

CHAPTER ELEVEN LAPIS RUSSIA

Lapis always said what he thought. Not surprisingly, he was given the nickname “Candid.”

After months of traveling, it was good to be home. His idea of having each city on the tour be sponsored by a different color (Olivine, Cerulian, Taupe, Fuchsia, Malachite, Gamboge and Zanadu) had been a marketing success.

He’d learned a lot about himself. He was hot headed and had a temper. Several times during the tour, when someone had done something wrong, he’d over-reacted, jumping to conclusions without having all the facts. In the future, he decided he’d try to do better, not to see wrong when none was intended. He would try.

Lapis wondered if he might have grown up too fast. Was it ever too late to do something, even if you were out of time and sync with what everyone else considered normal?

When he suggested an outing to the Leningrad Zoo, his parents were delighted. Passing the Elephant enclosure, he heard something and turned back. The majestic animal walked to the fence and slowly lowered his head. “We need your help. Teach others to communicate with tone and color.”

His Aunt and Uncle had invited Lapis to visit them in Prague next month. He couldn’t wait.

The headlines:

BUTTERFLIES DELAY WIMBLEDON FINALS
SHEEP ATTACK TOUR DE FRANCE
CARACALS CLOSE DUBAI HOTEL

It was July.

It had been nearly a year. Lapis missed Emilie. He'd felt something the first moment he saw her. He wished he knew if she felt the same. He and Emilie had talked about how alike they were, both so impatient, always interrupting people, how hard it was for them to ask for help. Lapis noticed that, around others, Emilie was sometimes distant. When the two of them were alone, it was very different. Many a time, they'd sit in the lobby talking into the wee hours. Before saying "Good-bye" Emilie showed Lapis the secret handshake her parents had taught her. Taking his hand, she squeezed it one time, telling him to answer with four squeezes of his own. She would then answer with 3 squeezes. 1-4-3. One letter. four letters, three letters. I love you.

After traveling from city to city, month after month, his decision to take a year off from touring was an easy one.

Having a Mother and Father who were both musicians, Lapis couldn't remember a time when music wasn't the backdrop of his life. He thought everyone heard colors. As a synesthete, teaching others how to communicate with tone and color was a challenge he was more than ready to accept.

He'd begin by studying each of the five senses: Sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. What was the emotional effect of sound and color? Could sound lower a pulse rate, relax muscles? How does color affect people psychologically?

One of Lapis' heroes was Alexander Scriabin, thought by many to be a creative genius. He was a poet, pianist, and a visionary. Like Lapis, Scriabin associated colors with musical notes and sounds, inventing the color piano, each musical key representing a color. In one of his compositions an organ projected colors into the auditorium.

Lapis loved St. Petersburg. One hundred islands. Three hundred bridges. Last year, his school had visited St. Isaac's Cathedral. It wasn't the grandeur of its golden dome that touched him, it was the breathtakingly beautiful columns of malachite and lapis lazuli. Was it a coincidence he had been named Lapis, before his parents could ever have know about Synesthesia?

Because his Mother played the violin at the Philharmonic, Lapis was a regular at rehearsals. Sitting quietly in the empty theater, he heard a compilation of dazzling colors that defied description. Leaving the auditorium one afternoon by the back entrance, he saw someone sitting in the alleyway. The young man, near his own age, seemed, almost to be in a trance. Lapis approached slowly - "Are you all right?" No answer. At that moment a white cat (black tail and paws) walked by, turning to sit directly in front of Lapis. "I am XENIA. "He is like you. His senses are joined. Talk to him." When the cat jumped into his lap, the young man began, very gently, stoking and petting her. Lapis leaned over, "Hello. I'm Lapis, may I sit down?" No answer. Lapis sat down.

Lapis - "Xenia, I don't know. . . what should I do?" "Nothing. Just sit with him for a few minutes." After several minutes, as Xenia jumped off his lap, the young man stood up and spoke in a low voice, a cultured accent Lapis couldn't identify. "Nicholas. I am lost."

Lapis - "Nicholas, would you like to come to my house?" Xenia walked over and jumped into Nicholas' arms. Tilting his head to one side, as if listening, Nicholas slowly nodded "Yes." Lapis, Nicholas and Xenia walked away together.

For the first week, Lapis and his parents did everything they could to make Nicholas comfortable. Asking no questions, they wanted nothing more than he feel safe. The second week, Lapis and his new friend took walks in the afternoon along the Neva River. Neither spoke.

One evening, Lapis went to Nicholas' room to say goodnight. Lapis - "It wasn't a coincidence that we met. Nicholas - "I don't remember anything. I don't know where I came from, where I belong. Wherever I found a place to sleep, the cat stayed with me When you came, all I could remember was my name."

“Xenia told me that you and I are alike.” “Why do you say that?” “I want to tell you something, Nicholas, that not many people know. When other people hear musical notes, I hear colors.” Nicholas’ demeanor suddenly changed. He sat up on the bed. Lapis continued. “We both have Synesthesia.” “Are we sick?” “No, it isn’t an illness. There’s nothing harmful about it, and nothing we can do to stop it. I can’t imagine my life without it. It’s the most wonderful gift anyone could ever have given me.”

“How do you know I have. . . what did you call it?” “Xenia told me.” “You can *talk to cats*?” For the rest of the night, it was one question after another. Nicholas began to describe what he experienced. For him, the word Wednesday was farther away in distance than was the word Saturday. Shapes evoked different sounds.

The next afternoon, Lapis took Nicholas to see Catherine the Great’s amber room, six tons of magnificent red/orange/yellow carvings. Afterward, they went to a Philharmonic rehearsal. Understanding they were each having very different experiences, neither talked a great deal. At the end of the day, as they were walking home, Xenia suddenly appeared. Xenia - “Take Nicholas with you to Prague. He will finally be home.”