. “But I don't like it as much as you do.”

Later that night when the whole family is asleep, I wake up. There is the yellow light beam shining through my bedroom window.

Chapter V

“Hector, is that you?”

“Yes Alice. Climb up the yellow light beam and come to me.”

“Let me get dressed first.”

“No need Alice. You look fine. Come as you are.”

“OK Hector,” I say, starting to climb up the yellow light beam.

“Here I am Hector,” I say after a couple of minutes.

“My Love,” says Hector, holding me and showering me with kisses. “Why are you trembling Alice?”

“I don’t know Hector. I never felt like this before.”

We both fall back onto the couch and remain in each other’s arms. I feel Hector pressing against me. A few minutes pass and Hector is still pressing against me. I see bright colored lights all around. Then everything goes dark. Some time passes and we are still lying in each other’s arms.

“Alice,” says Hector, “it is time for you to go back now. You have to get up for school soon.”

“I don’t want to leave you Hector.”

“I know. I don’t want to leave you either. But we will see each other again soon. You have to go now.”

“OK,” I say. I then get up and climb down the yellow light beam and get into my own bed.

“Good night Hector.”

“Good night Alice.”

Chapter VI

“Ring...”

There goes the alarm. Better get ready for school.

A little later Mom calls to me, “Alice come for breakfast.”

I go downstairs and sit down for breakfast. And there is a bowl of oatmeal with candy hearts in it.

“Happy Valentine’s Day Alice.”

“Oh thank you Mom. I forgot about Valentine’s Day. Happy Valentine’s Day to you too. But I have to rush. Don’t want to miss the bus.” I eat breakfast, make the bus and soon arrive at school.

“Hi Alice,” says Jon when I get off the bus. “I have a Valentine’s cupcake for you.”

“Oh thank you. Isn’t this a pretty cupcake—pink icing and red hearts. Thank you Hector.”

“Who is Hector? I’m Jon.”

“Oh I mean Jon. Hector is a character in a novel I’m reading. I’m getting all mixed up.”

“Alice are you OK? Do you still love me?”

“Of course I do Jon.”

“OK. We’d better go to class now,” says Jon.

And so we do.

Then there is lunchtime:

“Hi Alice,” says Jon as he meets up with me.

“Hi Jon,” I say. “Let’s get our lunch and sit down.” And so we do.

“How did you like the cupcake I gave you?” says Jon.

“It was very pretty and very delicious,” I say, wondering who I love, Jon or Hector.

“There’s a love story playing at the movies Sunday. Let’s see it,” says Jon.

“Sure,” I say.

What do I do now, I’m thinking to myself. Jon is going to want to sit in the back row and make out. I don’t want to. But I have his ring. Now what?

“Alice, I’m so glad we are going steady,” says Jon. “I wish it were Valentine’s Day forever. I’ll be over your house tonight. We’ll do our homework together.”

We sit and eat our lunch and—“ring…”

“Time to go to class Alice. Shit, who wants to go to class. I’ll see you tonight.”

Jon I have a sore throat. I’m going to bed early tonight. We’ll make it another time.”

“OK. I’m sorry you’re not feeling well. Bye Alice.”

“Bye Hector.”

Off I go to English. I love reading GREAT EXPECTATIONS by Charles Dickens. I'm really getting to love school. I wonder if I would like school on Mars. I remember the Little Red Schoolhouse. That was fun.

Later on the bus home:

"Jane, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

"I don't know Alice. My parents want me to be a teacher, so I'll probably do that. You know, I saw the greatest movie on TV last night, 'Diabolique'"

"Jane, how come when we get together everyone talks about what's good on TV. Isn't there anything else we can talk about?"

"Of course--what's happening in school."

I'm thinking--there must be more to life than school and TV. There is. There's Hector. Hector has shown me an exciting new life.

When the bus stops at my stop, I get out and go home. As soon as I enter my house I see that yellow light beam again.

"Hector is that you?"

"Yes Alice, it is I. But we'll see each other later. You have studying to do first.

"But Hector I miss you. I want to see you."

"I miss you too Alice. But I'm working on an important project for work. Can't make it right now. So I'll do what I have to do, and you'll do what you have to do, and we'll see each other later."

“OK Hector. We’ll see each other later.”

I’ll sit down to do my homework. You know, school has gotten to be so interesting. But I can’t stop thinking about Hector. Then there is Jane on the bus. And she wants to be a teacher because her parents want her to be a teacher. My parents are the same way. They say the same thing. They say a teacher is a good profession for a woman. But what about doing something you really love. Doesn’t that count? And then there’s Hector. But better get to studying now. I’ll see Hector later.

Later...

Done with my homework. I think I’ll do some sketching and watercolor. We do that in school but I think I’ll do some more at home.

“Ring...”

Oh there’s the phone. “Hi Jane.”

“Alice I met this great guy, Steve, and he wants me to play basketball with him at the gym.”

“That’s great Jane...” and the conversation goes on and on until we both say, “bye.”

Well let me do some watercolor now. I’ll get together all my supplies and do watercolor in my room on my desk.

Later...

Finished. This is a painting of Hector and me in the spaceship, Love to All, and all the bright colored lights around us. It really came out good.

“Alice, are you home?” calls out Mom as she and Dad enter the house.

“I’m here,” I call back.

“Are you doing your homework?”

“It’s done,” I say.

“That’s good,” say Mom and Dad in unison.

“Dinner soon,” says Mom.

“OK,” say I.

Chapter VII

“How did you like school today?” asks Dad when the three of us are eating dinner.

“I’m really beginning to love school,” I respond. “And I did a painting after school.”

“Oh that’s nice,” says Dad. “You’ll have to show it to us after dinner. Maybe you’ll be an art teacher.”

I then start thinking about Hector. Hector is a nuclear engineer. I wonder what that is like. I wonder if I would like that. But to be a teacher—no. I don’t want to stand up in front of a class full of kids and teach.

“This dinner is really good,” I say eating the meatballs and mashed sweet potato.”

Then I think about Hector. I really miss him. Can’t wait to see him tonight. I wonder what he eats. And who he eats with.

“I’m kind of tired,” I say finishing dinner. “And I have a little sore throat. I finished my homework. I think I’ll go to bed early. Maybe I’ll watch some TV first.”

“I’m sorry you’re not feeling well,” says Mom. “But I’m glad you’re going to rest and get to bed early.

Can’t wait to see Hector, I think to myself. But I’ll have to wait ‘til everyone is asleep.

I then go up to my room and turn on the TV. And guess what?! There's Hector on TV!

"Hector, what are you doing on TV?"

"Just want to talk with you Alice. Can't see you tonight. I'm working on an important project. And tomorrow night, too, I'll be busy. Hopefully that's it. But my mother invited us to her house the following night. Would you like to go?"

"I'd love to Hector. But I miss you."

"I miss you, too, Alice. But I have to go to work now. Bye Alice."

"Bye Hector," I say as I turn off the TV.

"Ring..." There goes the phone.

"Hello."

"Hi Alice."

"Hi Jon"

"Alice, how do you feel?"

"Not the greatest. I'm going to bed soon."

"Alice, if you're feeling better, can I come over tomorrow?"

"Sure Jon."

And the conversation goes on for a while. Afterward I hang up and decide to read some poetry. I bought a poetry book at the book store and I love it. I love

memorizing Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnets. And I think I'll write a poem about Hector. But let me go to bed first. I'm really tired. I'll write in bed.

I get washed and undressed and into bed. I never get to the reading and writing because I immediately fall asleep.

Chapter VIII

The next evening Jon comes over to my house.

“Alice,” says Jon, “if we get our homework done quickly, we can watch TV or play cards.”

“I guess so. But I have this great poetry book. Do you want me to read you one of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s poems. They are really beautiful?”

“No. Don’t like poetry.”

I’m thinking to myself—I wonder if Hector likes poetry. I’ll have to ask him. Maybe I can read Elizabeth Barrett Browning to him.

“Jon, what do you want to be when you grow up?”

“I’ll probably be a lawyer. They make good money.”

“Do you think you’ll enjoy the job?”

“Probably not. But I’ll enjoy the money.”

“I’d like to be an artist.”

“You mean a ‘starving artist,’” says Jon half-joking. “If we get married, I’d better be a lawyer.”

“You know,” I say, “I can do art as a hobby and then maybe become a nuclear engineer.”

“Alice,” says Jon, “why don’t you be an art teacher?”

“Maybe I shouldn’t get married,” I say. “Then I can do what I please.”

“Alice,” says Jon. “You are now talking nonsense. Don’t you want a family? Don’t you want a husband and children?”

“I’m not sure what I want.”

“Well,” says Jon. “I know what I want. When we finish our homework, let’s play cards.”

And so we do our homework and then play cards. Later, Jon and I finish playing cards and Jon goes home. I go to my room, turn on the TV, and there is Hector on TV again.

“Hi Alice. I’ll take a little break now and talk with you via the TV”

“Hector, do you like Elizabeth Barrett Browning?”

“Very much so Alice.”

“Oh Hector—‘How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.’” And I recite her entire sonnet by heart.

“That was lovely Alice. And you recite it so beautifully. But I must return to my job now. We’ll see each other tomorrow. Good night Alice.”

“Good night Hector.”

I get ready for bed and then lie in bed trying to sleep. “Starving artist,” I say to myself. “Starving artist. What else could I do? I could do beading—buy interesting

beads and do beading. What else could I do? What else? Beading won't make me much money. Starving artist. Starving artist. I'll have to talk to Hector. I want to earn a living but I also want to do what I love. Oh there's the TV—didn't shut it off. I'll go shut it off—Oh, it's Hector.”

“Alice, I couldn't help but hear you talking to yourself. You know what they say—‘the first ten years of being an artist you starve.’”

“And after that?” I ask.

“After that,” says Hector. “ You get used to it.”

“Ho! Ho!” I say.

“Don't fret Alice. I'm just kidding and I have an idea.”

“What's that?” I ask.

“We want to make our spaceships more attractive. That is one of the things we are discussing tonight at the meeting. One person mentioned painting murals on the inside of the ships. Do you think you would like to do that Alice?”

“Like it! I would love it!”

“Alice bring me over some of the paintings you've done so I can see them over the TV.”

“OK Hector. Give me just a few seconds,” I say collecting a few paintings and bringing them over to the TV to show Hector.

"Alice," says Hector. "I'll take photos of them and see what the others think. We are on the way to launching a career for you."

"Hector, you've been so good to me. What can I do for you?"

"Just be by my side Alice. Be by my side."

"Absolutely," I say.

"OK Alice. You have shown me five paintings. Show me them again one at a time in front of the TV and I will take a picture of each of them. And then I will show the photos to the people at the meeting."

"Hector thank you so much."

"My pleasure Alice."

So Hector takes the photos. I then go to sleep and dream of bright colored lights.

Chapter IX

The next day at school I meet Jon in the lunchroom.

“Hi Alice, guess what?! I just got into Columbia University.”

“Great Jon! That’s where you want to go.”

“And you applied to NYU,” says Jon. “That’s where you want to go.”

“I don’t know anymore,” I tell him. “I applied for liberal arts and I’m more interested in the fine arts. Maybe I’ll take literature with fine arts electives if they let me.”

“And then what will you do when you graduate—be a ‘starving artist?’”

“No, I have other ideas.”

“Alice,” says Jon. “You have changed. You are sort of drifting away from everything. Anyway, will you meet me at the movies Sunday—12: 30 in front of the candy counter?”

“Sure,” I say. “You know, I love that art class that I’m taking. My favorite subjects are art and English. I love them both.”

“How can you love school so much?” says Jon. “I just do it ‘cause I have to. Ever since we went to that movie about Mars you’ve changed.

“Ring...”

“OK,” says Jon. “There’s the bell. Time for class. Meet you at the movies Sunday.”

“Bye Jon.”

After school I sit with Jane on the bus home.

“Alice I’m going out with this real cute guy,” she says. “We’re going to the movies Sunday. We’ll see you there.”

“What’s he like?” I ask.

“Well,” says Jane. “He’s going to get a car soon.”

“That’s nice,” I say.

“Yeah,” says Jane.

“Here’s my stop Jane. See you at the movies.”

“Bye Alice,” says Jane.

Chapter X

I fall sound asleep that night. In the middle of the night the yellow light beam awakens me.

“Come to me Alice. Come to me. I need you Alice. I need you.”

“Coming Hector. I’m coming,” say I rubbing my eyes and then climbing up the yellow light beam.”

When I reach Hector he showers me with kisses.

“I need you Alice,” says Hector. “You are my inspiration.”

“I want to be with you always Hector.”

We remain locked in each other’s arms the rest of the night with the moon shining down on us.

“Did they like my paintings Hector? Do you think I’ll make it as an artist on Mars?”

“They liked your paintings Alice and we need artists like you to make the spaceships beautiful.”

“On Earth,” I remark, “some people make fun of artists. They call us ‘starving artists.’”

“I don’t think you will have to worry about that on Mars.”

“Hector it’s so nice to be here with you. I don’t want to ever leave.”

“Well you are invited to stay here on Mars with me. It’s all up to you.”

“Thank you Hector. I will think about it.”

Hector and I sleep in each other’s arms until it is time for me to climb down the yellow light beam back into my own bed.

Chapter XI

The next day is Saturday and I spend most of the day in my room doing my artwork. I do pictures of my room and pictures of scenes outside my window. I even make a picture of LOVE TO ALL, the spaceship.

“Alice,” says Mom, knocking on my door. “What are you doing in your room so much? Do you have so much homework?”

“No Mom. I’m doing homework, but I’m doing other stuff too.”

“OK Alice.”

“Oh Hector,” I say to myself. “No one on Earth knows about you except me. No one else on Earth would accept you. You couldn’t come to me. I have to go to you. They would accept an Earthling on Mars, but not a Martian on Earth. I guess my culture is quite limited.”

Chapter XII

Soon Sunday rolls around. I find myself on the bus again going to the movies.

“Hi Alice,” says Jane when I get off the bus. “Jon is inside the theatre. I’d like you to meet my friend, Jay.”

“Hi Jay.”

“Hi Alice.”

I go inside the theatre and find Jon by the candy counter.

“The usual Alice? Popcorn and soda?”

“No thanks Jon. I’ll have a dark chocolate bar this time.”

“What! Alice! You’ve changed in every way imaginable. OK. You get what you want and I’ll get what I want.”

And so we do.

“OK Alice,” says Jon. “Let’s go to our seats.” And we walk into the movie theatre.

“No Jon,” I say as Jon goes to sit down in the last row. “I want to sit in row 3.”

“What?! Why in row 3?” says Jon.

“Because I want to,” I say.

“Well I want to sit in the last row,” says Jon sitting down.

“OK,” I say. “You sit in the last row and I’ll sit in row 3.”

And so we do just that.

And I watch the movie, “A Love Story,” and think about Hector.

After the movie Jon meets up with me and he is furious.

“I don’t know what’s wrong with you Alice; but if you keep this up, I’m breaking off with you.”

“OK Jon,” I say taking off his ring from around my neck and handing it to him. I then walk away leaving him standing there with his mouth open.

That night I eat dinner with my parents.

“How was the movie today,” asks Dad. “And what did you see?”

“A Love Story,” I say. “And it was very good.”

“Alice,” says Mom. “I see you are not wearing Jon’s ring around your neck. What happened?”

“Oh,” I say. “We just don’t see eye to eye on everything.”

“Alice, you’ve been acting very strange lately. You are always spending so much time in your room. And Jon’s mother called me this afternoon. Jon has been talking to her and has been telling her how strange you are acting lately.”

“Nothing is wrong with me,” I say.

“Well Alice,” says Mom, “Dad and I have been talking and we think you should be talking to someone about this.”

“I’m very happy with my life,” I reply.

“Nevertheless,” says Mom. “We will arrange to have you see someone to talk with him or her. It’s for your own benefit.”

I don’t know what to say. I eat the rest of my meal in silence. That evening I go into my room and do some pastel.

“I love painting and drawing and pastel,” I say to myself. “I know this is something new, my spending so much time doing artwork; but so what? Does that make me strange?”

That night when I am sound asleep, the yellow light beam wakes me up again.

“Hector, I’m coming.” And I climb up the yellow light beam.

Chapter XIII

“Alice,” says Hector after a long hug and kiss, “we have to talk.”

“What is it?” I ask.

“They plan on taking you to a psychiatrist. What are you going to tell him or her?”

“I don’t know,” I say.

“I’ll tell you what is going to happen, Alice. If you tell the truth they will think you are crazy. They will drug you up and lock you up and I may not be able to reach you. If you lie you will get caught in your lie somewhere along the line. And what if they find you missing from your room when you come to visit me? The WILL start checking on you in the middle of the night.”

“Oh Hector, what do I do?”

“Alice, Sweetheart, we either say goodbye now forever, or you stay here with me forever.”

“Oh Hector, let me think about it.”

“I love you Alice. I want you with me always. But you have no more time to think about it Alice. You must make your decision now.”

“But my parents will be devastated if I leave them. How can I leave them like that?”

“But what about YOU Alice? What about YOUR life? Don’t you count? After all you will be sixteen soon. You have a right to a life of your own.”

“Oh Hector. I’ll stay here on Mars with you. I love you Hector. I love you Hector.”

“I love you Alice. And we’ll be together always. We will always belong to each other.”

Chapter XIV

“Alice, we’ll go to my place. You’ve never seen my house. I think you’ll like it, especially one room.”

“What room?” I ask.

“You will see,” says Hector. “We can walk to my place. It isn’t too far. I think you’ll like it, especially tomorrow morning when it’s light out.”

“Oh Hector, I’m so excited. I’m so excited about being with you and our new life together.”

After a few minutes...

“Here we are, Alice.”

“Oh a one-story little house with trees around it. I love it already.”

“Come inside,” says Hector as they enter. “Come see your special room first. Here, look...

“It’s a nice room, Hector, with lots of windows, mauve walls, and a gray tile floor—but no furniture.”

“This is your studio Alice. You will furnish it. It is your room.”

“Thank you, Hector, thank you.”

Part II

Chapter XV

Hector continues giving me a tour around the house. When we arrive at the kitchen, the last room we come to, he asks—

“Would you like hot chocolate before going to bed?”

“I would love it,” I say

“Computer,” Hector says, “hot chocolate please for two.”

In one minute there are the two hot chocolates.

“Here’s one for you, Alice,” says Hector handing me the hot chocolate.”

“Thank you Hector. Mmm, this is good.”

After we finish our hot chocolates, we go into the bedroom with a king-size bed. Hector holds me close to him.

“You are mine now Alice. I love you so much.”

“Hector I love you. I love you,” I whisper.

Hector pulls me close to him and we collapse onto the bed. My heart beats faster and faster and Hector holds me very close.

“Hector, Hector,” I whisper.

We embrace for a long time and then I fall asleep.

When morning finally arrives, the sun is shining in on the bed. I open my eyes. Hector is still asleep. I get up, go to the closet, take out a robe and go into the bathroom and shower. ,,

“Last night was wonderful,” I say to myself under the shower. “Hector is wonderful,” I continue. “But how is my family on Earth? I wonder how they are.

I finish my shower. “Let’s see,” I say after getting out of the shower and drying off. “Here are the combs, brushes, toothbrushes, toothpaste and body lotion. All set.”

I finish up in the bathroom, put on the robe and go back into the bedroom. Hector is still asleep.

“Oh,” I say to myself. “That thing over there looks just like what’s in the kitchen that makes the best hot chocolate.”

“Computer,” I say. “One hot chocolate please.”

And, voila, one minute later—a cup of hot chocolate. I take the hot chocolate, sit down on the bed and sip it. I am in seventh heaven.

“Hello Darling,” says Hector, as I finish my hot chocolate.

“Good morning Love,” I say leaning over and kissing him on the lips.

“Alice, would you like to go to the Magic Garden for breakfast?” asks Hector.

“I’d love to,” I say.

“OK Alice,” says Hector. “Let me just get washed and dressed. It won’t take long. Would you like to watch TV while you are waiting?”

“Yes,” I say. “I’d like to see what’s happening on Earth. I’m worried about my family.”

“OK Alice, I’ll turn on Earth News.”

“Thank you,” I say.

“I’m getting showered and dressed now. You can watch the news,” replies Hector.

“Oh my,” I say to myself while watching Earth News. “I see my family. They don’t know where I am. They hope I am safe. This is terrible. What have I done to them?!”

“Hector,” I exclaim when he comes out of the bathroom. “My family is so worried about me. Can I write them a letter to tell them I’m all right? What shall I do? Maybe I can write to them and light beam the letter to the dining room table tonight. Then in the morning they’ll know I’m OK.”

“You can do that,” says Hector while getting dressed. “They will be confused and no one will know how the letter got there. But it will give them some comfort. Yes we can do that.”

“Oh Hector, what have I done?! Look at all the distress I caused?!”

“Alice, these are the things that happen in life. Your parents have their life to lead and you have your own life. Just remember that. Anyway, I’ll be ready to go to the Magic Garden in five minutes.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” I say softly.

Five minutes later we leave the house and walk to the Magic Garden.

“Alice I have some good news for you,” says Hector as we are walking. “I didn’t tell you last night because I didn’t want to spoil the mood. But your pictures made a big hit with my sister, Marie, who the head of an art school, The Mars Art Academy, where I used to teach. She would like you to attend her school to perfect your skills. Also, at the same time you will get your high school diploma and go on to getting credits toward your college degree.”

“Oh Hector that’s wonderful. I didn’t know you were also an artist. I’d love to go to that school.”

“Good,” says Hector. “Here we are at the Magic Garden. Let’s sit down at this table and have breakfast. Would you like an orange, turkey bacon omelet and cappuccino?”

“I’d love it Hector. Can we also write to my parents?”

“Sure. I’ll get some note paper also. We’ll write to your parents after breakfast.”

Hector leaves and comes back with breakfast and note paper.

“This breakfast looks really good,” says Hector. And we sit enjoying our breakfast in silence.

“OK,” I say, finishing breakfast. “I’m going to write a note to my parents on that paper you have.”

I borrow a pen from Hector and write, “Dear Mom and Dad, Please don’t worry about me. I can’t tell you where I am, but I am very happy. Love always, Alice.”

I seal the note, write "Mom and Dad" on the envelope and hand it to Hector.

"OK Alice, we'll light beam it to them tonight."

"Let's go for a walk in these woods here," I say getting up. We walk through the woods hand-in-hand, stopping every few steps for a kiss.

"You know, Alice," says Hector, "maybe we can see my sister, Marie, at the Art Academy now. Maybe you can enroll and go there during the day while I am working."

"That would be great Hector."

"OK, I'll call Marie now."

Hector dials the number.

"Hello Hector."

"Hi Marie. I'm with Alice. Do you have time to see us this morning?"

"Sure. Come on over. I'd love to meet Alice."

"Good. Bye Marie."

"Bye Hector."

"OK Alice, we're off. We'll take a short helicopter ride to Marie."

Hector and I get into a helicopter parked at the edge of the Magic Garden.

Hector punches in Mars Art Academy and away we go. When we arrive at the Mars Art Academy the helicopter parks itself at the curb and Hector and I get out.

“What a beautiful building,” I say. “I never saw anything like it—pale blue with windows galore.”

“This is The Mars Art Academy,” says Hector. “Wait ‘til you see the inside with all the murals.”

We enter the building.

“Oh how beautiful! Look at all those murals,” I gasp.

“Yes they are exquisite,” says Hector. “Now let’s take the elevator to the 100th floor—the top floor. You should see the view from Marie’s windows on the 100th floor, and the view from her terrace.”

We enter the elevator and one half a minute later we are on the 100th floor. We exit the elevator and I gasp again:

“Look at the murals on these walls!”

“Let’s go to Marie’s office,” says Hector as we walk toward Marie’s suite. We enter the office and there is Marie, a little green woman with pink hair and matching pink eyes.

“Hi Hector,” says Marie. “And you must be Alice. Hector has told me all about you, that you are thin, medium height with beautiful long wavy blond hair and beautiful blue eyes.”

“Oh really,” I say, a little embarrassed.

“Alice, let me show you around. As you can see we have the office walls done in murals. This is our specialty. We go on to design the inside of spaceships with lovely

murals. Hector has shown me pictures of your artwork. Alice they are lovely and you have great potential. Are you interested in joining our team?"

"Yes I am Marie."

"Good. I'll give you a few days to get used to Mars and then you can come here and paint."

"Thank you Marie. Everything is happening to fast. I need time to get used to Mars."

Chapter XVI

After meeting Marie, we all walk around looking at the murals in the rooms.

“Where are the students?” I ask.

“They are on the two floors below, the 98th and 99th floors. Maybe Hector can show you around there. Then in a few days you can come join us.”

“That would be so exciting,” I say.

“If you also want a steady job, there will soon be a position open in the art supply store on the 97th floor.”

“I would like that. I never had a real job.”

“Alice,” says Hector, “let’s look around the art school and art supply store and then go downstairs for lunch.”

“Hector you are so good to me. No one has ever been so good to me.”

Hector and I then take a tour of the art school, watching the artists paint. Then we go to the art supply store and look at all the supplies.

“Would you like to go for lunch now Alice? It’s late and I’m hungry.”

“Me too Hector. I’m hungry.”

So we go downstairs to the cafeteria.

“Oh look at that beautiful outdoor garden, where we can eat,” I say.

“Yes Alice,” says Hector. “Let’s get our lunch and eat out there.”

And so we do. We eat and enjoy a lovely lunch.

“Alice,” says Hector after we finish eating, “I have one more day off tomorrow and then it’s back to work. That would be a good time for you to start school.”

“I’m looking forward to that Hector, but I’ve been thinking. What do I do for money?”

“I have some money,” says Hector. “And you can work in the art supply store when the position opens up.”

“Oh Hector, that’s wonderful.”

“Now let’s go for a bus ride around town,” says Hector. “You’ll be able to see what the town looks like. The busses have large windows.”

So we leave the cafeteria and walk a few minutes to the bus stop. The pavement is light blue. The buildings are tall with many windows and light blue just like the pavement. They all have gardens around them with magnificent flowers with a sweet perfumed scent which you can smell just walking by them. The sky is pink with some fluffy white clouds. It is all magnificent. Hector and I arrive at the bus stop and wait only about four minutes for the bus.

During a fabulous afternoon walking and riding around town, we also window shop in all the store windows.

“I love all these fashions,” say I.

“If you look through your closet at home,” says Hector, “you will find all these fashions there, just for you.”

“I saw some of them. I will look at them all when we get home. And I think they all will fit me.”

“You know,” says Hector. “It will get dark soon. Let’s head home.”

“OK,” I say.

“But before we go home,” says Hector, “we must make one last stop.”

“Where to?” I ask.

“It’s very close by—right down the block.”

“OK... oh look... an ice cream shop.”

“That’s where we’re going,” says Hector opening the door. “Come inside.”

We enter.

“Happy Birthday,” everyone inside shouts. “Happy Sweet Sixteen.”

“Happy Birthday to you...” they all sing.

“Thank you. Thank you,” I say in surprise. “That’s right, I’m sixteen today. And what a beautiful birthday cake!”

“We meet again,” says Marie. “And here are all your colleagues and fellow students.”

“What a surprise! I’m thrilled to meet all of you,” say I.

“Well,” says Hector. “You have to make the first cut into the cake and then it will be sliced into portions for all of us.”

“OK,” I say taking hold of the knife and making the initial slice into the cake.

“It’s so nice to meet you Alice,” says one of the lady students. “We can’t wait for you to join us.”

The staff, meanwhile, takes the cake and slices it into sections. Then everyone has a marvelous time enjoying a scrumptious ice cream cake. When we finally break up, it is dark outside. Hector and I walk to a helicopter parked at the curb, get in and fly home.

When we reach home, I am exhausted. I collapse on the bed and fall asleep in Hector’s arms.

Chapter XVII

When I wake up, the sun is streaming in on the bed. It is a beautiful day.

“Good morning my Darling,” says Hector.

“Good morning my Love,” say I.

“Would you like breakfast in bed?” asks Hector. “How about an orange, scrambled eggs with turkey bacon and cappuccino?”

“I’d love that,” I say, “but I’m still half asleep.”

“You’ll wake up,” says Hector. “And I’ll have the same—Computer—two oranges, two scrambled eggs with turkey bacon and two cappuccinos please.”

And one minute later—voila!

We both sit and enjoy our breakfast.

“You know,” I say when we finish eating, “I still have that note to send to my Mom and Dad.”

“No problem,” says Hector. “While you were sleeping last night, I light beamed it to your parents.”

“Thank you Hector. That was very kind of you.”

“Alice, this morning would you like to take a walk through the woods right outside here? The woods are beautiful and they will inspire you in your paintings. Then in the

evening we can lie on a blanket outside in the grass and look up at the sky—the moon and stars—also beautiful and inspiring.”

“Oh yes, Hector, yes.”

So I get up and get washed and dressed.”

“I love these clothes you got me—so fashionable, casual and comfortable.”

“And,” says Hector, “they are very beautiful on you. Shall we go for out walk in the woods?”

“OK. I’m ready.”

We both go outside and walk through the woods.

“How fascinating everything is here on Mars,” I exclaim. “And these cute little animals in the woods! And these pink bushes with silver leaves and pink flowers! And the lavender sky with fluffy white clouds with a gold lining as the sun shines through! What a beautiful scene! And the trees all have a soothing scent to them.”

So we walk and walk and never tire. After a very long walk we finally reach the edge of the woods. We end up in the little town we were in yesterday, right near the ice cream shop.

“Look! The ice cream shop!” say I. “Let’s get lunch there. I’m in the mood for a hamburger and a chocolate malted.”

“Me too,” says Hector. “And they will be having a jazz concert soon. Do you like jazz?”

“I do. I love jazz.”

“Well let’s go then,” says Hector as we walk toward the ice cream shop.

So in we go for a fun lunch and a fun afternoon. When we finally leave the ice cream shop, it is already dark outside.

“Well now that it’s dark, Alice,” says Hector, “we can go home, put down a blanket outside on the grass and look up at the moon and stars in the sky.”

“And what a beautiful sky it is,” say I, “with a full moon and so many twinkling stars.”

So we find a helicopter at the curb and off we go. When we finally get home, we spread a blanket outside on the ground, lie down, and gaze up at the night sky.

“It’s so beautiful,” I say over and over again. “It’s so beautiful.”

Chapter XVIII

The next morning we wash, dress and eat breakfast quickly. We take a helicopter to The Art Academy building. I get out and Hector continues on to his work. I go to The Art Academy office on the 100th floor and enroll in the school. I then go to the 97th floor for supplies and then to the 98th floor to start school.

“I love all this,” I sigh to myself.

Then I start drawing a nude model in charcoal.

“You’re a natural Alice,” says the instructor. “I can’t wait to see what else you will produce.”

At the end of the day the instructor tells me to go to the office upstairs. Marie wants to talk to me. I go upstairs.

“Alice,” says Marie. “A position in sales just opened up in the Art Supply Store on the 97th floor. Are you still interested?”

“I am interested,” I say.

“OK,” says Marie, “tomorrow morning go to the Art Supply Store. You will work there for four hours each morning Monday through Friday. Then after lunch you will go to the 98th floor for four hours of art.”

“Thank you,” I say. “I look forward to it.”

I then go downstairs and wait outside for a few minutes for Hector. I am still fascinated watching the people and traffic move by.

“Hi Alice,” says Hector walking toward me. “How was your first day?”

“It was really cool,” I say. “And tomorrow I start working in the Art Supply Store for four hours in the morning. And then I do my artwork for four hours afterward.”

“Wonderful,” says Hector. “I’m proud of you. Now let’s go home and have dinner.”

Chapter XIX

Thus begins my new life and I love it. And I love Hector. And Hector loves me.

Then—"ring..."

I wake up to the sound of the alarm clock. I open my eyes.

"What's this?!" I exclaim. "I'm back home on Earth in my own room?! What happened to Mars?!"

I get ready for school and go downstairs for breakfast.

"Good morning Alice," says Mom. "You're up bright and early for school. Dad and I have been looking at your paintings. We think you could be an art teacher."

"Don't want to teach," I say. "I'm an artist, not a teacher. If I need extra money, I'll work in an art store."

"You won't make much money doing that."

"I'll make much more as a recognized artist than as a teacher. You know what they say. 'Those who can, do. Those who can't teach.'"

With that Alice eats and goes off to school.

Alice meets Jane on the bus.

"Hi Alice," says Jane.

"Hi Jane," says I.

"Look," says Jane, holding up the ring around her neck. "I have Jay's ring. We're going steady."

"Congratulations," say I.

"You know that Jon has a new girlfriend, Patti," says Jane.

"Well good for them," I say.

Later on at lunchtime I go into the lunchroom. But this time I sit alone. As I am eating someone comes up to me.

"Hello," he says. "My name is Ralph. Is anybody sitting here?"

"No," I say. "You can sit down. My name is Alice."

"I'm new in this school," says Ralph. "I think I'm going to be in your art class."

"Good," I say looking at Ralph's black hair with pink streaks in it.

"And next period I have English," continues Ralph.

“So do I. Maybe we are also in the same English class. Are you in Ms. Nelson’s class?”

“Yes I am,” says Ralph smiling.

We chat and continue eating our lunch. When we finish—

“Ring...”

“There’s the bell,” I say. “Let’s go to English.”

“OK,” says Ralph. And we go to class.

When English is over we find ourselves in art together, the last period of the day.

“Are those your paintings Ralph? You’re quite an artist.”

“I like your work too,” says Ralph, looking at my work.

We work diligently throughout the class while the other students are mostly clowning around.

“Ring...”

The period is over.

“Alice, would you like to meet after school and do homework together?”

“I’d love to Ralph.” And I give Ralph my address and phone number before leaving class and boarding my bus for home.

“Hi Jane,” I say to Jane after getting on the bus and sitting down next to her.

“Hi Alice,” says Jane. “You know Jay is coming over my house today.”

“And Ralph is coming over my house. We are doing homework together.”

“Ralph?!” says Jane. “Ralph?! Who’s he?! You don’t waste any time, do you?!”

“Why should I?” I say.

And the two of us go on with chit-chat ‘til it’s time for me to get off the bus.

I go home, take some ice cream from the freezer, then sit down at the dining room table to do homework. As soon as I sit down—

“Ring...” goes the doorbell.

I answer the door.

“Hi Alice,” says Ralph, who is at the door.

“Hi Ralph,” I say. “Come on in. I just sat down to do homework. Would you like some ice cream?”

“OK,” says Ralph.

I get Ralph some ice cream and we both sit down at the dining room table and diligently do homework. When we finish our homework, we immediately open our library books that we are reading for book reports, and do some reading.

“How do you like your new school?” I ask Ralph, admiring his black hair with pink streaks.

“It’s good,” says Ralph. “But I can’t wait ‘til I graduate and go to art school.

“Art school?” I say. “You’re not going to college?”

“No,” says Ralph. “I’m going to The World Art Academy. My brother, Tom, went there and he loved it. He’s a very talented artist. And he can still go to college if he wants to. Many colleges recognize The World Art Academy. He can transfer most of his credits to that college and then finish his college education.”

“Is he going to do that?” I ask.

“Maybe in the future,” says Ralph. “Right now he is more interested in his painting.”

Just then the front door opens and Alice’s parents enter the house.

“Mom, Dad, I’d like you to meet Ralph. He’s new in our school and we are in the same art and English class.”

“Hello Ralph,” says Mom.

“Hello Ralph,” says Dad.

“Hello,” says Ralph. “I’ll be leaving now since we finished our homework. Bye everyone,” says Ralph as he leaves.

“Well,” says Mom after Ralph has left, “where did you find this friend?”

“We met in the lunchroom,” I answer. “And he is in my English and art class. And he is some terrific artist.”

“Well I wouldn’t get too close with him,” says Dad. “He has pink streaks in his hair.”

“He’s an artist,” I say. “An artist. And so am I.”

“I’m going to fix dinner now,” says Mom. “After dinner we have a few things to discuss.”

Oh crap I’m thinking to myself. I don’t like the sound of this already.

Soon we eat, mainly in silence.

Right afterward Mom says, “I spoke with your advisor, Ms. Tips, on the phone today, Alice, and she thinks you would be a good teacher in the lower grades.”

“Mom,” I say impatiently, “I’m not going to teach and I’m not going to college. I’m an artist and I want to go to The World Art Academy. If you don’t want to send me there I’ll work and pay for it myself.”

“But what about college? That’s important too,” says Mom.

“I can go to college afterward and get credit for the courses that I take at The World Art Academy. Why don’t you ask Ms. Tips about that?”

“Maybe I will Alice,” says Mom. “The World Art Academy—somehow that name rings a bell.”

From that time on Ralph and I eat together in the lunchroom at school. Half the Sundays we spend together going to a movie. However, the rest of the Sundays we both stay home doing artwork.

“Alice,” Mom would say, knocking on my door the Sundays I am home, “are you OK? You spend so much time in your room.”

“I’m fine,” I respond.”

Then one Sunday when I am home, Mom knocks on the door.

“Alice,” she says, “how are you doing?”

“I’m fine,” I say.

“Alice, may I see the pictures you are doing?”

“Sure,” I say. “Come on in.”

Mom looks at what I am doing and her eyes pop out of her head.

“Alice,” says Mom, “your artwork is exceptional. I didn’t know you could produce such works of art. Maybe you SHOULD go to The World Art Academy. Now I remember where I’ve heard about that school. The brother of a co-worker of mine teaches there. I’m going to ask my co-worker about The World Art Academy as well as Ms. Tips.”

“Great Mom. Let me know what they say.”

“I certainly will,” says Mom.

The next day when Mom comes home from work she says to me, “I spoke with Ms. Tips and she says she has just seen some of your artwork and has spoken with your art teacher. They think The World Art Academy would be an excellent choice of schools. Also my co-worker’s brother who teaches there will be visiting my co-worker on spring break, which is in a few days. I’m going to invite them both for dinner. That way we will learn more about the school.”

“OK Mom.” I say a little nervous and thinking that this will be a big change in my life, but a good change.

Spring break arrives and Mom's co-worker and her brother are invited for dinner on a Friday night. That night Mom, Dad and I are in the living room waiting for them. The doorbell rings. Mom answers the door and her co-worker and brother enter the living room.

"Alice, Dad," says Mom, "I'd like you to meet my co-worker, Marie, and her brother, Hector."

The End