

CHAPTER SEVEN    EMILIE    DENMARK

Christmas. Candles shone in the windows of every house and every shop. Thousands of lights. The Advent wreath hung over the dining room table, the music box waiting to be wound, a metal disc to be chosen.

Smells came from the kitchen, sweet and spicy. Emilie was making butter balls, rolling the butter between two ribbed wooden paddles. Wrapping gifts and decorating the tree, candles on the branches, was pure joy.

Christmas Eve dinner was nearly finished. It was time. Emilie's Stepfather stood up, walked to the other side of the table and gave Emilie her birthday kiss. When he raised his glass, everyone in the family knew the toast by heart.

"The world is a den of thieves and night is falling. Evil breaks its chains and runs through the world like a mad dog. The poison affects us all. No one escapes. Therefore, let us be happy while we are happy. Let us be kind, generous, affectionate and good. It is necessary and not at all shameful to take pleasure in the little world."

Suddenly, Emilie heard a noise, a noise no one else heard. Asking to be excused, she walked outside. A fox, sitting by the barn, was waiting for her. "We need your help. Learn to fly." He darted away.

Emilie was afraid of flying. She knew she had no sense of direction. Today was her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. She decided she would go to Flight School.

The headlines continued:

LIZARDS OVERRUN CAIRO MUSEUM  
FOOTBALL GAME CALLED - BEES SWARM FIELD  
ITALIAN BICYCLE RACE CANCELLED

It was December.

On her birthday, Emilie had found a glistening black feather on the doorstep. The following day, a black crow appeared, following her everywhere, cawing, playfully swooping and dive-bombing. It was three weeks before the bird communicated. "I am HANS. Pay attention to your instincts. Don't ever be afraid to walk away when you feel threatened." He built his nest in a tall tree directly in front of her bedroom window.

Having made the decision to learn to fly was too much to think about. Was it a coincidence, the first day back at school after the Christmas holiday, that the history teacher began talking about Eleanor Roosevelt? "You must do the thing you think you cannot do!" She would think about it later. Remembering the Admiral's suggestion to learn about indigenous people, Emilie embarked on a research project about the history of the Vikings. The word "Viking" came from an early Danish language word, *Kikingr*, meaning pirate. For over two hundred years, Vikings had invaded England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Russia, Sicily. She wanted to learn more about the runic alphabets and rune stones. Emilie was surprised to discover that the Danish Royal Family, tracing their lineage to Viking kings, was the oldest Royal Family in the world.

Learn to fly. Since she was little, Emilie knew well she had no sense of direction. Arriving at any new location, she was confused. While her friends were able to acclimate themselves, knowing how to return to where they started, Emilie would get lost. It was this that prompted her to start asking for help - for a "sign." She had never *not* received an answer: an advertisement on a passing truck, a car's license plate, a street name, a road repair sign - "Turn around, you are going the wrong way."

In the early Spring, she started spending all her free time at the Randers airport. Asking advice from everyone, she quickly made friends with several pilots who "took her under their wing." Was it another coincidence that one of the best Flight Schools was in Roskilde, where she spent summers with her Grandparents? She did all she could, read every manual, sat for hours watching the planes. Her new friends quizzed her on the control panels, take off and landing procedures, often taking her on short flights. Emilie never told her parents.

After her Mother and Father divorced, Emilie's father had remarried. It was during one of her grandmother's weekly phone chats that everything changed. "How's your half-brother?" "What do you mean, my half-brother. . . I don't have a brother?" When her Grandmother told her that her father had a child by his second wife, a son who was now twelve years old., Emilie was in shock. "Where is he?" "He's at the Vigilius School in Copenhagen." Emilie felt something she'd never felt before. A pain in her stomach began to spread all over her body, turning into an anger over which she seemed to have no control. She ran to her Mother. "Do I have a half-brother? Her mother answered "Yes." For the first time in her life, Emilie screamed. "You're my mother. . . why didn't you tell me?" She surprised herself by what she did next.

That she didn't yet have her driver's license meant nothing. Taking the car keys from her mother's purse, she, awkwardly and slowly, backed the car out of the driveway. Within minutes, it began to rain, not a light shower, but a wild weather downpour. After a few hours, she slowed down, steering to the right side of the road. . . asking for a sign. Turning on the radio, she instantly recognized Lapis' voice, singing a song she'd never heard "Seasons to be Free." She pulled back onto the highway. A normal two hour drive from Randers to Copenhagen turned into five. Reaching the outskirts of the city, she was stopped by a rescue officer, telling her that much of Copenhagen was flooded. "I have to get to the Vigilius School." "That's just across the way from where I'm going. I'll take you."

When she arrived at the school she was far from polite. "I am Emilie Larsen. I'm here to see my brother, Soren." The teacher asked her please to wait, while she phoned Soren's mother. Emilie wondered if her brother had been named after Kierkegaard. Her father often quoted "Be that self which one truly is." After a few moments, a boy walked in to the outer office. He looked scared and confused. Emilie wasn't the only one. It seemed that Soren didn't know he had a sister either.

Every year, school out for the summer, Emilie went to stay with her grandparents who lived in Roskilde - a hundred and fifty kilometers from Randers. It was there, when she was six, she has first learned to ride a horse. The two highlights of the summer were always the Horse Show and Air Show. When she first told her grandfather she wanted to be a pilot, she tried, but couldn't gauge his reaction. He just stared at her. His son, Emilie's father, had been a pilot, killed in an plane crash.

Emilie loved to read. Each year her grandparents would choose several books for her to read and then review. Rousing conversations, and questions followed each book report. After several summers, she now knew what to expect. After reading books one, two and three, her grandfather would ask her to reread book one and two. It never ceased to amaze her how her interpretation of the two previous books had completely changed since reading book three.

Every afternoon Emilie went to the garden to pick the ripe vegetables for dinner. One day, her grandfather walked outside. "What do you do if there are more ripe vegetables and fruits that we need tonight?" "I take them to the neighbors." Her grandfather always had clever ways to teach a lesson. "Never forget, Emilie, like vegetables, money is just a form of energy. Once you've figured out what you need, share the rest. Don't keep increasing what you think you need. When you get older, you'll understand better."

That Emilie could hear things no one else could hear never bothered her. Everyone was used to her jerking her head side to side. What *did* bother her was how impatient she was. She decided to ask her Grandmother. "Why do you think I'm so impatient?" Smiling, "I don't know, sweetheart. The only way to learn patience is to be patient. I think being impatient means that you see your own needs as more important than other's needs." "Bedda, do you have things about yourself you question?" "I like things in their place, in order. Maybe that's a Danish trait."

When Emilie's stepfather told her they would be going to Prague for the Music Festival in September, he was going to do an interview there for his documentary film on Progeria, she was thrilled.