20081210 : This was originally the point where she returns home, but it can work as the point where she retreats from the city to the estate she inherited. There are other options, as well, that might come up if the map shifts again.

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The Emerald Coast stretched its wings down from the cool north-west out across the warm equatorial seas. The majestic coastal mountains became a chain of islands where the land sank sedately into the water's embrace. Cold arctic air, flowing along the highlands, endlessly combed the tropical winds, bathing the rainforests from which the coast got its name. The forests had adapted a long time ago, blending across climate borders. Dangerous, because you had no way to distinguish where you were along most of the coast and deep into the eastern veldt of the interior. Only far to the east did the tropics become a dominating blanket over ancient slopes. Neither man, nor beast was ever entirely sure of the perimeter of his habitat. So when a traveler along the Northern Route suddenly found herself sharing the highway with a tiger, it was not all that surprising. The unfortunate traveler simply hoped to be alert enough to spot the tiger emerging from the tall ferns bordering the route far enough ahead to avoid it.

Fortunately, that was not one of those things I have ever had to worry about.

My people have an understanding with tigers. We have an arrangement. I once believed it to be the secret, the heart of the lie I knew even then I was living. With what had happened to me, the reason I was on the road by myself, seemed so unfair that for a moment I was tempted to drop it all there on the road and go with the tiger who met me there on the road. At times I wish I had. Unfortunately, my curiosity held me in a firm grip and I couldn’t argue with it. I remember clearly just stopping.

The tiger stared at me. I stared at the tiger.

I realized that I hadn’t consciously thought since I started walking. I had traveled on anger this far. I remember this moment so well because it was the moment I realized I had a choice. I could walk away. It would be that easy. The moment I realized that I knew that I didn’t want to. It finally occurred to me that this was an opportunity. Of the Great Domains of sa·en Deji·a, there were only two I had never seen with my own eyes: xaan ca·o·i ji·un, the home of my people and illu·ae ji·un, the jewel in the heart of the Given Lands; two unknowns to choose from for my expulsion from all I had known since childhood. Impetuously, I could have made illu·ae ji·un my original goal. Naturally, it was the road to xaan ca·o·i ji·un upon which I traveled. I could deny my mother nothing and home was the one place she could not go. Anennu bid me go to her House and learn from her family how the people live among men. I can't describe the effect this discovery had on me.

In... forever—which is the normal span of time occupied by childhood—I had known nothing of my people and understood nothing of the concept of home. In an hour my race went from thirteen members all directly related by blood, to a nation. The idea that a creature like me actually had a place in the world ended sixteen years of coercive imprisonment.

The realization was a bitter sting. I wasn’t given time to think about it. I was out. It was over. What was happening at that moment was enough of a shock to deal with. I quit that life without dwelling on it. As I began my pilgrimage, I choose several times not to pry at that thought. When the urge hit me hard I contemplated my mother instead. The less threatening revelation made as she rushed me out of the nest. She had faced this too and she had survived. She had given up her home, her House. To salve my loss, she gave me everything she had known and loved that had been stripped away from her, as all I had was being stripped away from me. The beginning of my exile was, in a way, an end to hers.