

BOOK SIX CHAPTER 3 ARCANE

Each time Shilli, Emilie, Julian, Asha and Lapis watched the video conference they heard and saw new details. Lapis - “A lot of people’s preconceptions are about to be exploded. What should we do with this?” Emilie and Julian - “Nothing now.” Julian - “We made it though our *brains aren’t fully developed, risk taking self involvement* teen age years, welcome to the *no one can stop us, we’re invincible* era. Wish I knew more about strategy and tactics. Are any of you good at that?”

As Shilli asked “Where do we go from here?” the light coming through the window cast five curved shapes on the deep maroon and green rug beside the conference table, *R, N, A, G, T*. Lapis - “Ask and you shall receive. First the SD card, now another puzzle. What does it mean?”

Shilli - Could it be an acronym? Is Trang a word, how about Nargt?” Julian was smiling. “How about grant, not Ulysses S. We could use some of the Nobel Prize money for a grant, a research project to study animal communication, with one rule. Only those under fifteen can apply.” Lapis - “Great idea! We already have professors and scientists anxious to help, now we’ll have young minds seeing things totally differently.” Asha - “Five of the professors helping us have triple PhDs.” Julian - “We could partner the finalists with a scientist or professor. Teachers learn from their students. Kids do things in uncomplicated ways, we’ve all been there, not thinking about consequences. Who knows, maybe younger generations learn more quickly from their mistakes than adults.” Shilli - “We’re the gamer generation. What about asking the grant winner to create a game to spread the message?”

Emilie - “Remember what the voice in the forest said last year. “We are interested in the young and old of your species.” What about two grants, one for under fifteen, the other for over seventy five? I remember asking my grandmother what it was like to be old. “So many things you thought were important aren’t important any more.”

Asha - “We won’t have time to go through all the applications.” Julian - “Let’s ask my friend, Wayne, for help. He started a home for the elderly, people and animals. They could read everything, narrow the list down, we can review the finalists and decide.”

Shilli - "We each have our own lives. The grants are a good idea, but maybe we need even more help. Do we have enough money to hire someone full time? They could work with the winners, coordinate everything." Lapis - "That way, when we meet next year, it'll be easier to judge our progress." Emilie - "Why do I think it won't be long before we hire a marketing or public relations firm for the corridor? We don't have a product to sell, but advertising could help raise awareness, answer questions." Asha- "So could a website." Shilli - "Remember, websites don't work during outages."

Lapis - "How do you say in English, the other side of the coin? Advertising will increase awareness but also expose us to people who want to stop what we're doing." Emilie - "I don't know a lot about different religions. Do certain faiths have beliefs, either good or bad, about interspecies communication?" Julian - "We knew from the beginning there was going to be lots of stuff ahead, risking disapproval even from people close to us, more than we ever imagined." Shilli - "Goes with the territory of change. I've been doing research on wildlife crime, poaching and trafficking, animals killed for their body parts. It's hard to understand how people can disagree about right and wrong. Everyone up for a focused mediation after lunch?" Lapis - "Lots of people know what they're doing is wrong. It doesn't stop them. Remember our role models. Regardless of what happens to them, animals never complain."

Shilli, Emilie, Julian, Asha and Lapis had been forced to grow up fast, five distinct and evolving personalities at play. Shilli's confidence, sensitivity and sense of humor, Emilie's impatience and interrupting, always the first to leap into the fray, Julian's appetite for learning, thoughtfulness and happy go lucky attitude, loving words, the daydreamer of the group, Asha the nurturer with extraordinary skills of observation and memory, Lapis' Synesthesia, hearing colors, his intelligence and temper, untucked shirt, constant windblown look.

Before going to bed, Emilie was reading about hawks having vision superior to human eyesight, when she heard a knock at the door. Asha - "You remember my telling you what happened at the Tiger's Nest. I left something out. The Raven told me Sana and Samuel will marry."

The commitment to a positive outcome of the interspecies internet was obvious, as was the importance of being flexible during the process. No one could remember having exercised their brains and hearts as they had since first meeting Marcus the Labrador in Australia. He would always be watching over them.

With no pretension, a safe place to say what they felt or believed, nightly dinner conversations were lively, sometimes heated, always informative. The subjects were as varied as the menus: combining rational science and emotional art, who owns the oceans, dogs seeing only part of the color spectrum, (the color blue standing out), the pros and cons of paying attention to one's instincts.

Julian was known both for his provocative T shirts and asking questions. "If you had to choose one thing you've read that moved you the most, what would it be?" Emilie didn't need a second to think. "The Death of Argos in Homer's *Odyssey*. Because it was translated there's always language subtleties lost, but I'll never forget how I felt reading it the first time. *And just then death came and darkened the eyes of Argos, who had seen Odysseus again after twenty years.*"

Asha - "My grandfather read it to me when I was little. I don't know who said it. "Pain by itself is merely pain. The experience of pain, coupled with understanding that the pain serves a worthy purpose, is suffering. Suffering is meaningful in the evolution of a soul." Rukmini - "I was ten. The butterfly counts not months but moments, and has time enough. Rabindranath Tagore was the first non European to win the Nobel prize for Literature." Lapis - "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." Leo Tolstoy. Turning to Julian, "How about the question master?" Julian - "The Trumpet of the Swan by E.B. White. If you read it, you'll understand."

Rukmini - "Tolstoy's one of my favorites. The two most powerful warriors are patience and time." Lapis, turning to smile at Emilie, "Having a very impatient wife, I purposefully didn't mention that quote." Arriving with baby Samuel, overhearing the question, Adrasteia took her turn. "The first thing I read in English was a book a friend from Denmark sent me called *Old Yeller*. It changed how I looked at the world."

Emilie - "Scientists all say their sacrificing animals' lives is done for a good reason, to find cures for human diseases. I wonder what Marcus would say? What if we found out our diseases were, somehow, our own making. Would we then rethink killing other living beings to find answers? Do some religions believe we return in other lives as animals?"

The following day, Shilli, Emilie, Lapis, baby Samuel, Adrasteia, Julian, Asha, Rukmini and daughter Sana walked leisurely through Paro to find the perfect place for an all day picnic. From the magnificently carved woodwork to the local weaving, nature's inspiration for the detailed designs and patterns of the buildings and fabrics was easy to understand, As they left the city behind, it was impossible to take for granted the open spaces, sweeping views, breathtaking scenery, the fragrances of countless blooming trees, the kaleidoscopic colors of terraced fields. After a half hour, the clearing ahead was ideal, baskets of food laid on three blankets with intricate designs of animals and birds, almost too beautiful to sit on.

Suddenly, without warning, five men with guns jumped from the bushes, talking in hushed voices. Adrasteia, immediately stood up, walking to confront the group, their drawn weapons obviously having little effect. Looking directly, eye to eye, at each one of the five, she calmly spoke one sentence. The men turned and left.

Lapis - "What was that, what language?" Adrasteia - "Dzongkha. They probably learned it years ago." Julian - "What did they want, were they looking for us specifically?" "Years ago gangs from India came here illegally to start terrorist training camps. They're probably left over." Lapis - "What were they saying?" "They were talking about bird sounds. Have any of you used social media since you arrived in Bhutan?" "Shilli - "We sent tweets asking people if they've ever communicated with any part of the natural world. How could they know that?" Julian - "I set up a database to keep all the replies." Adrasteia - "Maybe it's time for restraint with social media." Rukmini - "Could they use this data against us? Does this mean they have our passwords and cell phone numbers?" Emilie- "Adrasteia, what did you say to them?" "They won't bother anyone again."

Rather than continue the picnic, everyone felt more comfortable returning to Paro. In this beautiful Kingdom of Bhutan, even the show of violence seemed foreign and totally out of context. Explaining what had happened to Raoul, Jane and Paul, everyone agreed that going back to work would put their minds in a more positive place.

As Asha arrived from the kitchen with different flavored teas, it was obvious everyone had been badly shaken. Shilli, attempting to ease the anxiety, “You know what they say, for every protagonist, the opposing force is just around the corner. “We’re young and inexperienced, contrarians, trying to do something no one’s ever done before.” Asha - “I thought what happened during the trail would make me stronger. Now, with so many people wanting to confuse things, I’m not sure. Sana is my priority.”

Lapis also tried to alleviate the stress - “We’re ready for whatever’s ahead! Behind every bully is a coward. A boy in my school, Torre, was the meanest person I ever met. If I didn’t do what he wanted, he’d threaten me with one thing or another. My mistake was waiting so long to speak up. When I told the teacher, she asked Torre to come to her office. I looked him in the eyes and said “Please leave me alone. I wish you good luck.” You know what he said? “It’s you who needs the luck.” He never came back to school.” Shilli - “You all know Neil, he’s like a brother to Matheus and I. He had the same experience with a boy named Gloopy. Lapis, laughing, “You know what gloopy means in Russian?” Shilli - “Yes, Neil told me. Compassion isn’t easy. We’re all going to be fine!”

Asha, tipping her head to the left of the conference table, “Have any of you noticed anything?” Everyone turned to look at the wall they’d been sitting next to for three weeks, realizing they’d never noticed a sectioned wooden plank had been attached to the lower third of the wall. Small beams of light were dimly shining through almost invisible ridges between the panels. Emilie - “Something’s behind there. We should tell someone.”

It wasn’t long before two men arrived, politely asking Shilli, Emilie, Julian, Asha and Lapis to leave the room, the interruption an ideal time for the focused meditation. Ever since the trail, each work session began with a short meditation, not connected to any particular faith, simply to be still. Yesterday’s work session had focused on the power of thought. If someone has an idea and does nothing about it, is the energy of that thought then available for anyone to access? The heated discussion about the hundredth monkey effect went on through dinner.

Once everyone was settled in the beautiful outside garden, Shilli began by describing a certain area in Africa where wildlife crime was rampant, showing a detailed map of the location, drawing a border around a certain stretch of land. Today's meditation would be the first, asking for protection for animals within these specific boundaries, everyone promising to continue for the next thirty days.

No one could have predicted the outcome. A month later, when Shilli contacted the authorities asking if there been anything unusual, (not mentioning the meditation for fear of being ridiculed and not taken seriously), he was told there hadn't been one instance of poaching in that area during the past thirty days.

Trine was explaining the horoscope he'd prepared for Julian, who had questions about a new moon solar eclipse versus a full moon lunar eclipse. What was Mercury retrograde? Shillie, Asha, Emilie and Lapis were at the other side of the room describing their favorite meal in detail, talking about strengths and weaknesses, their Achilles' heels.

In less than an hour the men who'd arrived to look at the wall left, holding something wrapped in a white cloth. Although to the naked eye nothing had changed, one of the wall panels was now removable. The owner of the guesthouse lifted off the new section, asking everyone to write their name and a message on the back before replacing it. Shilli and Lapis were the first. Emilie, Julian and Asha needed time to think.

Before dinner, Emile and Asha were sitting quietly playing with babies Samuel and Sana, when Lapis and Shilli started arguing. When Shilli had mentioned Marcus the Labrador, Lapis began talking about hearing one of his neighbors screaming at their dog. Lapis - "I don't think you should yell at a dog." Shilli- "Like everything else, there are different opinions. Some trainers think yelling can correct bad behavior, other's don't." Lapis - "I don't care. I don't think you should scream at a dog. Humans don't like being yelled at. Why would dogs be any different?" As the conversation got loud and more heated, Julian and Asha walked over to quiet things down. Julian - "How about changing the subject?"

Both in medical school, Shilli and Lapis spent hours talking about their work, continually amazed as newly discovered data appeared every month in scientific journals. Julian and Asha sat down to listen. Lapis - "What if we didn't speak the same language?" Having taught Julian sign language, Shilli started to sign. Neither of them knew Asha had learned on her own until she began to sign as well, answering Lapis' question with the universal hand motions for *dream*.

Lapis - "You know I can't understand what you're saying to each other. Communication, speech, language, frequencies, thought waves, linking specific meanings to sounds from different species can be overwhelming. For me sound is color." Asha - "The animals bypassed language, sending us dream images before they began communicating telepathically." Shilli - "The same image can mean different things to different cultures. Were we each sent a different image?" Julian - "I saw a white crow and heard "Wait for a pat on the cheek."

Shilli and Lapis now regularly finished each others sentences. Lapis - " My commitment in court was to learn more about communication using tone and color. I've changed my mind. There's a doctor who believes, because of the similarities, violence should be treated like an epidemic. Having synesthesia has been the defining thing in my life. I want to work on using its effects on the brain to stop violence. How? No idea!" Lapis' frustration suddenly took over as he raised his voice. "I'm tired of people telling me how much I've changed. After all that's happened, what do they expect? None of us can go back to the people we once were. Even if they don't know about the interspecies internet, everyone knows about the trial."

Hearing Lapis yelling, Emilie arrived. Rarely, if ever, raising her voice, she surprised even herself. "I have no patience with that!" Lapis started to laugh. "You have no patience with anything." Remembering their promise to each other to work on their faults, temper and impatience, the spell was broken.

Ashs - "I had a dream about Marcus last night. I've never seen anything that defined pure joy more than watching him running through a meadow." Julian - "I've read we each dream several times each night but don't remember most of them. Asha - "Marcus told us we should try to understand what we do remember." Shilli - "Handy how communicating with telepathy and dreams doesn't need language." Asha, turning to Julian smiling, the emphasis on one word, "What a *coincidence* the professors helping us have been studying this their entire careers."

Shilli told his friends how much he enjoyed talking to himself on his daily walks. “It’s like discussing what I’m thinking about with a friend, questioning and clarifying my reasoning behind whatever decision I’m facing. Sometimes my other self changes my mind.” Lapis smiled at Shilli - “Just like having a twin?” Emilie, Julian, Asha and Lapis agreed to give it a try when they arrived home.

Shilli - “Do you think our suddenly beginning to remember our dreams has something to do with what we’re doing?” Lapis - “We keep paper and pencil next to the bed to write them down.” Raoul Lapin’s wife, an artist, sitting in the far corner of the room, walked over, putting her latest effort on the conference table. Over the past weeks, Claire Lapin had quietly sat in the background, sketching. When Shilli, Emilie, Julian, Asha and Lapis had received their portraits as a gift, each saw something about themselves they hadn’t noticed before. The drawing Claire now placed on the table, blending five faces into one, took their breath away. It wasn’t a sixth person, it was each of them and all of them. The unspoken was shared. Interdependence. The spirit of Marcus.

Claire left the room with a question. “Share with each other something about yourself no one knows.” After sitting quietly for a minute, Shilli was the first. “I don’t know how to stop thinking about painful things from the past, how to put it behind me.” Emilie - “I always carry a mourning dove feather in my pocket, reminds me that everything will be all right.” Julian - “It’s hard for me to pay attention to my instincts.” Asha - “The most important thing for me is to be a good mother.” Lapis - “Dreams of a man and woman ever since I was little. I can see their faces, have no idea who they are.”

The four weeks had flown by, more questions than answers, enthusiasm never higher. They were young students, working with renowned research scientists and animal behaviorists. Depending on a concept and intuition more than their knowledge, they knew they’d made progress. Others’ opinions about what they were doing wasn’t important, they wouldn’t be deterred, looking forward to their meeting in Bhutan next year.

The attorneys would oversee the new website, using funds received to best benefit the interspecies internet work in development. Tomorrow, their last day in Bhutan, would be spent with a visit to Paro’s Museum and the Kyichi Khakhang’s Monastery.

Returning to sit in the garden after a relaxing walk after dinner, there was a large woven wicker basket on the table in the garden, two hand knit toys for Sana and Samuel (a Labrador and orange tabby cat) sitting jauntily on top. Shillie had carved book marks from fallen tree bark found on his daily walks, Emilie's artistic hand drawn playing cards, trees for Shilli, flowers for Asha, books for Julian, musicians for her husband, Lapis, surprised everyone.

Julian was wearing a T shirt with the word "Than" on the back. As he gave shirts to Shilli (Finifugal), Emilie (Concision), Lapis (De minimis) and Asha (Symbiosis) he took each of their hands, guiding Emilie and Shilli to stand next to Asha, taking his place next to Lapis. Asha - "Are we going to dance?" Julian - "It's our message!" The words on the shirts were clear. **Nature is stronger than technology.** Turning to Julian, Shilli was laughing. "Are you changing your nickname to "Than?"

Asha's had woven different colored bracelets for everyone, the word *jugaad* a reminder. When Julian had said "on a shoestring" the day before, he'd explained what it meant. Jugaad is a slang word, an innovative and alternative way to solving a problem, usually because of a lack of resources, on the cheap, frugal innovation. Lapis passed out the heart stones he'd collected from the nearby river banks. At the bottom of the basket were five small envelopes. Emilie - "Who are these from?" No one answered. Inside were beans with a brilliant cobalt blue pearlized surface. Lapis - "Are these to eat?" When a meerkat appeared from the bushes, starting to tunnel at the corner of the garden, Julian knew - "Message received. We're to plant them when we get home. "

As everyone got up to walk inside, a Raven swooped down blocking the door. Standing calm, forceful, with an natural authority that communicated trust, looking directly at Shilli, then Emilie, Julian, Asha and Lapis, he nodded. "Please follow me." The moment charged with presage surprised no one. After last year's meeting in the forest, a safe place of innocence, wisdom and even mischief, in the excitement of expectation five imaginations ran wild.