

CHAPTER SIX SHILLI NAMIBIA

Shilli and his Father always climbed Dune 7 the last day of the August school vacation. While they hiked, it was an tradition for Shilli to set a goal he wanted to achieve in the coming months. He decided he would try to learn how to be more organized.

Happy to be back at school, when the music teacher asked who wanted to join a new singing group, Shilli surprised himself by raising his hand so fast.

Walking home, he started singing at the top of his voice. As he jumped over the gate to his house, the front door opened. Cellie, Shilli's Aunt, walked toward him, crying. Giving him a long hug, she quickly turned and walked away. Shilli ran inside to his Mother. "What's wrong?" "It's Neil. "I'll explain later, Shilli. Please get your father. Ask him to come home right away."

Running to the docks as fast as he could, Shilli had no choice but to stop, a White Pelican landing directly in his path. "We need your help. Learn about frequencies. Do what you can to have people here tomorrow."

Beginning at first light, a crowd began to gather at the waterfront. Thirty nine desert elephants stood quietly on the sand near the main dock. As seals and flamingos swam offshore, pygmy sperm whales filled the Atlantic ocean as far as one could see.

The following week, the world's headlines confirmed something had begun.

FLIES POSTPONE MOSCOW BALLET OPENING
POPE'S ADDRESS CANCELLED - STARLING MURMURATIONS
FLYING ANTS SWARM SUMMIT MEETING

It was September.

On a rainy October day, Shilli and Neil sat in the hospital waiting room while Neil's mother spoke with the doctor. Overhearing two nurses talking about a feral cat in the parking lot, they walked outside to look. A blue grey cat peeked out from behind a car. Shilli decided it was time to practice what he'd learned. Approaching very slowly - "I know we're not supposed to talk about it, is it all right for me to tell my cousin? "The answer was instant - "Yes. We need your help. I am ESCHER. Watch for us." Shilli turned to Neil - "I'll tell you everything when we get home."

Neil couldn't stop asking questions. "Tell me more about the dream you each had. Why do you think you were asked to learn about frequencies? Have you tried communicating with animals since? Can you teach me? Are you in touch with the others?" When Shilli explained the Admiral had suggested learning about indigenous people, Neil face exploded into a smile. The day before, a contest had been announced at all the local schools; the best essay submitted about Namibia would be published in the newspaper. "Even though we're in different grades, let's ask if we can work together? We could write about The Himba."

That night, at dinner, there was important news. Having financial problems, Neil's parents had decided to sell their house and move in, temporarily, with Shilli's family. The boys were overjoyed.

March 21st was Namibia's Independence Day. It was also Neil's birthday. When Shilli told Neil he'd met a girl from India, born on India's Independence Day, Neil couldn't believe the coincidence. March 21st was the last day of the second school term, the winning essay would be announced at morning assembly. As everyone started singing the National Anthem, Shilli turned around to see ESCHER, hiding at the back of the room. The head of school walked to the podium. "I'd like to begin with an announcement. This year, two students in different grades worked on the same project. The prize for the best essay on Namibia goes to Shilli Louwrens and Neil Augula for their essay on the Himba. The applause and shouts from the student body were thunderous.

During the school term, Shilli and Neil had learned sign language. They loved being able to talk without talking. Every day, walking home from school, they looked forward to seeing ESCHER and a white cat, who'd identified herself as LILLA.

At dinner that night, Neil's birthday cake was in the shape of a hand, signing *I love you*. When he asked "Why aren't there any candles? Everyone laughed. "Didn't you tell us to call you "The Old Man? You're so old, there wouldn't be room on the cake for that many candles!" "If I can't blow out candles, how do I get my wish?" Everyone answered - "By telling us!" "I want to see a Baobab Tree and a Welwitschia. I want Shilli to come with us." Everyone agreed it would be an wonderful adventure for both families.

One afternoon, walking along the docks, watching sun pennies on water, the boys noticed a small whale swimming next to the shore. "Learn morse code. Your fathers will help you."

When they got home, LILLA was sitting at the front gate. As Neil walked past, he then turned back, asking Shilli. " Do I say what I want to say aloud...or do I just think it?" Shilli - "Why don't you do both?" Neil sat down next to LILLA. "I've been watching you. You just sit and look and look . . . what are you doing?" Neil twitched. "I heard it! She said "I'm sitting and looking." She told me to join the singing group at school." Shilli smiled.

The beauty of Shilli's printing blocks spread rapidly by word of mouth. His goal of becoming more organized had been a success With his school work, singing group and carving, Shilli was very happy doing what he loved.

When Shilli told Neil he was supposed to learn about frequencies, Neil asked “Do light and colors have different frequencies? How about musical notes? Do you think there could be other beings that we can’t see - something to do with different frequencies? Should we ask Escher, or Lilla?” Shilli - “I know crows can hear lower frequencies that we can . . . cats can hear higher ones.”

Every afternoon, Shilli and Neil left a plate of food outside for the two cats. One night Escher came into the house, jumping on the bed next to the two boys. Neil asks “Where’s Lilla” “I haven’t seen her since yesterday.” Suddenly, yelps and growls, followed by horrifying screams came from outside, continuing for what seemed like forever. Escher - “It’s the jackal. He’s got Lilla. When we saw him on the beach yesterday, we ran away.” Neil gets up from the bed and hugs himself, rocking back and forth. “Should we got outside?” “Best not to.”

The next morning, Neil was confused. “Every morning my mother puts food outside for the birds and the cats. When I found a dead baby bird on the front mat, she told me one of the cats left it as a gift. When I asked her what it all meant, she said “It’s the way things are.”

The next visit to the Hospital, Neil’s doctor had news. He’d been contacted by a man making a film. Would Neil’s Mother and Father agree to have Neil participate in a documentary about Progeria? Neil’s answer was enthusiastic. “Of course, I have to tell Shilli!” No one knew the film maker was Emilie’s stepfather.

When the schools’ singing group was invited to perform at the Music Festival in the Czech Republic, Neil’s Mother arranged to have the film maker meet them in Prague for the interview.