

CHAPTER ONE ALBEMARLE INN

The lobby is bustling. As Shilli, Julian and Asha stand talking, Lapis arrives. “The new you?” Julian - “Decided to cut my hair.” Lapis - “Why? There’re no pictures of what happened.” Shilli - “Everyone’s saying it was an electro magnetic pulse.” As the Admiral walks by, Asha asks “What about the bomb on the bus?” “Three people were hurt. No one knows who did it or why. Your parents said another sleep over was okay. Just let me know.”

Two nights later, the Admiral sits in his favorite leather wingback chair reading, Youri asleep at his feet. The Library game tables have been replaced with three cots, each covered with a brilliantly colored handwoven blanket picturing a Quokka, a Cassowary and a Frilled Neck Lizard. The smell of cinnamon and apples comes from the sideboard, where cakes, scones, biscuits and pitchers of juices are almost hidden by an oversized crystal bowl, overflowing with blue cornflowers and white daisies.

At the far side of the room, Asha, Julian and Samuel sit cross legged on the floor talking. Asha - “Do you think we’re supposed to do something else?” Julian - “Don’t know.” Snug walks in, (his normal three legged lopsided gait), jumps onto Julian’s lap, stares at him for several seconds and then jumps back to the floor. Julian gets up, goes to the sideboard and brings back a glass of water, putting it on the floor in front of Snug. Snug drinks then walks out of the room. Samuel - “What was that?” Julian - “He asked me to bring him a glass of water.” The Admiral overhears, turns around and smiles. “Snug only drinks water from a glass.”

The kids laugh and continue talking. Julian asks Samuel - “What’s Lebanon like?” “We live in the country, it’s quiet, everything pretty much revolves around the Church. My Father’s an Arabic-English translator, works in the city during the week My Uncle’s a Deacon so my Mother organizes all the Church events.” Samuel - “What do your parents do?” Asha - “My Father’s an environmental engineer, my Mother’s a teacher.” Julian - “My Mom’s a photographer, my Dad’s a systems analyst.” Asha - “What’s that?” Julian - “Someone who works with computers, designs programs. Do either of you have animals at home?” Asha - “We have a dog.” Samuel, shaking his head, “We have a dog too, but he never talked.” Asha - “Maybe we just didn’t listen.”

Everyone has left the dining room except Shilli's parents who sit talking over dessert and coffee with Emilie's Mother and Step-father. Lights from the harbour sparkle in the background. Shilli and Emilie sit talking at a table on the other side of the room.

Emilie- "It's odd we're both doing papers on the same subject." Shilli - I didn't know anything about the Jewish religion before this." Emilie- "What are you writing about?"

Shilli - "There's a tribe in Africa called the Lemba. A story's been passed down for generations that their ancestors were Jews who came to Africa from Israel, descendants of Moses' brother, Aaron. A while ago, a professor from London was giving a lecture in South Africa when he noticed a group of black men in the audience wearing yarmulkes." Emilie- "The cap Jews wear?" "Right. Afterward, he went to talk to them." Everyone said the same thing. "We're black Jews." When the professor said he didn't believe it, they asked him to come to their village. He was shocked to discover they followed Kosher rules, not eating pork, not mixing milk and meat. Suddenly, Emilie jerks her head. Shilli- "What's wrong?" Emilie - "I heard something." Shilli- "I didn't hear anything." Emilie - "It's ok, go on." "The professor went back to the village again and again, trying to find some proof that the Lemba's ancestors were Jews from ancient Israel. He couldn't find anything."

Shilli and Emilie's parents walk over. Shilli's father is tall and muscular with short black hair, his mother's small frame a startling contrast. Half his height, she is always smiling. Emilie's mother is a graceful blond. Her step-father, tall and handsome, walks with a slight limp. "It's such a beautiful night. We're going for a walk around the harbour. Want to come?" Emilie - "Is it okay if we stay and talk?" "We'll stop in and get you on the way back." As the adults leave, Julian walks into the dining room. "What's up?" Shilli - "We're talking about papers for school. I'll be right back." Julian sits down next to Emilie - "Something interesting?" Emilie - "The Jewish religion in Denmark." Shilli has gone to his parents' table to rescue what's left of the Pav, a cake topped with meringue and berries. Shilli- "I'm always hungry, always disorganized, always hungry!" Three long, loud horn blasts startle everyone. A few moments later, four more blasts. Julian - "Another cruise ship!"

Emilie turns to Julian. "Shilli's writing about a Jewish tribe in Africa." Shilli, eating what's left of the Pav, continues. "After a while, the scientists knew they'd missed something, something about a common ancestor. Finally, they found their answer. The Y chromosome is the only one that doesn't change from father to son." Emilie - "What's a chromosome?" Julian answers. "In a cell, the DNA's in a bunch of different threads, called chromosomes." Shilli - "You won't believe this. They found that Jewish priests from all over the world were descended from one man who lived about 3000 years ago." Emilie - "You mean Jewish Rabbis?" "No, Jewish priests! Ten percent of all Lemba men had the same Y chromosome." Julian is intrigued. "No way, cool!"

Julian looks at Emilie. Emilie - "I'm writing about a different time. Germany invaded Denmark in 1940. Our government tried to get along but things changed when German soldiers started picking up Danes who were Jews. We did everything we could to help them escape to Sweden." Julian - "I went to Denmark last summer. Loved it, especially the food!" Emilie - "It's a really small country." Shilli - "How small?" Emilie- "You can bike from one end to the other in a day." Shilli- "You're kidding. You should come to Namibia. What happened after the war?" Emilie- "The Germans who killed so many Jews went to South America to hide. They changed their names, how they looked, even removed their fingerprints. They forgot one thing - their handwriting! Even though they wrote different names on their bank checks, their writing was the same. After searching through hundreds of records, handwriting experts found them. Finally, they were arrested."

Julian - "A friend of mine's dad is an attorney. When he came to our school "...Shilli interrupts "Your parents go to school?" "They come to tell us about their different jobs. Anyway, he said when he has to choose people to be on a jury, he checks their information sheets to see their handwriting." Shilli, shaking his head, "No....he thinks he can find out something about them?" "That's what he said." Shilli- "My handwriting's terrible!" Julian gets up. "Gotta go...my Mom's photographing some stuff at a Gallery. See you later."

Once Julian has left, Shilli's expression slowly changes as he begins to stare at Emilie, becoming noticeably nervous and uneasy, his jaw clenched. "Why are you looking at me like that?" Emilie, jerking her head, asks "What's that?" Shilli - "I didn't hear anything. . . is it okay if I tell you something?" "Of course." Shilli- "I've never told anyone else." Shilli's voice is almost a whisper. "I had a twin brother. He got sick and died." "When?" "Eight years ago." "What was his name?" "Matheus." Shilli is having a hard time talking. "He was my twin. I should have known he was sick. It was my fault. If I'd done something he might be alive. I hear his voice in my head all the time. Since I got here, all I hear is "Tell Emilie."

At the thundering noise of a jet flying directly overhead, Emilie takes a deep breath. "My Dad was a pilot. He was away a lot. One day he was supposed to come home but phoned, saying he had another flight. I got really upset, cried and cried. He changed his plans and came home. The next day he was on a plane that crashed. Everyone died. It was my fault." "Shilli - how long ago?" "Eight years."

Neither Emilie nor Shilli notice Snug the cat walking into the dining room. He scurries (lopsidedly) across the floor and jumps up onto Shilli's lap, laying his chubby body across Shilli's chest, staring into his eyes, Seconds later, Snug's on the floor walking over to Emilie, leaping into her lap and softly patting her cheek with his paw, over and over again. When Snug jumps down and walks away, Shilli and Emilie stare at each other in silence. It takes a long while for Shilli to speak. "It wasn't your fault." Emilie looks at Shilli. "It wasn't your fault." They both begin to cry.