

CHAPTER ELEVEN VELVET

Friday, November 17, 1989, the day for Freedom and Celebration of the Velvet Revolution.

The anniversary celebration had been in the planning stages for weeks. University students had decided it was important not only to celebrate their pride in the Czech Republic but also to educate others about non violent revolutions in history: Chile, Poland, South Africa, Hawaii, Samoa, Egypt, India.

After days of stimulating conversations, different perceptions, discussions about logic and intuition, new insights, it was decided. In addition to stalls exhibiting everything under the sun, the principal booths, one for each country, would be in Old Town Square directly facing the Astronomical Clock. Each would have its own musical group and original songs.

When Julian heard the name of one of the bands representing the Czech Republic, he took his first step in not believing in coincidences. HIPS. A name picked at random, or something else? Hidden In Plain Sight. The second band, KAPR, was named after the national fish.

For Julian, to be without technology was a definite adjustment. Johannes Gutenberg was top of his hero list; his invention of the printing press in 1440, introducing the concept of mass production, had changed the world. Setting up a press at the University, Julian and Neil were both thrilled with their first printing, artistic and unconventional posters detailing each country's unique history and non violent revolution.

Two days before the Celebration, everyone heard the news. The man who killed Marcus had been caught. That night the Labrador puppy who appeared at Marcus' funeral, scratched at Julian's door. "Will you tell the others there won't be a meeting tomorrow morning, I'd like to be alone with Lapis and Nicholas." Julian - "Lapis told me what happened. I'll help any way I can."

When Lapis and Nicholas walked into the conference room, they saw the Labrador puppy and a grey kitten sitting on top of the table. Seeing Nicholas, the kitten jumped into his arms. Nicholas and Lapis sat down facing the woman. Looking fondly at Nicholas, “Hello. I am your aunt, Katherine Lereimiya, your father’s sister.”

Nicholas, continually petting the kitten who had settled into his lap, is clearly confused and turns to Lapis for support. “We’ve been looking for you for nearly three months. There was a terrible accident. You’re home now. You’re safe.” Nicholas looks at her, a total stranger. Haltingly, “Why don’t I remember anything?” “Because something awful happened. Will you come and live with me? We’ll take everything slowly, very slowly.” “Can Lapis come? Can I bring my cat?” Certainly, Lapis can visit every day, stay with you as long as you like.” Lapis watched as Nicholas started to flex his shoulders, shake his head and shoulders, his whole body, the tension in his face, beginning to let go. Looking directly at his aunt, Nicholas had an expression of relief that, finally, gave way to tears.

Later that day, the Labrador puppy walked up to Julian in the lobby. “Nicholas witnessed a horrible accident that killed his parents. It will take some time for him to remember, and to heal.” Not everyone heals at the same pace, physically or emotionally. Julian - “Let me know if there’s anything I can do.”

For the first time, the morning after the Velvet Revolution Celebration, a question, not a quotation, was on the conference room blackboard. *Which is more important, reason or emotion?* Shilli and Neil were the first to arrive. It was obvious neither had slept more than a few hours. “Who wrote that?” “I have no idea.” That was some celebration. Did you see the booth with loaves of bread shaped like different animals and butter swans?” “No, missed that one. Couldn’t believe the bands, the one from South Africa was fantastic!”

Julian comes in, sits down and immediately starts writing in his notebook. Shilli walks over. “So, what are you doing?” Julian snaps back “I’m really busy.” “Why are you mad?” “I’m not mad.” Shilli repeats his question. “So, what are you doing?” Julian’s patience is running thin. “Don’t ask me, it’s complicated.” “Aren’t you the one always asking questions?” Julian - “I’m better at asking than answering.” Raising his voice, “Do you even know what an aggregator is, or an algorithm?” Shilli walks away, shaking his head.

Lapis and Emilie walk in together. Everyone knew the plan. Emilie would fly a plane (for the first time, without any professional training or license) to take Ayres the Orangutan and Victoria the Chimpanzee to the Netherlands. Lapis had been trying to talk her out of it. “You’re crazy to do that, you’re not flying a kite, it’s a plane! Don’t you understand how dangerous it would be?” Emilie answers, angrily, “I’ve thought about nothing else. Have you ever heard of the word “conscience?” Lapis, obviously hurt by her comment, “That’s pretty harsh.” Emilie - “What’s happened to you, where did the real you go? Suddenly you’re . . . oh, never mind, I really miss Hygge.” Lapis - “Who’s Hygge?” Emilie - “The animal I belong to.” Asha arrives, nodding at the question on the blackboard before sitting down. Samuel walks into the room.

Shilli - “If Marcus were here, what would he do?” Asha - “We’re probably supposed to answer the question. Who wants to go first?”

Neil raises his hand. “I nominate myself! I have Progeria. I know I will die before any of you. That’s a fact. Everything that’s mattered to me since I remember being able to think and feel, is emotional. What I feel for my parents, my friends, everything that’s happened in the past year, the kindness and love shown me by so many, what the animals have taught me, I vote for emotion.”

Julian - “Words, language and technology are rational. It’s rational to try to control our emotions. Who would we be without what we feel? Aren’t reason and emotion equally important?”

Lapis is agitated. “You’re all at the mercy of what you don’t know. I hear colors. Julian, you have a blue voice. Neil, yours is yellow. What’s reasonable about senses being joined together?”

Asha - “Naturally you’re emotional about it. We’re all affected by emotions and facts.”

When Shilli and Neil start tapping on the table. Lapis explodes. "I know I have a temper, but stop that! Do you do that, morse code, whatever it is, on purpose, just to annoy everyone? If you don't want to say something to all of us, don't play games."

Emilie turns to Lapis, making her annoyance know - "Are you finished?" Lapis - "What's your point?" Emilie - "Don't try to talk me out of what I'm feeling. I don't like you right now. You just like to argue!" Lapis, getting more and more agitated, stands up. "I'm leaving." As Lapis starts to walk to the door, everyone in the room is shouting. "Come on, Lapis, don't leave." "Lapis, please stay." Julian stands up, pretending to cast a fishing line, pulling back his right arm, aiming the imaginary pole, then slowly starting to reel it in. Lapis turns around, sits back down at the table, crossing his arms.

Asha - "Maybe there's no answer." Shilli - "Are you the middle woman in this argument?" Lapis - "What's a middle woman?" Shilli - same as a middle man, but a woman. Maybe this is a gender issue, you know, females and their motions." Asha instantly reacts - "What's *that* supposed to mean?" Shilli - "Just that!" Julian - "Not a good idea, don't go there." Emilie - "Meaning?" Julian - "Never mind." Neil, frustrated, gets up and starts walking around the room. "Here we go again."

Within minutes everyone is yelling. "We apologize." "Did you just wink at me?" "No, I have something in my eye." "I didn't say that, don't apologize for me." "How can you be so certain?" "I know because I feel it? "What's your excuse?" You said . . . "No I didn't." "Yes you did." "That's unfair, I never said that."

Since the meeting began, no one had noticed the two puppies (a Labrador and English Bulldog) sitting quietly in the corner of the room. As the argument gets more and more heated, both puppies jump onto the table. Suddenly, everyone is quiet. The Labrador begins. "I am GENTIL." Emilie - "John T, what does the T stand for?" "It's pronounced *John T* but it's one word, Gentil. I'm French."

Gentil begins. "Discussions are good. Anger isn't a bad thing. It's what we do with it that counts. All of you aren't angry with each other, you're angry because of what happened to Marcus. Humans often don't listen to themselves, don't hear what they're saying. We were in the corner and heard everything you each said."

The English Bulldog continues. I am CHOPPER. I understand what you may be feeling. When I decide something, I usually don't change my mind. When Chopper begins to repeat, word for word (with the accuracy of a tape recorder) what was said, everyone is shocked. Chopper - "Listen to yourselves. Saying you didn't say what you did is foolish."

Throughout the meeting, Samuel has been quiet. Neil had the greatest respect for Samuel. They had become good friends. Neil - "What's your opinion, o'silent one?" Samuel smiles. "I often know about things before they happen." Neil - "What's going to happen here?" "I'm not the one to ask." Neil - "You seem sad." Samuel - "I took someone at their word. Their word wasn't good."

Neil turns to Gentil and Chopper. "What do you both think? Which is more important, Reason or Emotion?" Gentil - "I think emotion is more important." Chopper - "I agree. What do each of you think your species does better, think or feel?"

The meeting over, Emilie and Asha walk out together. Emilie - Last year, when you blew out the candles on your Birthday cake, what did you wish for?" Asha - "I wished for the animals to help us. I got my wish."