

CHAPTER TWO BLESSING IN DISGUISE

There was to be a trial. The natural world knew.

Emilie had traveled from Denmark to Prague with her stepfather, who was filming a documentary on Progeria. Having been asked by the animals to learn to fly, she spent every free moment learning what she could. Finding a WWII biplane in an abandoned barn, she kept the plane (and all the fuel she could gather) hidden for months. What was the meaning of the seahorse with wings painted near the cockpit? Having researched the early ancestors of birds, Emilie knew well the story of a feathered dinosaur named Microraptor, who would glide on four wings, just like a bi-plane.

She hadn't told her stepfather. He had no idea she planned to fly to the Hague without a license or any formal flight training, her passengers an orangutan, chimpanzee and two puppies.

It was twilight. New Year's Eve. In a clear, cloudless sky, the last image many would see before the New Year was a World War II biplane circling the city. Emilie in the cockpit, Gentil and Chopper at her side, Ayres and Victoria in the rear. They were leaving for the World Court in the Netherlands.

Hearing that his daughter had been seen piloting a biplane, Victor Mortensen was angry beyond description, immediately contacting both the Danish Embassy and the Czech government.

The takeoff had been easy. After ten minutes, the plane began to lose altitude. Ayres the orangutan, sitting behind Emilie, gently put his arm on her shoulder. "Hard landing, not a crash, blessing in disguise." The butter yellow sky was now dark.

Emilie landed the plane safely in an open field; though the right wing was destroyed, no one was hurt. Hearing the crash, two men and a woman ran toward the plane. When they saw the passengers, they didn't know what to think.

Everyone walked slowly down the long driveway toward the farmhouse, passing a large blue barn, orchards blooming in sumptuous jewel colors as far as one could see. When Emilie tried to talk, she started to cry. Putting her arm around her, the woman asked, “Where are your parents?” “My stepfather’s at the Halcyon in Prague. His name is Victor Mortensen.” “What’s your name?” “Emilie Larsen.” “Emilie, I’m Jane Green. We’ll let him know you’re here.”

As the group approached the house, the men and women watching from the front porch were equally amazed at what they saw. Jane - “Would your friends like to explore the barn?” Gentil and Chopper were running around in circles barking, followed by Ayres and Victoria walking slowly and cautiously. All four were thrilled with the new surroundings.

Once inside the farmhouse, the homey informality of the main room, the cozy and inviting furniture, the warmth generated by a crackling fire in a beautiful rustic natural stone fireplace, Emilie knew she was safe.

When the plane crashed, everyone had been at dinner. One of the women quickly set another place at the table. As introductions began, Jane, who’d helped Emilie from the wreckage, left the room. Everyone gathered around Emilie, wanting to assure her all was well. “Please sit down and have some dinner.” One of the men at the table turned to his wife, smiling. “Did someone forget the onions?” Emilie asked “Can I help?” “They’re in the pantry closet around the corner, middle drawer.”

Opening the drawer, she saw it had a slotted bottom. Noticing the quizzical expression on Emilie’s face when she returned, the woman seated next to her explained. “It’s to let the onions and potatoes breathe.” Emilie immediately thought of Marcus. “Every living thing has an essence, a value, a purpose.” Jane walked back to the dining area, putting her hand on Emilie’s shoulder. “Your father will be here tomorrow. ”

After getting their bearings in the barn, Ayres the orangutan and Victoria the chimpanzee walked back to the farmhouse, sitting quietly on the porch. Inside, Emilie was telling her story. She'd met five young people at the games in Australia, different animals and birds had asked each of them for their help. Coincidentally, a year later, everyone had met again in Prague. Emilie asked - "Do you all live here?" The tall man with a strong British accent answered "No, we met in Dresden many years ago...we're attorneys. We rent the farm every year, part work, part vacation. It's become a tradition. I'm Paul Osprey, my wife. Christina, we live in London." "Raoul Lapin, this is my wife, Claire. I work at the United Nations in Geneva." "Rene Hibou, my wife Arnaude. We live in Paris." Jane - "This is my husband, Trine."

Hearing Ayres and Victoria scratching at the door, Emilie turned to Mr. Lapin. "Can they come inside?" "Certainly." Emilie opened the door, the orangutan and chimpanzee walked to the fireplace, sitting on the floor. Emilie continued. "The friends I met a year and a half ago are from Namibia, the United States, India, and Lebanon. The animals sent us dreams and taught us how to communicate telepathically. "This is Ayres and Victoria. They want to hire attorneys to bring a legal action against the human race for depraved indifference. I was taking them to the Hague when the plane crashed." Jane was intrigued. "How do you communicate?" "We use sign language."

No one slept that night. At first light, everyone was still talking non stop, endless questions. The attorneys explained how there were fifteen judges (from different countries) on the World Court at the Peace Palace in the Hague. Attorneys from France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States were always included. The last thing Emilie remembered before falling asleep, curled up next to Ayres and Victoria, was answering someone's question. "We were told we'd be asked to defend the human race."

When Emilie's step-father arrived, he was more relieved than angry. "I'm Victor Mortensen, Emilie's stepfather. Thank you all so very much for your kindness in caring for everyone." Emilie was surprised (and thrilled) that Irina and Nicholas had come with him. In light of all the research Irina had done as a law student, her parents had given her permission to visit Ayres and Victoria. She could teach everyone how to communicate. It had been agreed the night before that the orangutan and chimpanzee would stay at the farmhouse. Learning that Germany was the first European nation to guarantee animal rights in their Constitution, Emilie knew Ayres and Victoria would both be cared for beautifully.

Later in the morning, Irina asked to speak privately with Emilie. As they walked into the orchards, marveling at the smell of the floral blossoms, they suddenly came upon a fawn. Irina - "Did you know a new born fawn has no smell? It's protection from predators. A doe gives birth in high grass in order to hide her fawn for the first few days, until it can stand and move around to protect itself." Emilie - "There's *so much* I don't know." When Irina told Emilie about the Czech government having invited everyone to the palace on Christmas Eve, all the trouble they went to with special gifts, how angry they were that no one acknowledged the invitation or showed up, Emilie was shocked. "We never got an invitation. . . none of us. . . we don't treat people that way! Will you please tell someone in the government we never got the invitation?" Both Irina's parents were attorneys. They would see her message was delivered.

When it came time to leave, Ayres and Victoria put their arms around Emilie. She knew they were content. Of the four attorneys, Jane had particularly taken to them, as they had to her.

As everyone walked to the car, (Gentil and Chopper already in the back seat), a black crow flew overhead, cawing, in a widening circle. Emilie watched and smiled. Ayres knew. Blessing in disguise.

