

[b]Chapter 2: Small Town Settling[/b]

You wake at dawn in the largest and most luxurious bed you've slept in for a good long while. The hospital beds were comfortable, of course, but they had that hospital smell, and were designed more for function than relaxation. The sheets are crisp and cool, and the mattress is just the right balance between firm and soft.

Gentle pink sunlight filters through the circular skylight above your bed, though not so bright that it gets in your eyes. Kass must have had a skilled architect to create this place.

For a moment it's strange to wake in a bedroom so much larger than the one in the hospital. A glass door shielded with a pink curtain leads outside; beside it is a nook with a bookcase, couch, and armchair artfully arranged around a coffee table. An elegant bronze vase containing dried flowers sits on the table; the sunlight through the curtain lights it very prettily. Your trunk has been placed at the foot of your bed.

2-town \*choice 28#6 (line 50)

- I feel so refreshed.
- I slept so well that I feel groggy now.
- I didn't sleep well. Too much to think about.
- I didn't sleep well. I felt physically uncomfortable.
- The hospital wasn't fun, but this unfamiliarity is unsettling.
- ★ I need to get up and about.

The morning's one of the tricky points as far as your pain goes. After a night in bed, you're often stiff and uncomfortable. Not to mention that you get restless hanging around. As you rise, you stretch your shoulders. You're ready for the day.

When you open your curtains, you see that your window overlooks a little courtyard with a fountain in its center. A scraggy gray cat—not the large fluffy tabby from yesterday—is asleep on a bench; as it catches sight of your window, it stands, stretches, and trots off elsewhere.

Upon the desk is the now-familiar glossy Ozera pamphlet, along with a few leaves of typewritten papers stapled together headed OZERA POLICIES. Mostly around courtesy, safety, curfews and lights-out hours, dress codes: that sort of thing. One paragraph about staff discretion regarding "physical activities with other members of staff" that's so awkwardly worded that it could be about rock-climbing or watercolors, but after reading it again you realize it's about making sure students don't catch sight of you kissing anyone.

If the students see so much as a kiss on the cheek, gossip will run rampant. You're expected to keep such elements of personal life discreet.

2-town \*choice 58#5 (line 67)

- If I want to kiss someone or sleep with them, I won't care who sees.
- I'll be careful to be discreet as needed if anything happens.
- I only want to kiss or sleep with people I know very well, so who knows if it'll be relevant?
- Kissing and sex are really not priorities for me, though I might be interested at some point.
- ★ I know I'm not interested in kissing and sex at all.

You set the documents aside. Next to the window is a small shrine built into the wall. A foot-high bronze sculpture of a figure embracing the sun shows that it's dedicated to Elene, the deity of the sun.

The town of Elene's Prospect was originally built by priests of the deity who claimed that they'd heard Elene's voice at sunrise advising them to settle here; there are plenty of such tales across the country.

2-town \*choice 72#1 (line 73)

- ★ I take a moment to light a candle.
- I take a moment to pray to Elene.
- I brush my fingers against the statue. A small moment of ceremony.
- There's no time. I'll carry on getting ready.
- I have a few too many feelings about the gods, and I don't want to think about that now.

There are candles and a matchbox beside the shrine. When you light one, the smell of jasmine fills the room. You take a moment to watch the flame flickering, the wax softening.

2-town \*choice 4426#1 (line 4427)

- ★ I believe in the gods passionately.
- I believe in the gods, though I'm not particularly interested in organized religion.
- I do the festivals and ceremonies, but I don't personally believe.
- I don't believe in the gods, really. I do this out of habit.

You were brought up in the Church of Teran, as almost everyone is here. It's only natural that you formed a deep connection with the gods. Their influence can be seen both across nature and in people's own inventiveness.

You turn your attention to getting ready. There's a bathroom attached to your room with another skylight above the shower; when you wash, the water pressure is just right, delicious on your skin. The towels are soft and thick.

2-town \*choice 89#2 (line 92)

- I could stay here forever.
- ★ I'm concerned about getting soft here.

- Is this a school or a vacation resort?
- This was just what I needed.

It's all very luxurious, but you hope you won't get too used to it. Nothing lasts forever, and you need to be in top condition.

Once dried off and dressed in fresh field uniform—tan, as always—you wash your face and are pretty much ready for the day. Now, usually, you do your physiotherapy exercises. The hospital staff started out very strict, checking up on you each day to make sure you were keeping up with them; towards the end, they trusted you to keep on top of it yourself.