

CHAPTER NINE PERCHANCE

It was Samuel's turn to write a quotation on the blackboard. He wrote two.

We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark. The real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light. Plato

Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls. The most massive characters are seared with scars. The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain. Kahlil Gibran

Lapis is the last to arrive. Julian - "Whoa, what happened to you?" Lapis - "Dyed my hair, some girls recognized me yesterday. This should do the trick."

Marcus begins - "You all may have to unlearn some things. If one of you eats a cow, another of you eats a dog, understand it's because of how you were raised. Animals are treated differently in different cultures. Don't judge another culture. Take the time to understand it. When people are afraid, they're susceptible to do what someone else tells them, even if their instincts tell them it isn't right. Will you remind people, not only to talk to their animals but, equally important, to listen to them?"

He continues. "When you challenge any idea, you might be challenged in return. Emilie - "I saw something wrong yesterday but I wasn't brave enough to speak up." Marcus - "Find others who believe as you do. You can speak up together."

Neil - "I can't explain it exactly. This man came up to me yesterday, telling me he was an animal activist, how much he loves working with animals. I don't know why, but I didn't like him. Something wasn't right, You saw him too, didn't you Asha?" Asha - "I remember: medium height, dark curly hair, long thin face, heavy eyebrows, black pants, a light blue shirt, black jacket with an triangular purple emblem on the right shoulder, brown shoes. He had a scar on his right arm near the wrist. "Shilli- "You remember *all that*?" Asha - "I notice things." Lapis - "If he works with animals he must be a nice guy." Samuel - "I usually pay attention to my instincts."

Marcus - “ As you visit and learn about different cultures, your beliefs might change. Dealing with people who behave and believe differently than you do can affect you, change who you are. Each new experience will be an opportunity to look at your own culture, at your own self. Marcus - “Lets go out to the garden. There’s someone I want you to meet.” A moose wobbles into the garden from the street, stumbling, having tremendous difficulty walking. The kids watch in amazement. “Is he drunk?” Marcus - “He ate fermented apples.” Lapis - “On the tour, we had our share of problems with alcohol.” Neil - “I’m an addict” Lapis - “Neil, that’s nothing to joke about.” Neil - *I am* an addict. Lapis - “Okay then, what’s your drug of choice?” Neil answers, “Oxygen!” Marcus ended the meeting. “Please remember.”

At the beginning, unexpected and seemingly endless challenges were the daily norm: anxiety, frustration, impatience and anger. Cars lined up to get the remaining petrol. Markets put their goods on the street for anyone to take, making looting unnecessary. Doves and pigeons carried messages, as did Marathon runners. Horses were transportation.

When it was obvious that what had worked before wasn’t working now, every one had a choice to make. Some coped better than did others.

Every person, young and old, had a guardian, a bird, butterfly, cat, rabbit, dog, hamster. Animals were everywhere. It was not unusual to see a giraffe, lion or tiger walking the streets in Prague. People kept their distance, but there was no fear of what had previously been considered “wild” animals. A peacock’s cry was not an uncommon sound. Teams worked daily to ensure all walkways and streets were kept clean.

Those people who lived alone invited someone to stay with them. People met others living nearby they’d never known before. Strangers greeted each other in the street. Lamplighters walked the streets at twilight, their long bamboo sticks bringing gas lamps to life. Candle light flickered from each and every window.

The fall harvest was plentiful. After crops were picked, new fruit and vegetables appeared overnight. Water was readily available. Teams were set up to harvest and transport food. Community kitchens were everywhere. Daily farmers markets in Prague neighborhoods, and every village and town, were alive with conversations and laughter. Barter was the currency. The banks hadn’t reopened.

Schools continued with one difference. Every student brought an older person with them to class. Teachers and libraries became invaluable. With no computers, what other resource did anyone have to answer their questions?

Medical professionals explored new ways to spend their days. For reasons no one understood, suddenly their services weren't needed. Pharmacies closed, as medications weren't needed.

There were many attempted thefts. Was it a coincidence an animal was always at the scene to *correct* what was happening?

As things slowed down, alternative, inventive, unconventional solutions were the expectation. Carriages from a local museum were refitted, circling the city daily to deal with any emergency. People did with less and didn't seem to mind. With no mail delivery or refrigeration came an odd sense of relief. Suddenly, faster didn't seem better. Craftsmanship and calligraphy took time. Community murals began appearing in different neighborhoods. Amateur astronomers watched the night skies. Cycling enjoyed a renaissance.

With the beautiful fall weather, no one was in a hurry, spending time outdoors, playing cards, chess, backgammon, inventing new games. Neighbors worked together to build tree houses. Young and old learned to dance, draw, paint and play a musical instrument, violin to harmonica.

In Prague for the Music Festival, singing groups went from neighborhood to neighborhood, a performance every evening. People who had never seen a working farm left the city on horseback. Chalk festivals delighted adults and children alike. Everyone, not just the young, learned, for the first time, how to make kites, candles and paper lanterns. Children as young as five began to read and perform Shakespeare. Puppet shows entranced children as they had a hundred years past. Stages were set up all over the city, the largest in Old Town Square.

Shilli, Neil, Emilie, Asha, Julian did things they never imagined they'd do. One family needed unusually small sized tiles for a new roof. Using their legs as molds, everyone wanted to help. They shaped the newly made clay over their legs, rounding it, setting the tiles to dry in the sun. Because no one's height and weight was the same, each tile was different. The owners of the house were delighted - "You've given us a new charmed roof."

Everyone met with Marcus every morning, sharing ideas and stories, spending their days doing what they loved, working hard and learning like they'd never learned before.

When St. Wenceslas Day, September 28th, arrived, nearly a month has passed. The Seasons were about to change.