

# 3003 Times

## *Hokapen Era*

*By Priscilla Eve Adams*

### Chapter 1: What is the future like?

I woke up in the bright morning, tangled in my light pink covers. I opened my eyes and yawned as I looked over at my alarm clock, which showed that it was seven-thirty. So I slowly sat up and put my bare feet on the sunlit carpet floor. As warmth sank into my feet I felt peaceful and ready to start a new day. I walked into the kitchen and saw my parents sitting at the table. My mother was sipping, what I could guess, was green tea out of a coffee mug and greeted me with a, "Good Morning." My father was reading the newspaper and added, "Yeah," without looking up. I slid into a chair and saw a plate of food already in front of me with two pancakes, a mushroom omelet, and a side of strawberries placed upon it.

I leaned my face on one of my hands, looked off into space at the blank wall by the refrigerator, and thought about my life. I'm Amelia Chaprouph, I am sixteen years of age, and the year is 3003, yet my mom, dad, and I live as if it is 2003. I've only lived with my parents for all my life and I haven't seen any other people. There is only one exception to that; a year ago dark clothed people came to our house with a warning,

"If you do not come and live in the city as normal 3002 people, then this family will be slaughtered on Hokapen's order."

My father had yelled back at them, "I don't want to my family to live that way!"

Mother also countered, "Leave now!"

We've been ignoring that warning ever since, yet it troubles me if they would ever-

"Amelia? Hello!" I heard my mother call, interrupting the thought.

I snapped out of my trance-like state and mumbled, "Hm?"

"Welcome back to Anceseath, Amelia," she remarked in an upbeat tone and smiled.

She looked at my plate and added, "Are you going to eat your food?"

"I think I'll wait a while," I replied, my mind far away.

"Ok, could you do something for me?" She inquired.

I muttered, "Sure, what is it?"

I looked at her for a moment. She had long, crept hair; a purple shirt with excess cloth that drooped down to her knees, and blue jeans that had paint stains. Then I looked at myself, I have long, brown hair that goes all the way to my knees and I was wearing my usual pink pajamas that had little red hearts on them.

"Can you take out the trash? It's really smelly after our New Year's party we had last night," she politely asked.

"Yes, my brain is rotting because of the stench," my dad rudely commented as he looked up from his paper. My father had short, light brown hair and a mustache, and he wore a white button-down shirt, black and green patterned tie, and brown corduroys. "Amelia, take it out."

My mom nodded, I sighed and rolled my eyes "O-Kay!" I answered in an annoyed tone, because of my dislike for chores and walked over to the corner of the kitchen. I took the trash out of its bucket and as I was walking towards the door my mom called compassionately, "No matter what we say or what happens, know that your father and I will always love you." My dad was leaning on the doorway to the living room and nodded.

"Thank you, I love you guys too," I replied.

I like it when they tell me that they love me, but the way mom said it this time, hit something deep inside of me. 'Why would she say it now when I'm taking out the trash? That's odd. Something's up. I'll figure out once I get back.' I thought as I walked across the little stone steps that led to the bigger trash can. I turned around for a moment before putting the bag into the container to look at the quaint, little light blue house with the yard of green grass and irises. But my admiring of the place and my peaceful feeling was shattered right before my eyes. Because my house suddenly exploded into flame, with parts of the roof breaking off and flying in many directions at a high speed. I felt my body being pulled away and into the air from the impact. As the trash tore out of my hand all I could think was 'Are my parents okay? Am I going to die?' In the next few moments my body hit the ground, and everything went black.

I was awakened by a hard jab in the abdomen. I groaned at first because I didn't want to wake up. But when I realized what was poking me, I sprung up in an upright position. It looked like an over sized green and yellow worm that stood seven feet tall and was two feet wide with razor sharp teeth and beady black eyes. It was poking me with one of its two brown, hook-like arms. When it realized I was awake it smiled maniacally and let out a fearsome shriek in my face with bad breath that made me want to puke. But fear overwhelmed my disgust as I screamed in terror and cowered away.

I tried to get up to run, but the monster tripped me and pinned me down with its hook-like arms. I yelled, "Help! Save me, somebody!" as the beast opened its jaws wide to eat me. I covered my face with my hands and thought 'This is the end.' But instead of pain I felt a warm liquid cover me. I heard a ripping sound, a shriek, and the sound of two heavy things falling to the ground. Had I been saved?

I put my hands down and I saw that I was covered in green blood. The slug had been cut in two and the two parts of its body had landed on either side of me. I looked up and saw a person in green, spiky armor holding a sword covered in the same green blood. That person had killed the beast. The person turned their head towards me and I didn't know if I could trust them so I scooted away and took a defensive pose. But the person put their sword back into a sheath on their back and took their helmet off.

The person was revealed as a young man, about the same age as me. He had short blonde hair with bangs of two strands reaching to his nose. He had a green eye patch that covered his right eye, but his left eye was an enchanting light blue. He had a fair complexion and stood at five foot nine with, as far as I could tell, a lean physique. He asked in a concerned voice, "Are you okay?"

I just stared at him for a moment as I was trying to comprehend everything that had just happened.

"Well, uh, that's kind of a stupid question isn't it? You were about to be eaten by a glug-slug...Um, is there anything I can do for you?" He asked while looking at my surprised expression.

"Is this real?" I questioned as I recapped in my mind what just happened.

"I know, most people don't think that they would ever run into a glug-slug out here, but you sure are far away from town and from the looks of you...You aren't from around here..." He explained, "Um, I just saw a house blow up and-."

Then it all came back to me and I interrupted him with, "That's my house! M-my parents! Hurry! We've got to go see if they're still alive!"

"Alright!" He exclaimed and took out a small box that turned into a hover-board. He hopped on, but I looked at it for a moment until he said, "Well?" I thought it looked unstable, but I got on too, once I did it zoomed off like a rocket! I held on for dear life to the handle bars on the hover-board's sides. He noticed that I wasn't used to these kinds of rides and he slowed down a little. My grip loosened and I gained a little reassurance from the flying thing.

After five minutes of reckless flying we got there and I got off to take a look at my mutilated house. The top of the house was gone and some of the walls too, but nothing more...it

was extremely strange. My mom and dad were lying in the kitchen area, it was odd that they were still in perfect condition; even I had some scrapes on my knees. I went over to my mother and shook her shoulders, no movement or response.

“Mother!” I cried “MOTHER!” She still didn’t respond and I didn’t feel a pulse, I knew she had passed, so I fell to my knees and cried.

“Let’s see,” the young man knelt down to my father and grabbed his wrist, after a while he loosened his grip and said sadly “No pulse.”

I cried even louder as I went over to my father to see if he really was dead and it was true. The tears gushed from my squinted eyes so rapidly that I could barely see anything, just colors as I thought ‘All our memories together... all that time is now...’ I screamed in anguish, ‘and, and what our future could have been, but it’s all gone, taken away from me now.’ I fell on my side because of my pain and reached out to grab my parents’ hands with each of mine as I lay there. As I clasped their cold hands I wished so badly that they would turn warm again, yet they didn’t. I knew I had been there a long time when I felt someone’s hand on my shoulder and heard the young man’s voice say, “I’m sorry.”

I crawled away from him in desperation, even though I was still blinded by tears I knew he was there.

“For what? Are...are you the one who killed them?” I asked angrily, “Because if you are...I’ll kill you!”

“No...I just hate seeing anyone in such a painful and horrible mess that I wish it would go away, so I say I’m sorry.” He explained, “Please...let me help you.”

“No! You’re a future person and I can’t trust future people, because they said that they would kill us!” I stated.

“Who said? What did they look like?” He asked.

“They wore black clothes and that’s all I can remember...” I replied.

“What did they say other than that they wanted to kill you?” He questioned.

“Well, they actually said that we would be killed if we didn’t live like you guys, because someone named Hokapen said so.”

“So...he’s hurt you, too.” He said sad and angry at the same time.

“What do you mean?” I questioned as my vision slowly started to clear.

“Well...Hokapen’s ruined my life too...he ordered people to murder my mother and destroy my home...he’s the one responsible for what’s under this eye patch.” The young man answered.

“So...I guess I can trust you in that respect.” I concluded.

When I seemed a little more under control of my feelings he asked “Any known relatives or friends?”

“No...my parents were everything to me.” I sniffled, my vision was clear now and I was done crying. I could see him peering down at me with a concerned look on his face and his eye was even a little red as if he cried a little bit too.

I added, “I guess I’ll have to go with you now if you’ll accept me.”

“Of course.” He agreed.

“Um, what’s your name?” I asked feeling stupid that I hadn’t asked before.

“Spark Toroku, and you?” He answered as he held out his hand to help me up off the ground.

I took his hand and let him help me up as I replied, “Amelia Chaprouph.”

“So what’s your plan? I know this is sudden, but do you have an idea?” I asked.

Spark replied, “Well get whatever you want that is salvageable, because you can’t stay here. And...I guess I’ll take you to the city and introduce you to Kitty, she runs the hotel I’m staying at and I’m pretty sure she’ll take you in. But maybe you should drink some water first, you were crying for over an hour.”

I nodded in compliance, took out a bottle of water from the fridge and drank from it. It was then that I realized how thirsty I was because once I was done the twenty fluid ounce bottle

was empty. Then I went to where my room was, and saw the drawers still there along with my bed. I picked out a bag and started stuffing it with clothes. Spark happened to walk in and asked, “Do you want everything in this room?”

“Yeah.” I answered, “But I can only take so much.”

“Okay, step out of your room for a minute,” He explained and took out a small box with a red button on it, I stepped out of the room and looked over his shoulder in the doorway, he continued his explanation, “All I have to do is hold down this button on the side of this little device, outline the area, and I’ll have gathered all your things.” He held down the button, outlined the area with a glowing red light, and just as he said, all the items in my room were sucked into the tiny box. I stared in bewilderment and stuttered, “H-how...did you...”

“I dunno something about using an alternate dimension to store our things in places out in the galaxy.” He explained.

“Can you get them back?” I asked.

“Oh yeah, but we’ll empty the box when we get to the hotel.” He replied. “Anything else you need to see?”

“Yeah,” I answered, “I guess I could check a couple things.”

I walked down the hall and went to where my parent’s room was, and wondered what was in there. I looked through the drawers of my mom’s dresser to see if there was anything unusual, yet saw that she only had clothes. Then I looked into my dad’s drawer in the top left-hand drawer. I saw a picture of a girl smiling, that looked about my age, with short brown hair in a ponytail being carried on the back of a man with shoulder length red hair, glasses, who was looking up at her and also smiling. I wondered ‘Why would my father have this picture in his drawer?’

I looked closer at it ‘could it be them, younger? He could have dyed his hair when he got older.’ I was too curious so I put it in my pocket and I looked through the rest of the room, yet found nothing interesting. I took some last looks at the house and visited the garden, my mother’s irises, carrots, and tomatoes were dead. I picked up a shovel and walked to the kitchen where Spark was.

“I already gathered your refrigerator and other food supplies, so they don’t waste.” Spark informed.

I walked over to my parents with the shovel in my hand and I was about to start digging when Spark said, “There’s an easier way to bury them.”

I paused, set the shovel on the table, and paid attention as Spark took out a hazel brown marble.

“I have a task for you.” Spark announced to the marble and a man appeared. The man was slightly taller than Spark with short, black hair and a goatee, the man asked Spark “What is it?”

“Bury them.” Spark ordered pointing to my parent’s bodies.

Then the man raised some dirt into the air to make two rectangular holes. Next he raised my parent’s bodies up on platforms of dirt and lowered them gently into the holes. Then he covered them up with the dirt floating in the air, and returned into his marble. Spark put the marble into a bag with other marbles. Again I was mystified, but I picked up a piece of rubble to make a tombstone, yet realized that I didn’t know my parent’s names or when they were born. I dropped the piece of rubble, went to the kitchen table, and found that on the bills the names were just Mr. Chaprouph or Mrs. Chaprouph.

‘That’s weird’ I thought ‘Why would my parents not want me to know their first names? And I can’t recall either of them ever saying what their ages were...there was a time where I did ask, but all they did was laugh and say, “Age is just a number, Amelia.”’

But I picked the piece of rubble back up again and softly rested it on my mother’s grave and scratched “Mom” into the rubble. Then another piece of rubble for my father and scratched “Dad” into it, so I knew that is where they will lie, forever. I took one last glance at where my parents lay and felt the tears coming on again. ‘I love them,’ I thought, ‘but I guess I’ll never know them, entirely.’

“Well, are you ready to go?” Spark asked.

I cried for a couple minutes more, and then mumbled sadly, “Yeah.”

“And don’t worry, Amelia,” He stated putting his hand on my shoulder, “We can come back.”

“Okay.” I quietly said and wiped away my tears.

He threw out the box that folded out into a hover board, got on it, and helped me up, and this time when it took off it was much slower, so I didn’t have to hold on for dear life.

“So,” I said, with my mind full of questions, “Why would you think my parents would still be alive?”

“People can survive practically anything nowadays.” He replied.

“And what about the person who popped out of the marble? How can they control earth?” I questioned.

“Oh, that was a Quakeastan.” Spark explained, “It’s a magical person who can control the ground, sand, boulders, etc. There aren’t many Quakeastans, but I’ve got all four of the different element controllers.”

“What are the others?” I asked.

“There are three other element controllers; there is one for plants, fire, and water. So I’ve got a Quakeastan, a Vinestan, a Firestan, and a Waterastan in marbles.”

My parents didn’t really tell me about boys, small boxes that use alter dimensions to store things out in space, or element-controlling people being kept in marbles. All I knew is that I now had a strange feeling around Spark, because he was a male other than my father. We arrived at a huge gate around what I was thinking was the city and out popped a little robot.

“Wanders card please.” It beeped. It was in the shape of a box with little arms with claspers as hands, little buttons, an antenna, and the words D.N.I. printed on its side.

Spark gave it a card that had gold letters that said The City of Wanders and the robot scanned it.

“Card accepted, you are Spark Toroku, yes?” Questioned the robot and Spark nodded his head. “Welcome to the city of Wanders.” The gate opened enough for our hover board to get in and we flew inside.

The city had skyscrapers, markets, buildings, and homes that were supported by platforms on poles. Spark made his gigantic sword shrink down to a small necklace with a sword figure on it. Then he took off his armor to reveal a blue shirt with plastic see through sleeves and blue pants that looked like they were made out of plastic. Then he shrank his armor doll size and put it in his pocket. With this I realized how muscular Spark was and blushed. ‘Seems the clothing style changed,’ I thought ‘and there are so many other different things too.’

“We’re going to make a little detour; because in order to survive in this world you need a weapon of some sort.” He explained, “There are monsters outside the city walls, they were made for training the army, but they escaped their certain area and are everywhere now. That’s good for you and me, though, because I’m in training and I’m going to train you, too. There are also corrupted people and corporations, like Hokapen Inc. that killed your parents, so we’re going to the weapons shop now.” He concluded.

“Training?” I asked, “You’re going to teach me the basics, for free?”

“Of course, I already have enough money, why would I need to take money from someone?” He explained, “Especially someone who just lost their family, I could never do that.”

“Thanks,” I told him, “You’re a cool person.”

All he did was smile and give a little laugh, then we landed at a weapons shop and went inside.

“Go look inside the five to ten pound section.” He announced, “I’m going to get my sword sharpened.”

“Ok.” I called.

I looked around in those sections, it was mostly daggers, then I saw a really cool

sword with flames and all kinds of designs. I tried to pick it up, but let it drop, I looked at its tag and it was thirty-two pounds. ‘Too heavy,’ I thought ‘and misplaced.’

“Oh, sorry!” Called one of the employees, “I’ll put that back.” And he took it from the rack. Then, I saw a sword with a dragon-shaped handle, and on its side it said: *I fight with anger, yet inside I have heart*. I picked it up and swished it in the air to get a feel for it, ‘Not too bad’ and on its tag it said it was seven pounds and was seventy-five dollars.

I went to Spark and explained “Hey this one’s really cool and light, but...”

He looked at the tag “Hey not too bad,” He commented “Only seventy-five dollars.”

“Huh?” I said shocked.

“Oh, well nowadays that’s chump change.” He added, “I have to make sure it’s not that cheap, though.”

He tested it out by trying to break it on his knee, then making some sort of light on it that left a burn mark, then the burn mark faded and disappeared.

“It’s good let’s get it.” He confirmed.

We went to the cashier and bought the sword, paid for the sharpening, we walked out, and got on the hover board.

“Now I’ve got even more questions.” I spoke.

“Ask away.” Spark granted.

“First, you can buy weapons at this age?” I questioned.

“Yeah, people thought that everyone should be able to get a weapon to protect themselves from all the hazards of today.” He answered.

“Second, what was that thing you did with my sword? Are you magical?” I asked.

He leaned into me and whispered in my ear, “I’m an Ancestrian.”

“What’s that and why do you want to keep it secret?” I whispered back.

“It’s a person who can use their feelings to shoot beams, heal, and etc. And I want to keep it secret, because my mother told me “It’s good to not let someone know your abilities till you fight them, so you may have the upper hand.”” He explained.

“Oh, when did you figure that out?” I asked.

“When I was eight my mom told me I was and started training me.” He said.

I was about to say something but we just arrived at a pink building that said: Kitty’s Hotel all in bright red letters except for the O.

“Well, we’re here.” Spark announced as we landed and he led me inside.

“Hey Ki...” He was greeting, but his phrase was cut short, because we both saw a woman with gray hair, yet a youthful-looking face, having a mental breakdown.

“W-what’s wrong?” Spark asked concerned.

“Mark’s family...” She sniffled some more, “Is dead.”

“...Misfortune seems to be everywhere today...” Spark commented and started crying, “He must feel so horrible.”

“He’s in his room...and probably won’t be out for a while...I was once considered a grandma! He had such cute children...why!” The woman was saying and she sniffled “Why did they have to go so young?”

And because there was so much sadness in the room I started crying too and we cried for a while.

“Ugh,” Spark stated while wiping his eye, “We’ve got to stop this, or everyone who comes in here will be overwhelmed by sadness.” He straightened up and continued sounding more empowering, “C’mon, we can’t let this get us down! We’ve still got to live our lives and do what we need to.”

“Well, there have also been a lot of people quitting lately.” Kitty informed.

“Oh Kitty, you know I’d help you out with the hotel anytime. And it’d be something both of us could contribute to, right Amelia?” Spark stated.

“Yeah, I need to do something to thank you, if we’re going to stay here.” I replied.

“I’ve been living here since I was twelve, so, of course, I was thinking you could live

here too. Right Kitty?" Spark informed.

"Yes, so you're an orphan too?" She asked.

"Yeah, my parents died today." I answered sadly.

"Okay, pick any room then." She added.

"Thank you." I turned to the woman, "You have a big heart."

"Well, at the time Mark just moved out and I was missing the feeling of being a mother. So I've been letting him stay for free, with him helping out every once in a while." She explained.

I shook her hand, "I'm Amelia." I introduced.

"And I'm Kitty Marmole." She answered with a smile and shook my hand also, then Kitty turned to Spark and asked, "So you'll need a bigger room now, or?"

"Yeah, if you still want to be with me, Amelia." He asked.

"Yeah, who else would teach me about this weird world?" I answered.

"Ok...just making sure." He checked.

So we followed Kitty to Spark's room to let him get his stuff and unpacked our things into the new rooms, which were separated by a door so we could have our own space. Spark went to Mark's room to check on and console him; so I took the opportunity to take a shower and get dressed. Then I started looking through pictures and things that reminded me of my parents. Kitty brought up a sandwich for me at lunchtime and informed, "Usually we eat as a group downstairs in the dining room, but today we're just going to eat in our separate rooms."

"Okay." I added shakily, I felt like I was going to cry again.

She looked at me for a while, not saying anything, and then stated, "Well, you just have to let it out. I'll bring up some water."

She did a couple minutes later and then I just lay there on my bed clutching my pillow, and thought. 'I'm so confused, how could all this happen? It doesn't seem possible...Because all I knew, was of my parents and me living in a house with studying, exercising, watching movies and television, and playing video games. I...feel so lost...'

Because of all the stress of the day, I ended up falling asleep and when I woke up the first thing I thought was, 'I'm thirsty.'

I looked over and saw the glasses of water and remembered that Kitty had put them there. I picked up one of them and finished it within a minute, and then I picked up another one and finished it too.

I crawled out of bed, stumbled to the door, and looked around for Spark or Kitty. "Spark? Kitty?" I called out, because I really wanted to talk to someone. I walked down to the lobby and asked again, more anxiously "Spark? Kitty?" I walked into the kitchen and almost yelled "Spark? Kitty?"

"Yes, dear, what is it?" Kitty replied as she peeked her head out of the laundry room, looking concerned.

"Oh...I was just wondering where you were..." I stated.

"Ok, is there something you wanted to talk about?" Kitty asked while folding some clean towels.

"No...I'm just used to someone always being around...and I don't want to be alone." I answered.

"I have to get a couple things at the store, would you like to come with me?" Kitty offered.

"Sure." I said.

"Let's fold up these towels first though, do you know how to fold?" She stated.

"Yeah..." I replied and picked up a towel and folded it. As we completed the simple process I felt I was being accepted, but I couldn't help but feel how nostalgic this was to me and my mother and I started crying again, without even thinking about it.

"Oh, what is it, hon? Did I do something to offend you?" Kitty asked in a concerned voice.

“No it's just...my mom-” my voice cracked and I cried louder.

“Oh.” Then she gave me a hug and rubbed my back, “Just let it out.”

I cried louder still, because of how she reminded me of my mom...but she wasn't my mom. I didn't even realize that I was mumbling “Mom...I'm sorry mom...” as I cried on Kitty's shoulder.

Then Kitty asked me, “What would your mother want for you?”

“A happy, safe life...the best that can be...provided by this world.” I gathered from what my mom had said in the past.

“Well, while you're here, I'll hope to provide you with that.” Kitty stated and looked into my eyes and added, “Okay?”

“Okay...thank you.” I said and wiped away my tears.

“Okay, now. Do you feel like having a little treat before we go? You look like you could use one.” Kitty cheerfully asked.

“Sure.” I replied.

“Have you ever tried Flasinka?” Kitty added.

“No.” I answered.

“Alright, we'll make that after we're done doing this laundry.” Kitty concluded with a smile.

Which didn't take too long, because there was a small pile and two people were folding it. After putting the towels in the linens closet, I followed Kitty to the kitchen and washed my hands before she told me what to do. She took a plastic bowl from a cabinet underneath the counter, a packet of an ingredient I didn't know, a container with pink spongy, holey, gelatin-like substances inside, and a bottle of bubbly liquid. She placed one of the pink, holey gelatin-like substances inside the bowl, gave me the packet, and measured out about a cup of the bubbly liquid.

“Now, we'll both have to pour in our ingredients at the same time onto the Gunago, this holey, squishy thing here,” she pointed at it and continued, “So that the reactions happen correctly. Tear open the packet and I'll count to three for us to pour the stuff in.”

“Okay.” I complied.

I tore open the packet and she readied her cup and counted, “One...two...Three!”

We poured our ingredients at the same time and watched as steam came out of where the Gunago's holes were and they were slowly filled in. Kitty took out two plates and set one in front of each of us, then the Gunago turned blue, green, and then purple and started, what looked like, was melting.

“Now grab some of it up, squeeze it as hard as you can, and keep squeezing it as you put it on your plate.” Kitty directed.

I was confused as to how you could squeeze this liquid, but I grabbed the slimy liquid with both hands, anyways, and felt it solidify as I continued to squeeze it. Kitty did the same thing at the same time that I did and smiled as we both applied pressure to the solidifying liquid. She smiled at me while we did this with a cheeky grin, and I returned her expression with a confused look. Then it felt like the liquid-solid was going to burst out of my hands, and Kitty must have felt the same thing happening with hers, because she said, “Oh! Now slowly let your hands up off of it.”

I did and saw the substance following my hands as a guide as it formed.

“Now, move your hands in the way you would want the Flasinka to form, and the substance will follow until it is done forming.” Kitty instructed further.

I moved my hands away in a round cake shape, and the Flasinka formed in the form of a small round cake. Its final form was a brown, spongy, gelatin-like substance, but now it was whole. Kitty contently smiled at hers, that was in the shape of a heart, for a few seconds, then picked off a piece and ate it.

“Go ahead.” She said.

“It's done?” I asked, bewildered.

“Yep.” She answered.

I picked off a piece and tasted it, it was like pudding, but in gelatin form with a more grainy feel to it as I chewed, but it was heavenly, chocolatey, sweet, and soothing.

“Whenever I'm upset, Flasinka is my comfort food.” Kitty stated and took another bite.

“I can see why,” I added and nibbled at it again, “This is good, I've never tried this before.”

“Really?” She curiously pondered, “How did your family live that they hadn't tried Flasinka before? It's a very popular food nowadays.”

“Well...me and my parents lived as people did a thousand years ago.” I explained.

“So that would be,” She looked up and calculated in her head as she tasted another piece and returned with, “2003?”

“Yeah...It's the kind of time I've known, but I don't know why it should be so different from yours. If we had lived as 3003 people, would this still have happened?” I nervously confirmed.

“Interesting.” She concluded and finished her Flasinka.

I had a little bit left and finished mine as well, then she stated, “Well, I'll get my purse and we'll go to the store. Anything you need to do before we go?”

“No” I replied.

“Okay, I'll be back in just a moment.” She announced and headed to her room.

I waited in the kitchen and watched as the plates suddenly disappeared back into the cupboard. I turned around and looked at the electronic message strip that I suddenly noticed that was on the bottom edge of the cupboard and it read:

“Unused, “still-clean” plates, returned to cupboard. For sake of convenience. This occurred because of your current electronic dish settings, if you would like to change these settings...” Then it went into a long paragraph of a complex process of changing the settings, which I didn't understand a word of.

Kitty was back in a couple of minutes and I asked her, “So how are we getting there? Do you have a hover-board?”

“Nope, we're walking.” She replied.

“Walking?...But everything's on platforms now, how-?”

She interrupted my question with the answer, “Escels.”

“Hm? What are Escels?” I questioned.

“They help people get from one platform to another if you don't have a hover-board, you'll see.” She answered.

“Ok...” I added warily.

I followed her outside, she locked the door with her keycard, and we walked to the end of the street, where Kitty proceeded toward a bench that looked similar to a bus stop. There was a screen on the inside of the enclosing over the bench and Kitty pressed buttons answering questions like, “Which platform do you want to go to?” and “How many people?” When those questions were answered it said: Please wait for the next available Escel, and we sat down on the bench.

It was only a few seconds before a huge floating platform zoomed up to the stop, two places in the shape of pairs of feet glowed light blue and a voice from the Escel instructed, “Please place your feet where it is glowing.” We did and the device locked our feet into place and zoomed in straight lines over the city going forward, left, then forward again at a rapid speed. When we were there, the Escel announced, “Now arriving at Platform 7.” Kitty walked off like it was a normal day, but I was a little dizzy, so I stumbled onto the platform. And when I turned around I saw it zoom off again, and somehow I couldn't believe that I had survived being on that thing.

“That's an Escel.” Kitty stated with a cheerful smile.

“Whoa.” I added and shivered.

“Alright, on to the store!” Kitty announced, and marched happily down the next two blocks with me steadily following. When we arrived at the store, it was closed.

“Closed? But why?” Kitty questioned in a confused way, she read the smaller words under the sign and concluded, “Oh...well that's a bummer. They have instant meals in this machine.”

She walked over to a tall, rectangular machine with a screen on the front of it, she touched pictures of different meals she wanted on it and indicated how many of each meal. Then she swiped her bank card when she was prompted to, and the machine printed out sixteen circular cards with names of each kind of meal on it.

“I usually like making the food from scratch, but these instant meals should do for now, until the store re-opens. They should be open four days from now.” Kitty explained as she stuffed the circular cards in her purse.

“*Those* are instant meals?” I questioned.

“Yes, why does that confuse you?” Kitty answered and zipped up her purse.

“Oh...well instant meals to me would be a dry food or that you don't have to refrigerate it, and you just have to add hot water or microwave them.” I explained.

“Oh no, this is much different, maybe I'll show you what an instantly transported meal is.” Kitty explained, then asked, “What's a microwave?”

“Never mind.” I concluded and shook my head.

We got back to the hotel by way of the crazy Escels and by the time we set foot in the front door, I plopped down on one of the couches in the lounge area. Kitty went to the kitchen to store the 'instant meals' in a drawer somewhere and when she came back she looked like she was about to say something, when a couple walked in. So she gave me an apologetic look and turned around to greet them and helped them pick out a room. I felt a little bit better than earlier, learning more about the future was kind of fun to me. But it was still hard to adjust to how things were now and I was still trying to cope with the idea that my parents were dead now.

Spark came down the stairs and greeted, “Hey Amelia.”

He sat in the chair on my left side and I noticed that his eye was red, he wiped some moisture from it and asked, “How are you?”

“Better.” I replied.

“I'm sorry I had to leave you when you just arrived here.” He explained, “I feel like that was kind of irresponsible of me, I led you here and then I left you alone.”

“Well, I wasn't alone, Kitty helped me, we made Flasinka and went to the store.” I explained.

Kitty came back from helping the couple and sat next to me.

“Thank you, Kitty.” Spark added, “You know that I can't be everywhere at once.”

“No problem,” She said, “You know that I like adopting orphans.” Then she pointed at him and gave a little smile and wink.

Spark smiled and added, “Yeah.”

“Are you hungry, Spark? Amelia and I had some Flasinka a little while ago and when I came by with sandwiches you...had to pass on it.” Kitty inquired.

Spark's stomach growled and he said, “Yeah, I could probably eat something about now.”

“Okay, I wanted to show Amelia what an instant meal was. C'mon, let's go to the kitchen!” She announced and we followed her into the kitchen.

She stood in front of a device that looked like a microwave to me, Spark gave her the disc of the meal he wanted and she slid it into the slot on the device. The device glowed blue and was counting down from five minutes on the side and once the countdown was over the device announced, “Papa Larry's Chicken Alfredo from Kitchen B3295.”

Spark opened the little door on the device and we saw steamy, real-looking chicken Alfredo on an ornate plate. He had a fork in his hand and started eating it and I asked Kitty, “*That's* an instant meal?”

Kitty smiled mockingly and explained, “An instantly transported meal is activated by these circular tickets that put in the order for your meal to one of the kitchens, calculated to have one of the shortest wait times. Once the cooks finish your meal they send it through the Send-A-

Meal, which is this device with the little plastic screen door and the slot on the side.”

I stared at her in slight irritation and added, “It's still kind of confusing, because you call these “instant meals” and what Spark's eating is definitely real and wholesome. And the Send-A-Meal looks kind of like a microwave to me, but, oh well! Because that looks good to me. Can I have one?”

Kitty laughed and answered, “Of course, dear. Look through the tickets and put the one you want in the Send-A-Meal.”

I chose the Chicken Alfredo like Spark, waited for it, and ate with Spark at the table, Kitty decided to get the same and sat across from us. We finished our meals with light conversation here and there, some jokes that made me smile, and to complicated, intriguing ideas that made me think. Then we piled the dirty plates and silverware into the sink, the plates disappeared, probably back to the kitchen it was sent from, yet still left the forks. Kitty started washing the forks when Spark turned around and announced, “I'm going to go fuel up the hover-board, I'll be back in a little while.”

“Okay, be careful.” I said.

“I will.” He reassured.

After he walked out the door Kitty explained, “Hover-boards run on fuel, but mostly on wind energy, so Spark doesn't have to fill it up that often. But I found out that he likes to zoom around the city for a while, I think that's how he clears his head.”

I dried the dishes with a clean towel as she washed them and handed them to me and added, “Hm, it sounds soothing enough.”

“It is.” Kitty replied as she turned off the sink, “But I know what's even more soothing.”

“What?” I asked.

“Follow me.” She beckoned.

I followed her to her room and she lifted up a board in her closet to reveal some stairs and she leaded me down them. Then we both went through a door into a dark room, she closed the door behind us, then flipped on a light switch. The room glowed light blue and revealed a garden, filled with flowers similar to roses and orchids lined with purple ferns.

“Whoa.” I whispered as I stared in wonder.

“Moon-Flowers.” She explained, “My mother started this garden, she had a little shop in the city until she met my father. He ran this hotel and when they got married she moved in with him and helped run the business. But she still loved gardening, so she started this, and when she passed I continued to take care of it.”

“It's beautiful.” I remarked as I observed a blue rose-like flower.

“Do you have a way to carry on your parent's memory?” Kitty asked.

I stared into a black orchid-ish flower and answered, “I dunno.”

‘Something of theirs that I could continue after they're gone...’ I curiously pondered, ‘What could that be?’

When Spark got back it was dark outside and we were both tired, so we brushed our teeth in the bathroom we shared and I got dressed in my pajamas. As I settled I was feeling very alone and unsafe so I called to Spark, “Can you sleep with me tonight? I feel very alienated and want to be near someone I know, even if I just know them a little bit.”

“Ok.” He said and I heard him get out of his bed and walk over to mine. I actually had a good size bed, so we both could fit on it. He snuggled in and said, “I hope this doesn't scare you, but I just don't feel comfortable leaving my eye patch on.” He loosened the straps and took off his eye patch and set it on the nightstand. Underneath it was scarred eyelids, that when opened, had nothing inside, except for some tissue. He noticed that I was staring, almost fascinated, yet it suddenly made me feel sad, letting me know how much pain Spark has been through, physical and mental.

“The doctor thought...” He nervously explained, “That it was best for the eye to be

completely gone, and have the tissue heal itself.”

“No, it’s not that.” I reassured in a sad tone, “I knew I’d be bad and it doesn’t disturb me...at least it’s not a shredded eye.”

I was very close to him and asked, “Can I hold you?”

“Uh...sure.” He replied.

I looped my arms around him and rested my head on his chest.

“I’m sorry for what you had to go through.” I said as I noticed the scars on his arm as it came around my waist.

“I’m sorry also, for what you had to go through today.” He apologized.

I kind of laughed, “Why do we say we’re sorry when it’s Hokapen’s fault?” I added.

“I dunno.” He commented, “Maybe we just feel sorry for each other, and wish we could have done something to make it better. Because we hate seeing people get hurt.”

“Maybe...maybe.” Were my last comments as I drifted off to the world, of those who slumber.