

Before leaving Norway for home, everyone agreed that geography would not stand in the way of their continuing friendship. A monthly conference call, even in the face of different time zones, was the answer.

Samuel's neighbors, whose house had burned down, decided to move to Germany. When Samuel's mother asked if she could adopt Argos, the golden retriever her son had rescued from the fire, she had a plan in mind.

Lapis and Emilie were married in Randers, Denmark, a quiet wedding with both sets of parents thrilled with their children's choice of a marriage partner. The afternoon of the wedding, hearing barking from outside, Emilie went to the front door. Argos darted inside, going room to room to find Lapis, jumping into his arms. Samuel was there in spirit.

With Lapis' scholarship at Pavlov State Medical University in St. Petersburg to begin in September, Emilie was busy preparing for the move. The baby was due the last week of June, the move to Russia the first week in August. Staying with Lapis' parents for the first year would make the transition far easier. A new country and language would be a challenge, but, as everyone told her, *nothing* compared to motherhood. Once settled, Emilie planned to get her pilot's license, continuing to work with Vestes Wind Systems to make changes needed for the climate and environment.

Receiving Asha's wedding invitation, Lapis and Emilie agreed the July date was too close to the baby's arrival to risk traveling. They wrote Asha, sending her their love.

When, weeks later, the attorneys' letter arrived, their disappointment in not attending Asha's wedding was relieved. They'd all be together again in Bhutan on September 28<sup>th</sup>. Never having received such a letter, Emilie read it again and again.

“Go ahead and make your plans. Decide what you are going to do with your life but, as you do, remember that there are people, places and things that are, at the moment that you are reading these words, on their way to you, to change your life in ways you cannot imagine.”

Lapis and Emilie were enjoying the magical lights at Tivoli Gardens when the call came from Emilie's stepfather. On their way to a rehearsal at the Philharmonic, Lapis' mother and father were among six who had been killed when a political demonstration turned deadly. Lapis was on the next plane for St. Petersburg. Travel to different countries during his teenage "rock star" years had opened his eyes to cultural differences and prejudices. Russia was not the same. Since the recent election, riots were no longer unique but expected.

Devastated by Samuel's death, now losing his parents, Lapis was inconsolable and overwhelmed by his emotions. Everything had changed. He didn't know if he'd be able to make the right decisions. For the first time in his life, a husband and soon to be father, he was now responsible for other people. Phoning Emilie hourly, one day to the next, kept him going. They talked about everything. Lapis - "It was only after we'd been together for several months that I noticed something. You take the time to choose things that are beautiful, little things, a kitchen knife, a toothbrush. Just one of the things I love about you."

The first time he'd seen Emilie at the games in Sydney, he'd felt something he'd never felt before. That they would meet a year later in Prague was no coincidence. The happiness everyone shared when the two families were together in Denmark for their wedding now seemed like a dream.

Everyone in the Philharmonic orchestra worked together to help with the arrangements for the funeral and reception. The following week, Lapis surprised himself at how quickly he made what everyone knew was a difficult decision. Instead of Emilie moving to Russia, he would move to Denmark. Emilie's parents had offered them a place to stay as long as they wanted, giving them plenty of time, once the baby was born, to decide their future plans.

In an odd way, Lapis was relieved about not going to medical school, hesitating to talk with Emilie about his true feelings. His thoughts returned, daily, to his first experience communicating with Argos. How did this happen? When he told people about his Synesthesia, many had difficulty understanding. Hearing colors? Knowing far more about color and tone than the average person, he was certain of one thing. Humans were not the only ones on the planet who could communicate.

The day after Lapis left for Russia, Emilie and Chopper the bulldog, went for their afternoon walk. As always, Chopper pranced, sniffing, lifting his head in the air, looking left to right and, after doing his business, kicking back his hind legs, one after the other, as if saying “Done. Onward.” Once home, Emilie sat down to read, waiting for her friend, Hanna, to arrive. When Chopper walked over, biting the top of her right wrist, she was startled. Even though the bite hadn’t broken the skin, the pain was intense.

The lump quickly grew to golf ball size. Emilie was starring at her wrist when Hanna knocked at the door. “What happened?” “Chopper bit me.” “I’ve never seen swelling like that before.” Emilie - “What did you say?” “Never seen swelling like that.” Emilie looked at Chopper, lying quietly on his stomach, his front and rear paws stretched out as if in a yoga pose. “Chopper, I understand. Swelling!” Within minutes, Emilie was on the phone to the University of Copenhagen. “I’d like to make an appointment to see Professor Swelling.”

Emilie’s close friend, Hanna, a cat lover, had just returned from visiting relatives in California with surprising news. Although some cities had abolished the declawing of cats, many continued the inhumane practice. Declawing was not, as many people thought, a nail trim. It was a surgical procedure in which the animal’s toes were amputated at the last joint. When Matthiessen, the Turkish Angora cat, walked into the room, Emilie picked him up, looking into his eyes. “It’s illegal in Denmark. No one will ever harm you.”

Hans Swelling was a Professor of Ethology (Animal Behavior) at the University of Copenhagen. “Hello, Mrs. Lishin. How can I help you?” “Please call me Emilie.” “You look familiar. Have you ever been at the Vestas’ office?” “Yes, many times.” “That’s where I’ve seen you. My son’s one of their pilots.”

Emilie began by explaining how Marcus, Snug, Youri, White Crow and Mal’akh had all communicated with her, anticipating the Professor’s first question. “Did anyone else experience what you did?” “Yes, my friends from Namibia, the United States, India, and Russia. If there were no humans on Earth, we believe animals and the natural world be fine. I look at so many things differently now.”

“My husband’s working on an interspecies interface. Did you happen to read about the trial in the Hague?” “Yes. Fascinating.” Emilie - “What we experienced changed us all.” Handing the professor an envelope, “A list of people who have information that might interest you.” “Thank you, Emilie. I look forward to our next meeting.” Leaving the University grounds, Emilie began skipping, saying to herself, “Thank you, Chopper.”

Driving to the airport to pick up Lapis, she didn’t know what to expect. When Samuel died, Lapis kept everything bottled up inside. During the drive to Randers, he sat silently in the passenger seat, obviously exhausted. Suddenly, a bird flew overhead, a splat on the right windshield, what appeared to be four letters. Lapis - “Please stop the car.” “Why, are you all right?” “Please stop.” Pulling the car to the side of the road, Emilie squinted to see. This time it was Lapis who was amazed at the *sign*. Emilie - “It looks like a b i n. . . what does that mean?” “It’s what my parents used to call me when I was little. I couldn’t pronounce Scriabin; all I could manage was *abin*.”

Other than an album of family photographs, the only thing Lapis chose to bring to his new home in Denmark was a set of nesting dolls his mother had given him when he was five. Representing different Russian musicians, the wooden dolls had no hands, were separated top to bottom, revealing smaller dolls inside. In most sets, the innermost doll didn’t open. Taking the set out of his suitcase, Lapis opened one after another, until he held the smallest one, which did open. Inside was a slip of paper with one word in his mother’s handwriting - *abin*. At that moment, Emilie and Lapis knew, whatever the future held, Gentil and Snug were right - “You will always be a part of one another.”

The night Samuel Abin Lishin was born, Emilie and Lapis had the same dream. As the family of three stood together in a forest clearing, a white bellied heron and black necked crane circled overhead.