Chapter One

ZOE GETS HER WINGS

Zachary Augenblick, Manager of the Royal Zoo of Tarinia, was concerned. So was Betty the rhinoceros.

Betty's daughter Zoe was listless and moping, and no one knew what to do about it. Dr. Karsten, the Zoo's veterinarian, could find nothing wrong. He suggested giving Zoe extra vitamins, but that didn't help. He suggested exercise, so every day Zoe, prodded by her mother, trotted around the Rhinoceros Enclosure, but that didn't help either. She wouldn't run or jump or play games; instead she just sat on the ground looking up at the sky. Whenever a flock of birds flew overhead she sighed and shed a couple of tears.

One day Zachary received a postcard from an acquaintance of his, Marcus Aurelius Wentworth, the Karakaxologist (he'd used to call himself a Magpie-ologist, because he was forever picking up interesting trinkets of knowledge, but changed after learning that "karakaxa" was the Greek word for "magpie"). The two had met shortly before Zoe was born, when Mr. Wentworth had tinkered together a mind-reading machine whose side-effects had accidentally caused a great deal of trouble at the Zoo. An ostrich had thought he was a penguin; a monkey, that he was a sloth; and Betty had thought she was first, a seal, and later, a bird.* *(* See notes at the end of the book.)*

When Zoe was only a few months old, Mr. Wentworth had gone to work at the Turnip Institute in the neighboring Kingdom of Brassica, to help them find a solution to the blight that was devastating the turnip crop. Now, he said in his postcard, he was coming back for a visit.



Zachary was waiting at the railway station when Mr. Wentworth's train pulled in and greeted him as soon as he got out.

"Zachary!" said Mr. Wentworth. "It's good to see you again." He looked Zachary up and down. "You seem quite grown-up now."

"Responsibility," replied Zachary. "When Miss Grey unexpectedly retired, I had to run the Zoo until King Conrad and Queen Alexandra could find a replacement for her. I must have done a pretty good job, because in the end they decided to make *me* the official Manager — the youngest manager since King Charles the Vulgar started the Zoo three hundred years ago."

"My felicitations. How are things at the Zoo?"

"Running smoothly. All the animals have recovered from your experiments."

Mr. Wentworth gave a rueful chuckle. "Ah, yes, that mind-reading machine. It's still not perfected... I remember the day we found out what it was doing to your animals. That was when Betty's daughter was born — I forget her name."

"Zoe. To be frank, I was hoping — but first, how long will your visit be? I don't want to take up your time if you can't spare it."

"Time is the one thing I *can* spare. I'm not going back to the Institute."

"Why not?"

"It didn't work out. I'm afraid I found turnips — even blighted turnips — to be quite uninteresting. One day the Director came into my workroom and said, 'Not enough turnip here, Wentworth, and far too much tinkering.' So I said turnips were boring and he said — Well, to make a long story short, we agreed to disagree."

"So you'll be here for a while?"

"As long as I want — and as long as you need me."

"Then would you please come to the Zoo and take a look at Zoe? She's not well and no one knows why — not even Dr. Karsten."

"I'd be happy to."



And so the next day Mr. Wentworth came to the Zoo. He talked to Zoe but got nowhere until he realized Zoe didn't want to say anything in front of Zachary or Betty. He persuaded them to let him talk to Zoe alone.

"Maybe now you can tell me about it, Zoe?" he asked gently.

"Promise you'll keep it to yourself?" asked Zoe in reply.

"I'll say nothing to anyone without your permission — on my honor as a karakaxologist."

Zoe had no idea what he meant by that, but it sounded impressive. "I didn't want to talk about it with anyone because they'd think I'm crazy," she said sadly. "Maybe I am."

"And maybe you're not," replied Mr. Wentworth. "Please go on."

"Well... I want to *fly."*

"To fly?" Mr. Wentworth had not expected this.

"Yes. Every time I look up and see birds in the sky I want to go up and join them. Sometimes so much that it hurts."

"Hmm. When did this start?"

"I don't know. I can't remember ever *not* wanting to fly."

"Well, that's not necessarily —" Mr. Wentworth suddenly stopped. After a moment he swallowed hard and murmured, "Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear..."

Zoe sighed. "So I guess I *am* crazy," she said.

"What? No. No! You're not crazy... I must talk to Zachary and your mother."

"But you promised not to."

"I won't say a word about you wanting to fly. I want to ask them about the time before you were born."

Mr. Wentworth sought out Zachary and Betty. "I remember you telling me, Zachary, that when my mind-reading machine was making the animals behave oddly, Betty here," he bowed to Betty, "was acting like a seal. Did she ever think she was anything else?"

"Why, yes," said Betty. "I was trying to fly like a bird. Zachary had to risk his life to stop me."

"I was afraid of that," said Mr. Wentworth.

"Does that have anything to do with Zoe's problem?" asked Betty.

"I can't say," replied Mr. Wentworth. "At least, not yet."

He went back to Zoe. "You're not crazy, Zoe," he said. "I can assure you of that. Now — I have to explain what's going on to you, and to your mother if you'll let me."

"I'm not crazy?" asked Zoe.

"Not a bit. You're as sane as I am — probably saner."

"All right."

"It's really my fault," began Mr. Wentworth. Sitting before him were Zoe, Betty, and Zachary. "My fault, and the machine's. It mixed up Betty and made her act like a bird. Apparently it mixed up Zoe also. But Betty was able to get over it because she *knew* she was really a rhinoceros. Zoe, who hadn't yet been born, didn't have that knowledge and so she was much more strongly affected by the delusion. It seems to be permanent. I'm terribly, terribly sorry."

"And so you should be!" snapped Betty. "Doing such a thing to my poor baby — yes, I know you didn't mean to, but still! Now, what are you going to DO about it?"

"I don't know," replied Mr. Wentworth, tears in his eyes. "But I'll think, and I'll study." He went on more firmly, "And if anything can be done, no matter what, by George I'll do it!"

And so Mr. Wentworth set out to find a way to cure Zoe. He thought, and he studied. He even took his mind-reading machine to a cottage at the top of a cliff, overlooking the sea, and tried some experiments. If he confused anyone, it was only the fish.

Finally he had to admit a solution was beyond him.

Dispiritedly he began packing up his books and equipment. Then the idea came to him. "A: Zoe wants to fly," he said to himself. "B: Zoe can't fly. I can't do anything about A. Can I do something about B?"

He unpacked his books and equipment and went back to work.



Two months later Mr. Wentworth returned and at once arranged to meet Zoe, Betty, and Zachary at the Zoo.

At the appointed time he arrived, carrying a large bundle of papers in one hand and a box in the other. "I've found a solution!" he announced.

"What is it?" asked Betty.

"I'll show you," replied Mr. Wentworth, undoing the bundle of papers and spreading them out to reveal an assortment of complicated plans and sketches. "These are all preliminary, of course," he said. "Here's the basic arrangement —" holding up one of the sketches, "— we buckle on the harness so, and then —" holding up another, "— attach the wings like this. Here —" displaying a third sketch, "— are designs for the helmet and goggles. I still haven't *quite* worked out how to arrange the controls —"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Zachary. "Wings — helmet — goggles... Are you suggesting —"

"Yes!" said Mr. Wentworth triumphantly. "Zoe is going to *fly."*

"You're kidding."

"Certainly not. Here — I'll *show* you." Mr. Wentworth opened the box and took out a toy stuffed rhinoceros and a pair of wooden wings with propellers. He attached the wings to the toy, wound up the propellers, and held it up. The propellers spun; the toy rhinoceros

lifted from his hand and flew through the air while Mr. Wentworth looked on proudly and the others in bewilderment.

A sharp breeze sprang up and caught the toy. It tilted, went into a spin, and crashed to the ground. "As I told you," said Mr. Wentworth, unfazed, "it's a preliminary design. There's a lot of work still to do."



So Mr. Wentworth went back to his cottage and his tinkering. From time to time he returned to demonstrate his latest model of wings to Zoe, Betty, and Zachary — and also Miss Grey, whom Zachary had told of the strange plan, and who was most curious to see how it would come out. Every time some new flaw made itself known.

One day, tired and glum, he came without a model. He had lost weight and there were bags under his eyes. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I can't go any further."

"You can't get the wings to work?" asked Zoe.

"Oh, I'm sure I can get them to work," replied Mr. Wentworth. "The problem is, I've run out of money."

"If it's only a question of money," said Miss Grey with a smile, "you needn't worry."

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Wentworth, surprised.

"Do you know why I retired from the Zoo?" asked Miss Grey.

"No," said Zachary.

"I learned my Great-aunt Terpsichore, the Countess of Lavendel, had died. She was the last Countess and I was her nearest relative, so she left everything to me. Now I have more money than I know what to do with. I've been looking for worthy causes to support but they're not as easy to find as one might think. Getting wings for Zoe sounds worthy to me."

"Really?" cried Zoe. "Oh, thank you so much!"

"So, Mr. Wentworth," said Miss Grey, "order whatever you need and tell them to send the bill to me."

"I will," replied Mr. Wentworth. "Permit me to thank you also."



Finally, a full-sized set of wings was ready. Zoe wanted to try them out at once, but Mr. Wentworth refused. "It's a bad idea to rush ahead with something this novel and complicated," he said. "First, let's make sure they actually work."

A few days later, he invited Zoe to come to his cottage. He had built a workshop next to it. Inside was a model rhinoceros, the same size and weight as Zoe, with the wings attached.

"With this remote control," he said, "I can fly the model while staying on the ground. Until it's ready, you can practice with this."

"This" was a second set of wings, hanging from the ceiling of the workshop. Attached to it were dozens and dozens of wires, all leading to a large rack bearing an array of lights, bells, and whistles.

"For now, I call it 'How to fly without actually crashing,'" said Mr. Wentworth. "I'll have to think of a catchier name. We strap you into the wings so you're also hanging from the ceiling. Then I call out maneuvers to you and you work the controls to carry them out. The wings will tilt one way or another as if you were in the air. A mistake will trigger one of the indicators on that rack, telling me what you did wrong; then we can work on getting it right. Ready?"

"I guess so."

The next hour featured a cacophony of dings, dongs, and bongs from the bells; squeaks, shrills, and trills from the whistles; while the lights would have put a Christmas tree to shame. Zoe grew more and more nervous and made more and more mistakes.

At length, both Zoe and Mr. Wentworth lost patience. "All right," said the tinkerer. "Let's call it a day. We'll try again tomorrow. For now, you can come out and watch the model fly."



And so it continued; but at last the day came for Zoe's first flight. Mr. Wentworth came to the Zoo, driving a large truck. Zoe and Betty climbed into the back, while Zachary and Miss Grey sat in the front

with Mr. Wentworth. They drove to the cottage and saw Zoe's wings hanging from a wooden frame (for they were too heavy to lift).

"Here's what we're going to do," Mr. Wentworth told her. "I'll use the remote control to lift you off the ground and fly you about for a bit so you can get used to being up in the air. If you feel comfortable with it — and don't worry if you don't, since it will be completely new to you — let me know and I'll let you take over. Keep in mind that, while you've had a lot of practice, it's *not* the same as doing it for real. *Don't* try anything fancy. Just fly around in circles and stay close to the ground, in case anything goes wrong."

Zoe walked under the wings. Mr. Wentworth lowered them and strapped them to her, then went over everything to make sure the controls were in place and the connections secure. "Here we go!" he cried, and started the wings. Feeling the vibration of the engine and hearing the whirring of the propellors, Zoe shivered with anticipation and joy. She was going to fly at last!

As Zachary, Betty, and Miss Grey looked on, Zoe was lifted off the ground and moved slowly forward. With Mr. Wentworth at the remote control, she went up and down, then flew a hundred yards away, made a wide turn, and flew back.

As she passed the others she shouted, "Wheee! This is *great!"*

She went a hundred yards in the opposite direction, banked in a tight turn, came back again and landed.

"Well, Zoe, how was it?" asked Mr. Wentworth.

"Oh, that was so much fun!" said Zoe, her voice shrill with excitement. "Please, *please,* let me fly on my own!"

"All right. And remember what I told you." Mr. Wentworth started the wings again and Zoe lifted off. "Ready?" he called.

"Ready!" answered Zoe.

"Over to you!" Mr. Wentworth turned off the remote control.

As instructed, Zoe rose about ten feet off the ground and made a couple of slow circles. Then she flew back and forth. Whenever she came close to Mr. Wentworth and the others, they could hear her laughing with pure delight.

Then she began circling again, faster and faster, higher and higher.

"Zoe, slow down!" shouted Mr. Wentworth.

"You come down right now, young lady!" added Betty.

Zoe paid no attention.

"DO something!" said Betty to Mr. Wentworth. All his attention was on Zoe and it took a little while for her words to sink in. He fumbled with the remote control. Before he could turn it on, Zoe swooped down over his head, forcing him to duck, then shot high into the sky and out over the sea and off into the distance.

"Get her back!" cried Betty. "Get her back at once!"

"I can't!" said Mr. Wentworth. "She's gone out of range!"



Heedlessly and gloriously, Zoe reveled in flight over the ocean. She flew higher and higher until the world spread out below her like a map. Then she dived down, steeper and steeper, leveled off at the last moment and zoomed along so low her feet splashed against the crests of the waves. She rose again and looked about.

Above her the sun shone in a cloudless sky. Below, the water sparkled in the sunlight. Far away to the west was the land she had left behind. She could just make out Mr. Wentworth's cottage and workshop. To the north were the Dragon's Teeth, steep and rocky islets surrounded by reefs on which the waves pounded; no ship dared come near them. Beyond them in the dim blue distance was the Land of Lonassea. To the east there was nothing but the ocean for a thousand miles. To the south —

What was that? There was something floating on the water that didn't look like a boat or a ship. Zoe decided to fly over for a closer look.



Back at the cottage, Betty was weeping with worry and rage. "This is your fault!" she stormed at Mr. Wentworth. "YOU made my poor Zoe think she was a bird, and YOU made those crackbrained wings for her

and now she's gone away and she'll fall into the sea and drown and I'll never see her again and it's ALL YOUR FAULT!" She lowered her head and pawed the ground. Mr. Wentworth looked around for something he could quickly dodge behind if Betty charged.

Zachary and Miss Grey ran to Betty and tried to calm her down. Mr. Wentworth thought of saying it wasn't *his* fault if Zoe behaved foolishly, but decided not to. He also thought it best not to mention that he hadn't fully fueled the wings and that Zoe would run out of gas before long.



Out on the ocean a man clung to the keel of a capsized yacht. *Two days and two nights with no food or water,* he thought, *or has it been three? I can't remember. Why did I take up boating? Things are so much safer on land. You know where you are with an automobile* — for the man was none other than Bobo Vincent, the famous racing-car driver — *if it turns over you just crawl out and walk away. The boat turns over and all you can do is grab on and hope somebody finds you before the sharks do.* He heard a strange sound in the air and looked up.



As Zoe approached the floating object, she realized it was an overturned boat. Flying nearer, she saw someone hanging on to it. She circled over and saw him move. *He's alive!* she thought. *I must fly back and tell someone so he can be rescued.* She waggled her wings as a sign to him he had been seen before turning and flying away.



Oh, great, thought Bobo Vincent, *now I'm seeing things. A rhinoceros with wings just flew overhead and signaled to me. That's funny — that's really funny.* He laughed and laughed until he fainted from weakness.



"Here's what we'll do," said Miss Grey. "Betty, you stay here. Zachary, you stay to keep Betty company. Down on the coast, not too far away, is the fishing town of Garley. Mr. Wentworth and I will drive there and hire the fastest motorboat they have — I'll buy it if I have to. We'll go out to sea and try to find Zoe."

"Wait here? No! I'm coming with you!" cried Betty.

"You can't come along, Betty," said Miss Grey. "The truck will go faster without you in it, and so will the motorboat."

"All right," grudged Betty, "I'll stay." She glared at Mr. Wentworth. "But if Zoe doesn't come back safe and sound..."



Before long Miss Grey and Mr. Wentworth were speeding out to sea from the town of Garley in Miss Grey's new motorboat (she'd had to buy it). Miss Grey steered while Mr. Wentworth scanned the sky with a spyglass he had brought along.

"There she is!" he cried, and pointed. Miss Grey looked up into the sky and saw a little black dot. She steered toward it.

"When we're close enough I'll use the remote control to bring her down," said Mr. Wentworth. "If she's high up when she runs out of gas..."

Soon Zoe was alongside the motorboat and just above the water. "You must come back with us!" shouted Mr. Wentworth above the sound of her wings.

"No!" Zoe shouted back. "There's a boat wrecked out there — floating upside down with someone hanging on — we have to rescue him — I'll guide you —" But even as she was speaking the wings used up the last drop of gas. She glided on for a few moments before coming down to the water and — to the horror of Mr. Wentworth and Miss Grey — sinking.

"The wings!" exclaimed Mr. Wentworth. "They're too heavy!" He dived into the sea and disappeared.

Fortunately, Zoe was not sinking fast. Mr. Wentworth, swimming downward, reached her. Working frantically he undid the straps and freed Zoe. The wings dropped into the deep darkness below, but Zoe and Mr. Wentworth returned to the surface.

Mr. Wentworth climbed back into the boat. He and Miss Grey then used all their strength to help Zoe clamber aboard.

For a while they were all too exhausted to speak. Miss Grey was the first to recover. "What was all that about a shipwreck?" she asked.

Zoe took a deep breath before gasping out, "Over that way — must rescue — hurry!"

At once Miss Grey turned the boat and sped off in the direction Zoe had indicated. Mr. Wentworth recklessly stood up in the bow and looked about with his spyglass. They went on in this way for fifteen or twenty minutes until Mr. Wentworth called out, "I see it!"

It didn't take long for them to reach the capsized boat and haul aboard the unconscious Bobo Vincent. They motored back toward the land as fast as a boat loaded with three people and a rhinoceros could go. Halfway there, Bobo Vincent stirred, opened his eyes, and looked vacantly around. "Where am I?" he muttered. "What happened?"

"Don't worry," said Mr. Wentworth. "You've been rescued. Soon you'll be safe on land and in a hospital."

Then Bobo Vincent saw Zoe looking down at him. "Oh, no," he groaned. "There's that rhinoceros again. I'm still seeing things. At least this time it isn't flying..."



Zachary and Betty sat by the cottage looking out at the ocean. Neither had spoken for a long time, for there was really nothing left to be said. They were so wrapped up in their worrying that they didn't hear the truck as it drove up.

"Betty!" called Miss Grey, getting out of the truck. "Hey, Betty!"

Betty turned and saw Miss Grey was alone. "Where's Zoe?" she cried. "Why isn't she with you?"

"Zoe is all right," replied Miss Grey. "She and Mr. Wentworth are at the hospital in Garley. I'm here to fetch you and bring you to her."

"In the hospital? What happened to her? How badly is she hurt?"

"She's not hurt at all. She came back a little cold and wet, but they're taking good care of her. Come on!"

Betty burst into tears and climbed into the back of the truck.

While Zachary drove, Miss Grey rode in the back with Betty and told her what Zoe had done. At the hospital, Miss Grey excused herself and went to see how Bobo Vincent was doing. Betty asked about Zoe and Mr. Wentworth; she was taken to a lounge where the two were sitting with warm blankets wrapped about them. Zoe was drinking tea; Mr. Wentworth had a glass of hot whiskey toddy.

Betty ran to Zoe. First she gave her daughter a hard thump with the side of her horn, then sat down and nuzzled her, saying, "Oh, my bad, *brave* little girl!"

Mr. Wentworth was scribbling in a damp notebook and talking, more to himself than anyone else. "First thing I need to do is devise a quick-release mechanism so Zoe can shed the wings herself if she has to. It will need a fail-safe, so it can't be triggered as long as she's in the air..." He took a sip of his toddy. "Maybe it would be a good idea to put inflatable floats on the wings for water landings..."

"You're not going to make another set of wings for Zoe, are you?" exclaimed Betty.

Mr. Wentworth looked up. "Of course I am," he replied.

"Of *course* he is," echoed Zoe.