

Families from Hungary, Austria, Denmark, Greece, Slovakia, Poland, Belgium, Latvia, Spain, Cyprus, Estonia, Italy, Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Netherlands, France, Germany, Iceland, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Romania, and Slovenia were in Prague for the Music Festival.

Opening night at the Opera House ended with a standing ovation. The fireworks that followed in Old Town Square were spectacular. Rather than a launch of one display after another, it happened all at once. For a few moments people wondered . . . were the clouds on fire?

The following day, Emilie wanted to visit the Old Jewish Cemetery. Walking with her stepfather through the grass covered tombstones (dating from the fifteenth century) she saw someone familiar in the distance. “Shilli, is that *you*? What are you doing here?” “I’m here with my Mother and my Aunt. My cousin and I are singing at the Festival tonight... rehearsal’s in an hour. Why are *you* here?” “My stepfather’s making a documentary on Progeria.” Shilli - “My cousin!” Emilie - “I’ve missed you. Where’re you staying?” Shilli - “At the *Halcyon*.” Emilie goes to hug Shilli. “That’s where *we’re* staying. See you later. Lots to catch up!”

Julian’s Mother was in the Czech Republic to take photographs. The beauty of the city and the surrounding countryside was legendary: castles, hidden villages, limestone caves. Of all the different places he’d seen that day, Julian’s favorite was Old Town Square. Staring at the Astronomical Clock, he felt a tap on the shoulder. “Hi Julian.” Wayne was smiling ear to ear. “Are you here for the Marathon?” Julian - “No, came with my Mom. I really like your shirt!” Wayne’s T shirt was black with white block letters - *Lose your temper and lose a friend. Lie and lose yourself*. “It was *your* shirts last year that gave me the idea.” Julian’s Mom overhears - “Wonderful to see you, Wayne. Can you have dinner with us tonight?” “Thank you, Mrs. Emerson, that would be great.” Julian - “Why not come back with us now?” “Sure.”

The Halcyon Hotel was located on the banks of the Vltava River. At the center of the Lobby stood a huge bronze statue of a Kingfisher. A mythical bird having the power to calm the winds and waves, the halcyon hen lays her eggs on a nest floating on the sea during the Winter Solstice, usually the 21<sup>st</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup> of December. The hotel was renowned for two things: topiaries and tomato soup, the recipe as closely guarded as any state secret.

Returning to the hotel, Julian was shocked to see Asha standing in the lobby. She hadn't changed much in a year, the flower in her hair a constant. "Hi, Asha, this is my friend Wayne." "Hello, Wayne." Wayne - "Hi, Asha. Are you here for the Marathon?" "No, my Father's here for an Environmental Conference." Julian - "Mom's got a photo gig." Julian's shirt (he was known for his unique T shirt sayings and designs) provoked a question. Asha - "What's *A Hopeless Jumble*?" Julian - "Words from a song." When Emilie and her Stepfather came through the front door, it was clear there was a reason everyone was here.

Asha and Emilie sit laughing in the lobby. "Try it. I dare you. Theophilus the thistle sifter sifted a sieve of unsifted thistles. If Theophilus the thistle sifter sifted a sieve of unsifted thistles, where *is* that sieve of unsifted thistles that Theophilus the thistle sifter sifted?" As Julian and Wayne walk toward her, Emilie, hearing something, jerks her head - "I hear something. I don't think we have much time." Asha - "I don't hear anything." Wayne - "Neither did I."

Julian walks quickly to the computer room and starts typing. "*What's going to happen isn't meant to frighten anyone. Animals and plants have the ability to change the Earth in ways we don't yet understand. This is not what they want. The natural world has something to say. This is the only way they knew to get our attention, to be heard. Please listen.*" A mouse scurries under his legs. Indignantly, "Who gave you permission to use our name for your computer gadget?"

Within minutes, bells all over the city began to ring, soft peals graduating to sonorous, lingering, haunting sounds.

Animals lined the streets and filled the bridges. Lights began flashing in the sky. Solar flares.

Outages and cascade failures: satellite relays, power grids, cell phone towers, radar stations, airport to plane and all military communication, television and radio broadcasting, power lines, a catastrophic failure of all the battery powered and electricity driven devices in the world. Backup power sources did not operate. Nothing was immune.

Worldwide: Lima, Nevis, Frankfurt, Geteria, Muscat, Helsinki, Geneva, Bangkok, Quito, Prague, Antwerp, Reykjavik, Seoul, Dublin, Moscow, Montreal, Berlin, Tel Aviv, Johannesburg, Beijing, Brazil.

Would anything ever be the same?