

BOOK SEVEN CHAPTER THREE HALCYON

The Halcyon Hotel was located on the banks of the Vltava River in Prague. 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 21st or 22nd of December. The hotel was renowned for two things, topiaries and mushroom soup, the recipe as closely guarded as any state secret.

When the last outage began, over four years ago, it was September. Asha Singh and Marcus the Labrador had gone to Prague Castle to speak with those in charge. Because the President and Prime Minister were out of the country, Kveta Ceskova, the Minister of Education, was authorized to speak on their behalf. Asha began. “I’m here on behalf of the animals and the natural world to explain what has happened, to offer our help.”

The following day, from the top of Old Town Hall Tower, built in 1338, castle guards standing at her side, Kveta Ceskova addressed the people in the square below, everyone’s fear palpable. Without any microphone, her voice carried clearly. No one would ever forget her demeanor of calm and leadership. “The airport is closed; no flights are arriving or leaving. The metro, trams and buses are not operating.”

“Yesterday, a young woman, someone we do not know, came to Prague Castle to speak with us. She met with me, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Ministers of the Interior and of Informatics. She requested I ask every Czech citizen not to cause harm to any animal. Her exact words were “They are here to help.” We were told that neither food nor water will be a concern. Our Ministers of Agriculture, Environment, Health, Labor and Social Affairs are assessing what has happened, putting all essential services for survival in place.”

“The name of our capital means *Threshold*. The unknown can be frightening. We are Czechs. Our history has shown who we were in the past. How each of us behaves now, the choices we each make, will define who we are for the future.” Every choice Kveta Ceskova made was the right one.

After the fear of the unknown subsided, the residents of Prague not only accepted the consequences of the outage but readily admitted they were genuinely relieved, welcoming a break from the fast pace overtaking their lives. Slowing down wasn't the negative anyone had imagined.

Citizens who owned one or more guns, knowing it was voluntary and temporary, turned them in to a local government authority. Since the Marathon was scheduled for the next day, runners were available to take messages across the country. Morning meetings were held in four different locations for daily updates and announcements."

No citizen caused harm to any animal, horses were transportation. Candles shone in every window. After crops were harvested, new plants appeared overnight. Everyone had a guardian, a butterfly, cockroach, cat, mouse, bird, lizard, spider, fly, snake, a small dog. Community kitchens were the norm. With barter the only currency, banks closed. Every youngster brought an older person to school. Doctors and pharmacies weren't needed. Any illegal act, corruption, theft, abuse of any kind, was dealt with swiftly and safely, one or more animals arriving to correct the situation.

Shilli, Emilie, Asha, Julian and Samuel had met at the Olympics in Australia, a few days before the first outage. Their coming together a year later in Prague, the second outage soon to occur, was no coincidence. Marcus' murder, Samuel's death, a lawsuit in the Hague naming them as co-defendants, their parents' kidnappings, the first Nobel Prize awarded to non humans, what they each had experienced would now play a pivotal role. Nearly five years had passed since what had happened at the Olympic's closing ceremony grabbed the attention of ethologists worldwide.

When Chloe arrived at the hotel, she immediately noticed another sloth sitting on the head of the huge bronze statue of a Kingfisher. "I am Cling. How can I help?" Chloe - "Do you know who is in charge? "I'll show you the way." The two sloths, very different in demeanor and gait, began their walk to the Castle.

Prague Castle is the largest castle complex in the world, two uniformed Castle Guards standing watch at the main entrance gate. Chloe communicated with one of the guards. "I'm here to speak to the President." Obviously taken aback by the fact he'd clearly understood what an animal had said, he quickly turned to enter the building. "Please wait here."

Chloe and Cling were escorted inside and asked to wait in the hallway. Five years ago, Asha and Marcus the Labrador were sitting on the identical bench in the same corridor. Today it was Chloe and Cling who noticed the framed quotation on the wall. “As soon as man began considering himself the source of the highest meaning in the world and the measure of everything, the world began to lose its human dimension, and man began to lose control of it.” Vaclav Havel.

Shown into the President’s office, Chloe and Cling proceeded slowly. Seated behind a large, baroque desk was Kveta Ceskoza, who, on the day before the outage began, was elected the first female president of the Czech Republic. A white Siamese cat, one eye silver, one eye gold, sat on the desk, looked at Chloe and winked, nodding her head toward the chair. “I am LIBUSE.”

As Chloe jumps into in one of the two chairs facing the desk. Cling stands next to the closed door. As Chloe begins, “Congratulations, Madame President, we’re here to offer our help. . .” loud barking interrupts as Jan Jelinek enters the room, followed by a Prague Ratter, his black coat glistening. As the Minister of Informatics sits in the second chair, glaring at Chloe, the dog jumps to the other chair, embracing Chloe. “I am VACLAV. We’ve been waiting for you.”

President Ceskova - “As before, the priority is to care of those who can’t care for themselves. I will address the people in an hour. Do you know how long this outage will last?” Chloe - “The outcome will depend on the human race. Everything is in place. Optimism prevails.”

Kveta Ceskova - “Are you staying at the Halcyon?” Chloe - “Yes.” “Are Asha, Shilli, Emilie, Julian and Lapis with you?” Chloe - “No, they are each in their home country. You know about their progress on the interspecies internet?” “Yes.” Madame President, would it be all right if Vaclav and Libuse returned with us to the hotel for a few hours?” “Certainly.”

The words Kveta Ceskova would speak today as President were the same she’d spoken years ago. They had become part of every Czechs’ cellular memory. “The name of our capital means *Threshold*. How each of us behaves now, the choices we each make, will define who we are for the future.”

Following the speech, as had happened in Australia, clouds and contrails (without planes) formed an image in the sky, one that appeared to those who saw it as familiar. Was it possible that, somehow, the natural world was, through collective feelings, not only affecting, but possibly altering, the brain chemistry of the human race?

Returning to the hotel, Chloe, Cling, Vaclav and Libuse noticed how Prague's residents, rather than tense, anxious, frustrated or angry were smiling, laughing and skipping. Food carts and puppet stages were being set up, notices for street theater presentations posted, musicians on every corner, children doing chalk drawings, everything from a fairy tale water sprite to a hummingbird.

If chosen President, Kveta Ceskova made a commitment to address two issues, transition and corruption. Little did she know the latest outrage, immediately following her election, would prove to be pivotal.

Transition. Twenty five years ago, the Velvet Revolution had ended communist control. How did those who'd grown up under the communist regime adjust to the new Czech Republic? Mutual understanding the goal, honest discussions between generations, describing and questioning their experiences and personal challenges were held weekly. That those born after the revolution experienced a very different world was obvious - prime ministers communicating on Twitter the norm. The one question everyone thought but no one spoke. Did the older generations have to die before the palpable feeling of heaviness of the dark history was replaced with optimism?

Corruption. That fraud and collusion was rampant was common knowledge. From all levels of government to mail delivery, property ownership (state owned to private) tax evasion, bribery, banking, Corruption was not only affecting businesses in the country, it was discouraging outside interests to become involved.

Communication between Kveta Ceskova and Libuse began nearly five years ago, after the second outrage. The siamese cat's first message, winking first her gold eye, then her silver, was "The human species has failed to mature." The new President of the Czech Republic welcomed change. Knowing little about communicating with animals, but intrigued by the idea of an interspecies internet, she decided to organize a think tank including animals and the natural world. Not knowing how long the breeding ground of the internet would be on hold, the timing was perfect.

Libuse always enjoyed accompanying Kveta to the Castle. After exploring the different rooms and staircases, she looked forward to an afternoon nap in her favorite window seat in the office of the President. Researching the first of multiple issues of corruption, the transfer of state owned property to private ownership, the President had file folders and papers covering not only her desk but every tabletop in the outer office, sometimes overflowing onto the carpeted floor. Libuse walked to one corner of the room, sitting down on a large envelope, then jumped onto the side table, nodding her head toward a photograph, lifting her right paw to touch the face of one of the men. Exploring a direction she would never have, Kveta immediately discovered one of her principal supporters in the recent election campaign was the leader of a group illegally transferring property.

From that day forward, one evening each week, Libuse the cat (who didn't know how to lie) invited different animals to meet in the President's office. Kveta the only human present. The informal communications, covering every phase of corruption, from bank fraud to mail fraud, began immediately to bear fruit. Far from patronizing, those having information would simply point Kveta in the right direction. A florist delivering a bouquet of flowers to the President of the Czech Republic had no idea he was playing a positive part in transporting ants, bees, small insects, professionally qualified informants and whistle blowers of the natural world. When Chloe visited the Castle, hidden in her coat were moths, beetles and cockroaches, all carrying information.

As weeks passed, the new government's successes grew exponentially. Once caught and exposed, those involved asked themselves the same question. "How were we found out?" "How was this possibly discovered? What did we do wrong - we left no clues, not one?" When asked directly, "How did you find out?" the President's answer was simple. "An anonymous tip. The evidence speaks for itself." On certain occasions, it was their personal animals, dogs, cats, ferrets, who'd turned them in. Why? Because they loved their humans and wanted them to evolve.

Those who were foolish enough to repeat illegal acts were immediately apprehended. It didn't take long for anyone bent on cheating the system to realize there was no use to continue. Time and space to think about what was continuing to happen answered their every question. Kveta kept her think tank abreast of the progress, asking advice as to how to best continue the country's process of positive change. Conventions were challenged and, slowly but surely, recognition was approaching.

Libuse delivered the invitation to Chloe and Cling, two very different sloths, to spend the weekend in Olomouc, where the President had a small farmhouse. Years ago, during the second outage, Marcus the Yellow Labrador had met every morning in the Halcyon's conference room with Shilli, Emilie, Asha, Julian and Samuel, awakening them to take the first steps in what could be a turning point for the human race. Marcus had been murdered by a man masquerading as an animal activist. Chloe suggested to the President that having daily meetings at the Halcyon (for anyone who wanted to attend) might be productive. Perhaps someone from the natural world could begin by delivering a short message?

Kveta was concerned. How were young people going to react to what could be a prolonged outage? What would happen, psychologically, when they were suddenly disconnected? Had their dependence on electronic devices, including those used for school work, reached an addiction, causing them to experience a kind of withdrawal? Chloe had the answer. "The fast paced lives of new generations, their being in touch electronically worldwide, began training their brains at a very young age (as never before) to multi task. Gaming has speeded up their thinking process, helped them to organize many different thoughts skillfully. Because of this, solution based thinking and problem solving came easily.

When Libuse, Chloe and Cling returned to the Halcyon, entering the lobby through the garden, they were startled to see Marcus the Labrador. A year ago, Shilli, Emilie, Asha, Julian and Lapis had hired a sculptress. The clay mold had to be redone three times until finally, after several subtle changes, the life size statue, capturing every detail, had been cast in bronze then painted, the resemblance remarkable. Notices had been posted that morning at the Halcyon inviting everyone to attend daily meetings. Was it a coincidence the statue had been delivered today, the spirit of Marcus watching over the place he'd called home for so many years?

Cling the sloth, orphaned as a baby when her mother was hit by a car, was found and raised by a large white cat who lived in Prague. Meeting her for the first time, Cling noticed how different Chloe was. She walked upright, rarely hanging upside down and slept only three hours a night when Cling slept twenty hours. Before returning to the Castle, Vaclav and Libuse spent a hour with Chloe, discussing how things were changing daily. They agreed to stay in touch, telepathically. Before leaving tomorrow, Chloe promised to meet with the young people.

When Chloe walked into the garden, youngsters of all ages, in Prague on holiday with their families (before the outage began) were sitting on the grass in a large circle. Chloe did a somersault, landing in the middle. “One of Marcus’ favorite questions was “What are you feeling but not saying?”

The boy sitting directly in front of Chloe started, the others continuing in turn around the circle. Ages three to seventeen spoke easily about what they were feeling. “I was scared about the outage, now I’m more excited than afraid.” “How can we understand what animals are saying?” Chloe - “Learning to listen is the key.” “Do you think we’ll die because of what’s happened?” “Chloe - “No. There’s nothing to be afraid of.” The questions came faster than Chloe could answer. One boy turned to the girl seated next to him. “I wasn’t afraid of being born. Why should I be afraid of dying? It could be just as exciting.” She answered, “I’m scared to die.” Another voice. “We’ve been taught to be afraid of death. Why. . . it’s just the next adventure.”

“Maybe the outage is to slow us down, help us notice things.” “My religion taught me right from wrong. It’s not right to think animals are as smart as we are.” “Let’s keep religion out of this.” “What’s the religion that respects and listens to Nature?” “Religions, play a part, as do human power and greed, disputes over territory. in creating violence. If others don’t believe as you do, does that give you the right to kill them?” “The unknown is always scary, but think of the potential. If you measure fear against excitement, I think excitement wins.” “I don’t think a meaningful life requires technology.” “I know what’s right and what’s wrong. If I walk over and hit Chloe, that’s wrong.” “People hit animals all the time. They don’t think it’s wrong.”

Chloe questioned her spellbound audience. “Do any of you know what an ego is?” “It’s what makes us think in a certain way.” Chloe - Yes, you each have an ego. Many times it can make you think rigidly because you’ve been taught certain things, and get in the habit of thinking them over and over.” Chloe began somersaulting in and out of the circle, landing in front of what appeared to be the oldest girl there. Her question - “What would happen if our egos disappeared?” Chloe - “You can now communicate with animals. If the boundaries disappeared between who you think you are and what you think the world is, how would you change? What if you discovered we’re all connected, one no better than another?”

Chloe continued. Most humans want to develop a sense of who they are, what you call a healthy ego. When humans are young they believe in fairy tales and magic. Why does this stop as they grow older?"

That evening, a tall man dressed in a loose fitting long sleeved white robe, a scarf folded around his head tied with a black cord, was the first to enter the dining room for the evening meal. He immediately noticed what looked like a penguin standing on one of the center tables. As others arrived, curiosity joined amazement. How did a penguin travel from the Arctic to Prague? The fifteen inch tall black and white diving bird with short wings and legs, webbed feet waited patiently until everyone was seated.

"I am DAVINROY, an Auk. The natural world does not understand the concept of prejudice. Strands of corruption are blending with frequencies of understanding. Many will be angry. Anger is a sign of life. It serves a purpose, has helped us survive. There are positive qualities that mobilize resources, increase vigilance, facilitate the removal of obstacles to pursuing worthy goals. I wish you well." Davinroy jumped off the table and walked out of the dining room. The room was silent. Chloe jumped onto the table where Davinroy had stood.

Chloe - "We've scheduled a meeting in the dining room every morning, open to everyone." The man in the long white garment stood up. "People can't shed their cultures like a lizard does its skin. How does one begin to define right from wrong? Chloe - "A good question to ask at tomorrow's meeting."

The following morning, the dining room was full to overflowing. An elderly dark haired woman was the first to speak. "I'm Italian. "We're all in this together. Everyone is confused. The ability to grasp what has happened will take time. Questioning everything we've each been taught, much less making changes... whatever is going on, we have to take this very slowly. That we can suddenly communicate with animals would baffle anyone, whatever our culture." Turning to the man wearing the white robe. "Would you be comfortable telling others about your culture? I will do the same, maybe others will join us." He did not answer.

A girl, seated at the far side of the dining room, began to speak, haltingly. “Tolerance of other points of view is easier when you’re young. Growing older, it seems that society, culture, and religion teach us to be less tolerant. The outage could be a blessing in disguise, a chance to talk with each other about our differences?” Standing up so she could see the man who had just spoken, “I understand, in your country, women are rarely seen or heard. It’s against the law for you to name your child Linda. That’s my name. Are you not allowed to speak to me, because of my name, because I’m female?” The response was emotionless. “Several countries have lists of banned names for children. Many things accepted in one country are frowned upon in another. Since the outage, my private jet won’t function. What you are talking about is very different than what we are facing today.”

In a previous outage, Prague had, successfully, instigated the barter system. With the Halcyon providing complimentary shelter and food, those who’d traveled to the Czech Republic to see the capital’s extraordinary architecture, picturesque gardens, parks and breathtaking views wouldn’t be disappointed.

Residents of Italy, China, Zaire, France, United States, Nepal, Japan, England, South Africa, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Costa Rica, Peru and Honduras were staying at the Halcyon. The morning meetings’ discussions, although vehement, were illuminating, the inequity of wealth, health care, education. “I’ve been oblivious.” The youngsters made a colorful poster that hung above the desk in the lobby. *OpenMind*. The challenge was written in chalk on sidewalks throughout the city, followed by the word *ACTION*.

Although the morning meetings in the dining room were open to all ages, most of the young people preferred to meet in the large garden outside the lobby. The topiaries, a giraffe, eagle, elephant, lion and peacock, seemed to be listening. While their parents and other family members were frustrated and anxious about the outage, it hadn’t affected them in the same way. For them, talking with animals came easily. HAPPY, the zebra fish (who’d accompanied Chloe the sloth from Australia), arrived to ask if anyone wanted to learn something new. “I can regenerate my heart and my brain. Would you like me to teach each of you how to do this?” The youngsters resoundingly shouted “Yes!” HAPPY - “You must listen very carefully. When I’m finished, I’ll answer all of your questions.” No one interrupted. HAPPY the zebra fish.

Other than playing checkers, backgammon or flying kites, the youngsters wondered what they could do to help. "I'm from Zaire. On a plane flight two years ago I met a boy my age, we talked the whole time, kept in touch since. He has Progeria." "What's that?" "A genetic disease accelerating the aging process. Growing up he lost his hair, his skin became coarse, his eyes very big, He joked about how he looked like an old man. My friend Neil has lived longer than anyone else with Progeria. He told me how a few years ago, during an outage, how exciting it was to learn to make a pencil. We need graphite and clay. Cut a block of wood into slices, make grooves into one side, put the lead into the groove and glue another slice on top, just like a sandwich. Then cut it into different pencils, put an eraser into the end. Anyone want to join me? Where do we get the lead?" "I don't know. We'll figure it out." "How about the erasers?" "Nature probably has the answer."

Ideas abounded. "Let's make flutes from the stalks of plants." "We could start a band." When a lady bought a large tray with fresh juice, the glasses beautifully hand painted with different animals, birds, fish and snakes, when asked, pointing to one glass (a snake) what is that called?" she answered "Rattlesnake. Chrestys." After trying to say the word again and again, not even coming close, everyone was laughing. The Czech language was not easy. What was easy was adopting the Czech habit of agreeing with "Ya Ya Ya."

Two butterflies flew into the garden, landing on each shoulder of a young girl, sitting on the grass near the lobby door. She knew it was time. "Have any of you ever heard the expression *No butterflies live here?*" Silence. "Do any of you know about the Holocaust, the Shoah?" One person nodded, an older boy standing at the far corner. After the girl described the horror of what had happened, he asked "Does anyone know what *doubling* means?" Silence. "It refers to those who slaughtered thousands of men, women and children, then went home every day to their own families, convincing everyone, including themselves, they were moral human beings - I was just doing my job." As Chloe arrived from the lobby, a small girl, getting up to leave whispered "That will never happen again," When someone yelled "It has. Rwanda!" the boy from Japan was also angry. "Have you heard of Nagasaki or Hiroshima. Is that *doubling?*" Another shout. "No. When attacked, you attack in return." Chloe took over. "A friend of mine, Irina, wants all of you to meet someone. Please follow me. It's a short walk."

As a light rain began to fall, Chloe, Irina and the children left the Halcyon for the Vltava river. Shilli, Emilie, Asha Julian and Lapis had been in Prague together, nearly five years ago, during the second outage. Lapis was visiting his aunt and uncle. Their daughter, his cousin, Irina, was a law student. Walking on the banks of the river one morning, Lapis and Irina met CTIBOR the dolphin. His message to them was clear. For the animal world to bring a legal action against the human species, an orangutan and chimpanzee needed an attorney. The two words that came into Irina's mind were prophetic. *Depraved Indifference*. A trial at the International Court of Justice at the Peace Palace in the Hague was followed by the awarding of the Nobel Peace prize, the first time in history, to non human plaintiffs, AYRES the orangutan and VICTORIA the chimpanzee.

As everyone arrived at the river bank, CTIBOR popped his head out of the water. "I have a favor to ask ." Everyone gathered on the banks, some walking into the shallow water to stand nearer. "A man named Abraham Lincoln spoke the truth. "I am in favor of animal rights as well as human rights. That is the way of a whole human being."

CTIBOR continued. "It is up to you to understand the difference between what science offers and the offerings of the natural world. Though change will always bring challenges, more and more humans are spreading the energy to make the turn. The designs and geometric properties that exist in nature have lessons to teach your species in all fields. Having chemicals to kill cancer cells, plants can change many lives. A dog can sense and detect smells linked to cancer. When you return home, life as you'd known it before this moment not be the same. It will be up to each of you to do what you can to protect our habitats, both yours and mine. CTIBOR disappeared under the water.

Interspecies communication was not only growing but on the way to becoming contagious. No language needed. Telepathy. How was it possible? No one knew. Was what was happening in the Czech Republic unique only to that territory? No one knew. With the tyranny of technology not at play, the glories of the natural world, before unnoticed or undiscovered, were now the new frontier. Why had no one experienced any health concerns? No one knew.

HAPPY the zebra fish decided to make Prague his home. The next morning, as Chloe the sloth left The Halcyon, all the guests stood outside to wish her a safe journey. As she somersaulted away, a partial solar eclipse, the moon not completely covering the disc of the sun, left an image in the sky that seemed oddly familiar to everyone.

