

CHAPTER FIVE FRAGILE

As Marcus walks into the Conference Room, Shilli is writing a quotation on the blackboard.

A man who has committed a mistake and doesn't correct it is committing another mistake. Confucius

Ever since arriving in Prague, Shilli wasn't himself. He had begun to have unsettling dreams about Matheus. Waking up, he could never remember any details, just Matheus' face.

The daily meeting begins. Marcus - "Do your best, even if you think it won't make a difference. Don't measure yourself against anyone else. It's disarming to have your ideas challenged and questioned. Things you thought were important won't be important any more. Question what you believe. Give yourselves permission to fail. Be honest about your fears. Be honest with yourself and, especially, be honest with each other."

Hearing a knock, Samuel goes to the door to see a uniformed guard. "I've been sent to ask Asha Singh to come with me to the Castle."

Julian, Wayne, Emilie and Lapis all look quizzically at Shilli and Neil who've suddenly starting using sign language. Neil, used to people looking at him, smiles. All of Shilli's friends are curious about Progeria.

As Asha gets up to leave, Marcus walks to her, licking her hand over and over.

Julian - "Where did you learn to sign?" Shilli - "At school last year. It really comes in handy." Neil - "We learned Morse code too! You want to hear something *really* weird? Sometimes I hear clicks in my ear. . . that actually mean something."

Walking with the guard to the Castle, Asha was scared. Having had Marcus with her before meant everything. This was different. When she walked slowly into the President's office, only one person was there.

Kveta Ceskova walks from behind her desk to greet Asha. “Please sit down, Miss Singh. To believe what you’ve told us is difficult, but something has happened for which no one has an explanation. May I ask you some questions?” “Of course.” “You gave us a series of numbers. What do you know about these numbers?” “Nothing. I was just asked to remember them.”

“Do you know if the timing of what has happened has any significance?” “No, I don’t.” “Were you told anything about our Government?” “I was told there’s currently a high level secret meeting of EU members, it was important no one knew the location. Both your President and Prime Minister are at that meeting, the Head of your Senate and Chamber of Deputies are also out of the country.”

Kveta Ceskova - “I am the Minister of Education. In his absence, the President has authorized me to manage the country. As you know, the President and Prime Minister lead the country, no matter where in the world they travel. Their not being able to communicate with us in any way changes that. I’m not authorized to sign any multilateral documents, any documents of any kind. Should anything happen to me, the next person authorized would be the Minister of the Interior. You met him yesterday. A woman has never been in the position I find myself. Our citizens will question this.”

Asha - “ Ms. Ceskova, Like you, I’m doing my best. That I can communicate with some animals is extraordinary to me. Your speech was powerful and eloquent.” “Thank you, Miss Singh. Before you go,” she hesitates, “I have a cat, Libuse. You met her when you were last here. Before she left for your hotel, it was as if she was telling me where she was going.”

Asha stands to leave. “If there is any way I can be of help, please let me know.”