

"Close off the area. Why?" Beth asked. "Let me guess: government business?"

"That's right," she replied.

Beth put her bag on the back seat and started up the engine. She felt the agents' eyes on her as she pulled onto the road and drove off. After a few miles, when she was sure nobody was following her, she said, "OK, you can come out now."

She didn't see quite how he did it, but she heard movement on the back seat and then Lael was sitting there, putting on some of her father's old clothes she had packed in the bag with him.

"Thank you again," he said.

"It might be a good idea to stay low in that seat," Beth said. "You never know who we might pass on the road."

"Right," said Lael, and dropped down out of sight.

She passed by a few cars on the road, and there was one moment when she held her breath as a truck passed her, but mostly the road was quiet, as it was always quiet. She wanted to ask about her father but she was scared Lael might say she had imagined it or something. Instead, she asked about his world, and listened in amazement as he told her about the crystal cities in the sky of his home planet, and about the journeys his people had made across the universe.

"It is easy for us," he told her. "We live a long time so we have a long time to learn."

"Oh, yeah?" Beth said. "How old are you then?"

"I'm not sure I should say," Lael said. "You might feel strange about it."

"Try me," she said.

