

3 THE ACCIDENT

Darkness was her enemy; moonlight her companion. On an otherwise calm night, the wind suddenly began to blow fiercely. Only a few steps from the car, she could feel the violent gusts of air. Dust and debris swept up into the air created a state of flux. Visibility went from high to almost nothing. The wind was ferocious, and the debris hurt Elle's big brown eyes, narrowed to two thin slits against the strong wind. She tried to use her hands to shelter them but there was too much debris in the air. The violent wind was fighting with her. Even the ground seemed to be shaking from its howling. Voices were calling her but she was too dizzy to make sense of them.

Suddenly a cushion-like sensation washed over her, making her feel safe and protected. It was as if an invisible barrier had her trapped from head to toe. Feeling like she was inside a giant capsule, she opened her eyes slowly. Her hair was no longer flying around and she could stand freely without effort. It was calm inside her protective bubble, though outside the tornado-like swirl of leaves and dirt continued to dance in the buffeting winds.

She heard a male voice again. In the calm of the bubble, she could make out the words.

"Come to me. Come!"

No, you must stop hallucinating, she told herself.

"You belong here. Come join me!" the voice continued.

It was almost as if the voice were in her head. She wanted it to stop but it wouldn't.

Elle's legs were becoming numb and she felt weightless. Am I in a Ferris wheel on an ascent? she wondered.

Unknown to her, a pair of white wings flapped behind her. She was levitating, turning around like she was trapped in a revolving door. A circular veil revolved around her. The world she came from, the world

Puissant Angel

she knew, was no longer in sight. Her new surroundings were overwhelming, allowing neither entrance nor exit. She clutched her hands together tightly, not knowing what to do. She wanted to ask for help but from whom?

Then a myriad of flashing colourful lights approached from her left. A slight turn of her head revealed something that belonged in a fantasy novel. A rotating column of air flashed colourful lights that reflected a phantom image of blinking Christmas lights on the buildings and parked cars all around her.

It was another tornado!

But Elle had never heard of tornadoes reflecting colours! She was so captivated by the scene that she hadn't noticed the large wings sprouting from her back, balancing her in mid-air. A quick glance at Kyle's white car returned a particularly vivid picture of lights reflecting on the car body, making the flashing lights appear in multiple directions. At times, the lights seemed to be flashing in slow motion leaving a trail of colours behind, making the picture in front of Elle inconceivable.

No, it must be a mirage. She concocted a rational explanation to try and calm herself. How a mirage would occur in an urban area would be a question for later thoughts. Right now, Elle needed a convenient excuse to explain the current phenomenon and make it easier for her to stay calm.

The flying debris was everywhere. Her invisible barrier almost became visible when a thick tree branch collided with it before rebounding. She couldn't help but jerk her body away. It was reflex, and an unnecessary one, since the protective cushion reacted immediately.

The howling wind was more pronounced to her ears with the second smaller tornado approaching. The tornado surrounding her appeared to vibrate at a higher frequency, as if it were fending off its counterpart. Up close, something small inside the second tornado caught her eyes. Despite the moving, flashing lights, a palm-sized white circular disc hovered at the tornado's centre, as if it were the heart of the swirling whirlwind. What caught Elle's attention was its colour. It was so white that it was almost transparent. Elle was sure she'd never seen anything so vibrantly white before.

It's not real. It's just your imagination, she told herself. Focus! Determination would prevail.

The Accident

The dust and debris were making way for the smaller tornado as it continued to circle towards her; she could feel the vibration drawing nearer. At the same time, the bigger tornado surrounding her felt like a lawnmower engine working fiercely in tall grass. She wasn't sure if she was trembling due to fear or from the vibration of the tornado. Being trapped at the centre of two colliding tornados was not something Elle had ever wanted to experience. Fear began to overtake her and she closed her eyes. She didn't want to see what would happen next.

It was a horrific thought.

She closed her eyes and tried to stay calm. The thought of her mother's words floated to her mind. The onyx! It was an emotional struggle for her to put her faith in her mother's words.

But in spite of her scientific belief, she had no better alternative and nowhere to turn. Slowly, she began to focus her thoughts on the onyx clutched tightly in her hands.

If nothing else, the thoughts of her mother would be comforting.

She drew in a big breath of air.

Help me, please! she prayed. Please go away and leave me alone! This is not real. I must go back to reality.

The smaller tornado with the white disc inside approached at full force. It collided with the larger tornado, which absorbed the hit immediately. The smaller tornado backed off before approaching again. With each impact, the wind speed and scale of the larger tornado seemed to weaken. The smaller tornado remained fierce, attacking the larger tornado until it shrank to insignificance and eventually disappeared.

Throughout the whole event, Elle remained trapped inside the larger tornado. She was protected by the invisible cushion and did not feel any impact during the attack. Yet, the movements felt undeniably real to her. Despite her fear, Elle kept her eyes closed.

By the time she opened them, the tornados had already dwindled to gentle breezes. Calm had been fully restored. Everything around her was still. She was standing on the road, a few feet from Kyle's car.

She started to relax before remembering what was still wrapped tightly in her right hand. Gradually she opened her fist and saw her onyx still glowing in her palm. Its colour shifted from crimson red to burgundy, then darkened to its original black and the glow faded.

From nearby, she could hear Kyle's voice. "Elle! Elle! Come help me! Please!"

Puissant Angel

She followed his voice and found Kyle crouched beside a female body on the ground in front of his car. Her head rested on Kyle's lap. Elle rushed over to them and knelt down beside them.

"The wind was so strong. I was worried that you'd blown away," Kyle said, without mentioning either tornado.

Still shaky from the tornado incident, Elle was trying to calm down. Light-headed and disoriented, she felt her tongue was twisted and she didn't know what to say. She took a long and deep breath. One, two, three, she counted slowly, going right up to ten. Soon, she could talk again.

Elle wanted to ask him about the tornadoes but now was not the time. I'll ask later, she decided.

"Uhh... Should I go call an ambulance?" Finally, her senses came back to her.

"Yes! Yes! Please!"

Elle was only a few steps away when she heard a weak female voice call, "Wait!"

She turned around and saw an arm rising from the pavement, reaching out to her. Her natural response propelled her to go back. The arm's owner started to wiggle into a more comfortable position.

"Wait," the petite, pale blonde said. She paused to take another breath. "It's my fault. I'm so sorry! I think I had a seizure just before crossing the road." She swallowed and then continued. "I saw your car coming and stopped but somehow I felt like I got pushed out into the road anyway." She turned to Kyle and smiled reluctantly. "Thank you for braking in time."

She struggled to sit up by herself. Before long, she managed to stand with support from Kyle and Elle.

"We should get you to the hospital to make sure you're ok," said Kyle worriedly. He bent down to look at her eyes and make sure she was coherent.

"No, it's ok. I've had seizures before. I have medication to treat them, but it's probably time for an adjustment."

"I think it'll be safer to get checked out at the hospital. I can take you there," Kyle offered.

"Yes, please let us take you," Elle added.

After a brief consideration, the other girl smiled and nodded in agreement.

Without any further delay, Kyle cleared some space in the backseat. Elle insisted on sitting in the back. Upon entering the vehicle, she

The Accident

looked up briefly and saw a clear sky. She shrugged her shoulders. She couldn't understand why it was so calm again. There was no sign of the freak tornado that had held her captive, or its opponent.

Gradually, Kyle helped the other passenger enter the vehicle before going around to the driver's side. They all buckled up and were ready to go. On their way to the hospital, they had a chance to exchange names and chat casually. Elle and Kyle learned that the girl's name was Chelsea Lang. She was in her first year at the University of Ottawa, and it was her first time away from home.

After his close call, Kyle decided to concentrate on driving. He would try to keep quiet and let the two young women hold the conversation.

"It's a pretty scary experience for someone with epilepsy... Being away from home," Chelsea said.

"You have epilepsy?" asked Elle.

"Yes, and my Mom is always worried that something like this will happen to me when I am away. But I think if something is going to happen, it will happen regardless of where I am."

"I agree. Things like that can happen anytime, anywhere," Elle echoed her point.

"If I followed my Mom's idea, I would never go anywhere. I believe everything happens for a reason. I probably sound philosophical but I believe we attract events that happen to us."

"Neat! Do you think we're more likely to attract certain events when we're at certain places?" asked Elle. She was referring discreetly to the events that had happened to her earlier.

"Maybe. Say, if you're downtown hanging around the pubs for long enough and late enough on St. Patrick's Day, you'll have a higher than average chance of getting hit on by a drunk." They all laughed.

"You sound like you're studying statistics," said Elle.

"Actually, I'm going to major in biochemistry," Chelsea replied. Then she added thoughtfully, "I hope that I can develop a cure for epilepsy one day."

"What a goal!" exclaimed Kyle. He had been silent so far so that he could concentrate on driving but now he couldn't resist joining in the conversation anymore.

"Well, that's my current thinking anyway," said Chelsea.

Chelsea blushed and tried to change the subject. She wanted to find out more about her current company. "What are you studying, Kyle?"

"I'm in phys ed, second year."

Puissant Angel

“He’s on the hockey team,” added Elle.

Chelsea stared at him, admiring his strong jaw and attractive features that reminding her of some famous sports stars. He felt her gaze and tried to dodge the bullet by shifting the focus off himself.

“What about you, Elle?”

“Me? I’m in my first year as well. I’m registered in general science but want to get into engineering,” said Elle calmly.

“What a brain!” Kyle was noticeably impressed. Here he was, in a car with two academics, while he was enrolled in a more physical than intellectual program. He couldn’t help wondering if brainy women would soon run society.

He took his eyes off the road briefly to look at each of them. “I’m with two women who both have great ambitions and who knows – we may just have two of the greatest inventors and researchers in this car right now!”

They all cheered in joy.

While they were talking, nobody mentioned anything about either of the tornadoes. Sightings of tornadoes here in Ottawa were a fairly significant and unusual event. Elle wondered why they didn’t mention it at all.

Did they not see it? she wondered. She didn’t want to spoil the light atmosphere or stress Chelsea, so she decided to avoid the topic for now.

* * * * *

The wait time at the hospital was relatively short. Before long, the doctor on duty examined Chelsea. Her absence gave Kyle the chance to talk with Elle alone.

“Where are you from?”

“Perth. It’s a small place just west of Ottawa.”

“I know where it is. It’s a nice little town with nice people,” he said admiringly. His tone of voice was gentle and sincere. A sense of fondness came across to her.

“Thank you!” She smiled warmly. Perth brought back memories. Home sweet home. Her grandma still lived there. She wondered how she was doing. Bright and early tomorrow morning, she would phone her.

“I guess since you stay at the residence, you are here alone then.”

The Accident

“Yeah,” she said. She looked down, feeling a bit homesick, missing her grandma.

“What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?” he asked with a keen interest in his voice.

“Well, school keeps me so busy that I don’t have much spare time. When I was living at home, I enjoyed playing the piano.”

“Do you like sports?”

“Hmm, I guess I enjoy watching rather than playing. I’m not that athletic.” She was beginning to feel uncomfortable with his questions, so she turned the tables on him. “What about you, Kyle?”

“I was born in Jacksonville, Florida, and my parents split up when I was young. I came to live with my mom in Gatineau. She’s French Canadian.” He answered in an open tone.

“Jacksonville? That’s a place I would choose to learn ice skating and play hockey!” Elle teased him.

He laughed. Laughter was contagious and she couldn’t help joining him in it. She felt invigorated and liberated by her own laughter and sensed his closeness to her as if it opened up a private pathway between them.

Their conversation was light and enjoyable, talking about ordinary things at school, where they had fun, and their social activities, when time allowed. They traded their likes and dislikes and even shared some of their childhood secrets. There was so much life and colour in his personality. He was delightful to be with. His smiles were suggestive and his laughs were addictive; she found herself being drawn to him slowly with every word they exchanged.

Chelsea came out of the examination room too soon for Kyle and Elle. The doctor turned up nothing unusual apart from a bruise on her hip and another on her arm due to the fall. The doctor couldn’t be sure if Chelsea’s medication needed adjustment, so he was sending her back to her specialist for further examination and diagnosis.

They all felt relieved by the doctor’s diagnosis. At least there was nothing apparently wrong with Chelsea following the near accident earlier tonight. Kyle would take the young ladies back to ensure their safety and Elle offered to tuck Chelsea in bed. Chelsea would arrange her follow-up appointment with her own doctor.

It was late by the time Kyle pulled up outside Chelsea and Elle’s residence. The girls happened to be staying in the same building but had never met each other before tonight. They exchanged room

Puissant Angel

numbers and Elle promised to visit in the morning. They were all tired, so they didn't linger in the car to chat.

Chelsea thanked Kyle before getting out of the car. Elle watched her slow steps moving towards the building. She felt somewhat reluctant to follow. It was an enjoyable evening for her but all good things must end.

Elle was about to leave when Kyle whispered, "We have a practice tomorrow afternoon at two. Would you like to come and watch?"

The invitation brought an instant smile to her face. It was all the answer he needed. "Yes," she replied happily.

"It's in indoor arena one."

"I'll be there."

"Great! Goodnight, Elle!"

"Goodnight, Kyle!"

One more cheerful lasting glance at him, then she would leave. Though tired, her heart was filled with happiness as she exited his car.

She quickened up her pace to catch up with Chelsea, who just went through the front door of the building. She caught up with her just before the elevator arrived. Leaning against the walls inside the elevator, they both looked exhausted. Elle offered to tuck Chelsea in bed if that would make her mother feel better. Chelsea laughed as she turned down the kind offer. Then they wished each other a good night's sleep before parting their ways. Elle continued in the elevator until it reached her floor, the 15th.

Back in her room, Elle couldn't sleep even though it was late. As much as she would appreciate some rest after all the excitement that night – the near accident on campus, the tornadoes, the hallucination – she was beyond exhaustion.

Much too soon, dawn was upon her. She finally decided her attempt to sleep would be futile. She picked up the phone to call the one person she could trust with anything, no matter how embarrassing or bizarre.

"Good morning, Gram!" She greeted eagerly, knowing her grandmother was an early riser.

"Oh, good morning, my dear little one! You're up early!" Her grandmother was surprised to hear her voice although her excitement came through the telephone wires clearly.

"Yes, Gram. I couldn't sleep."

"What's wrong?"

The Accident

She knew Grandma Sophie had strong intuition and would often know something wasn't right immediately. Her grandma's question didn't startle her; however, she wasn't sure where to begin.

"Er, Gram, we...I..." Elle hesitated.

"Yes?" said Grandma patiently.

"We had an accident last night and I thought we hit someone but she turned out to be fine."

"Are you ok? Was anyone else hurt?" asked Grandma. Although her voice was gentle, Elle could sense the anxiety in her words.

"Yes, I am fine and no one else was hurt. Don't worry," Elle answered quickly.

"Thank Heaven!"

"It was kind of strange. She had a seizure and fell down in front of the car. We braked in time so we didn't even touch her."

Grandma exhaled audibly. Her rapid heartbeat could almost be heard over the phone.

Elle was still occupied with the incident with the two tornadoes. She accepted it as a coincidence that she came out unscathed. She happened to be at a spot where the tornadoes missed. It was another coincidence that she'd grabbed the onyx stone instead of her keys just before Kyle hit the brakes. She could accept that the stone was next to her keys so she reached it by accident while being distracted from talking to Kyle.

But then how would she explain the onyx glowing from one colour to another and then not glowing anymore? She had never seen that stone glow until tonight! She was curious if the stone had a special physical property that she was unaware of.

"Gram, I'm calling about the stone." She wanted to explain further but her grandmother beat her to the next question.

"Do you still have it with you?" she asked urgently.

"Yes, of course!"

"Whatever you do, make sure the stone is always with you! It's..." her grandmother's tone changed from fast and urgent to slow and deliberate. "It was your mom's favourite stone. That's all she had left for you after the house fire. Your mom used to play with it all the time. She carried it with her wherever she went. It has tremendous sentimental value. You must keep it with you at all times."

If her grandmother hadn't changed her tone and pace, Elle might not have picked up on the cue. She sensed that her grandmother was

Puissant Angel

not telling the whole story; however, she understood that it was essential for her to keep the stone with her at all times.

“Gram, is the stone supposed to glow?”

The question caught Grandma Sophie by surprise and she was speechless all of a sudden. After a brief moment of silence, she said, “Are you sure it glowed? What did you see?”

“Yes! It went from crimson red to burgundy and then nothing at all. It all happened in a matter of seconds.” Elle was firm in her response, positive of what she’d seen.

“Is it possible that you were too tired or a reflection from somewhere shone on it?” Something about Grandma Sophie’s tone warned Elle that the older woman knew more than she was letting on.

Elle continued to poke and pry about the stone but her grandmother was not giving up any more information. After twenty minutes, Elle decided she wouldn’t be able to get more out of her now. She would have to try again later.