

While their daughter, Emilie, was in Bhutan with her husband, Nan and Victor Mortensen were happily spending four weeks caring for their first grandchild, Samuel. He was at the park with Emilie's best friend, Elsbeth, when the Mortensens suddenly disappeared. After speaking with the local police, Elsbeth immediately stepped in, caring not only for Samuel but Chopper the bulldog, Gentil the Labrador, Argos the Golden Retriever and two cats, Penny the orange Tabby, Matthiessen the Turkish Angora.

Arriving home in Denmark, Emilie and Lapis' feelings of helplessness were only alleviated by the knowledge that three renowned attorneys were working day and night to bring Emilie's parents home. Seeing Samuel again, knowing he was safe, Emilie wanted to stay, if only temporarily, at the house in Randers, rather than return to the flat in Copenhagen.

Knowing she had endangered her mother, step father and son, changed everything for Emilie. In her mind, what had happened was no one's fault but her own. Before being married, she and Lapis often talked about a shared personality trait - prone to extremes. Never before had they both felt so frightened and insecure.

Neither Emilie or Lapis knew how to be diplomatic. It wasn't a matter of being impolite, but two blunt and candid people who spoke their minds, always making it clear where they stood. What Emilie had always done easily, totally without effort, was now difficult: caring for Samuel, driving, working on environmental issues, preparing meals, reading a bed time story. Everything had to be planned, routine over spontaneity. What had happened was out of her control, now she wanted to control everything.

After meeting in Bhutan and becoming friends, Emilie asked the young Greek woman, if she'd like to come to Denmark to help take care of Samuel. Enthusiastically, Adrasteia said "Yes." For Emilie, her support meant everything. Without it, she didn't know how she'd manage, emotionally, one day to the next. Emilie quickly realized she wasn't as strong as she'd thought she was.

That Lapis now had indigo skin, Emilie's a sea green, had to be addressed. Their explanation was that it was a temporary anomaly. Chopper the English bulldog noticed the change immediately, anxiously licking their faces, arms and legs. Rolling over on his back, his legs flailing in all directions, he was happy to have his family home. Chopper turned to Lapis - "Purple's a color not often found in nature." Lapis' Synesthesia, the ability to hear colors, now had an added dimension - his own skin.

For Emilie everything she saw, smelled, tasted and heard, carried memories of her parents. Her idiosyncrasies, eating six raw almonds and two par boiled cloves of garlic daily, tapping on the table when she was scared, were gifts from them. When she put a wreath of forget-me-nots, their favorite flower, on the front door, she heard croaks, peeps, chirps and trills. With no water or pond nearby, frogs had arrived with their message. "They are safe."

After a few weeks, things fell into a manageable routine, Emilie caring for Samuel and working with Vestas Wind Systems, Lapis preparing to enter medical school. When Emilie noticed the corners of the living room's small wooden table had been chewed away, she phoned the veterinarian. He suggested she sprinkle hot pepper on the table to stop Chopper's biting. But Chopper loved pepper. One spicy dog! Taking him into her lap, "Why do you chew the furniture?" Chopper tipped his head to one side, staying absolutely still for thirty seconds, staring at her. He was thinking. Then, rolling his eyes, "Because I missed you. When I'm alone I get scared. I like being with people. I'll try not to do it anymore. I love you."

At dinner that night, Lapis was in an almost jovial mood. "I never asked you. What did you write on the back of the partition?" Emilie - "Let no one tell you it can't be done. You?" Lapis - "The world hangs on a thin thread and that thread is the psyche of man." He continued - "I've decided to use part of my share of the Nobel Prize money to buy a new car." Emilie didn't do well hiding her shock and disappointment. "Isn't buying a place of our own in Copenhagen more important than your having a fancy car? Do you have any idea of how much tax you'll pay?" Lapis - "We each received two hundred thousand dollars, what's wrong?" With Lapis' temper, and Emilie's impatience, things escalated quickly. Lapis - "I'm going for a walk!"

The following morning, Lapis left for Copenhagen. After buying a silver Porsche, the car of his dreams, he spent the day driving through the city, stopping to pick up some cheese and a bottle of akvavit, congratulating himself on his new purchase. Beginning to talk to himself as Shilli had suggested, he purposefully didn't turn on the radio. This wasn't about hearing colors, this was about enjoying his magnificent new wheels! The trip to Randers was three and a half hours. A half hour from home, having finished the entire bottle of akvavit, he lost control, crashing into a guardrail, flipping the car on its side. Driving to the hospital, Emilie was both relieved and furious. Lucky to have only suffered a broken right arm, Lapis didn't speak. Emilie - "What if Samuel had been with you; you both could have been killed!"

Emilie made Lapis' favorite dish, a poached egg in an artichoke heart, topped with hollandaise sauce, carrying a tray to the bedroom. Taking his face in her hands, she kissed him. "Please, never again." The sound of Chopper's snores lulled them both to sleep.

Two weeks later, it was Emilie's emergency. In the middle of the afternoon, after putting Samuel down for a nap, Emilie was dizzy, having difficulty breathing, sharp bolts of pain. When she went to find Lapis, he was slumped over in the living room chair watching television, drunk. Emilie phoned Elsbeth, who was there in less than five minutes, talking Samuel from his crib, putting him in the car seat, driving Emilie to the medical center, promising she'd stay with Samuel. An emergency appendectomy.

Elsbeth minced no words with Lapis. "If you ever drink again, you'll lose both your wife and your son. When she needed a doctor, you couldn't even drive her to get help. You've already had a second chance. You won't have a third! Do you know this could affect your admission to Medical School?" Lapis had a terrible temper. Being on the receiving end of his own behavior was something quite different. Disgustedly, Elsbeth continued. "Samuel is coming to stay at my house until Emilie's better."

When Emilie returned from the hospital, Elsbeth came twice a day to take Chopper, Argos and Gentil for their walk. They did *not* want to leave Emilie, Chopper always emitting a high pitched cry. After being coaxed outside with treats, they did their business, running back inside to sit on her bed.

Two weeks passed quietly with no word from the attorneys about Emilie's parents. Lapis vowed never to drink again, Emilie was content caring for Samuel. As they were both reading the grant applications, Lapis was pleasantly surprised. "I met this girl, Sang, in Switzerland. She was there to see Raoul. He took both of us on a tour of CERN." Emilie and Lapis made their choices. During next week's conference call, they'd learn who Shilli, Julian and Asha had picked.

Lapis enjoyed watching Emilie cook. "When I was little, we used to dye Easter eggs with beet juice and onion skins. Have you ever noticed after you cook a beet, it's skin just slides off?" Emilie - "Same thing with garlic. When you boil the cloves, they just slip out of their skin." Looking first at her hands then at Lapis' arms, "Marcus used to tell us to be sure and be comfortable in our own skin." Lapis - "Be comfortable or slip out? I think I'm beginning to like being indigo!"

Leaving the kitchen, Lapis noticed a small star shaped silver tag on the floor under the cabinet. Picking it up, he asked "Does this belong to Penny or Matthiessen?" Emilie - "Let me see." What was printed on the tag took her breath away. Lapis - "What's wrong?" Emilie - "Nothing. NC37510. That's the registration number of the plane my father was on when he died." When the phone rang, it was the Russian Consulate in Copenhagen with a message asking Lapis to contact his grandmother in St. Petersburg. Lapis smiled. "My Babuska wants me to phone her. When I was growing up, every time she saw me she'd ask me to tell her something she didn't know."

Lapis wasn't prepared for what his grandmother told him. "Abin, I didn't say anything when you were here for your parents' funerals. You're happy and settled now with a wife and son. It's time for you to know the truth. When your mother died in childbirth, your father disappeared. You were then adopted. Your biological father wants to see you. He can't leave Russia."

When he walked back into the kitchen, a long tear on his face, Lapis spoke as if reading from a book, a low, emotionless voice. Explaining what he'd just learned, "I don't want to leave you and Samuel, but I have to go to Russia. Back in a week in time to start school." A Vestas Wind Systems plane was leaving for St. Petersburg in the morning, Argos the Golden Retriever would be at Lapis' side.

It wasn't until after Lapis left that Emilie realized she had no idea when the next outage would begin. All she could do was hope he'd be home before it happened.

Meeting at an outdoor café in downtown St. Petersburg, Babuska introduced Lapis to his biological father. As Argos watched, the two men shook hands, hugged awkwardly, then sat down. Lapis' recurring dream (since he could remember) of two strangers, a man and a woman, was now real, the tall, dark haired man with a square jaw and piercing blue eyes was sitting in front of him.

"My name is Rodion." Lapis - "Were you named about Raskolnikov?" "Yes. It's better you not know my last name." Argos, the golden retriever sitting at Lapis' side, jumped into Rodion's lap. Caught off guard, he regained his balance and held the dog affectionately. "When you were born, the Russia of today didn't exist. I did what I thought was best for you." "Tell me about my mother." "She was born in Bulgaria, her name was Emiliya. It means *skillfully disguised as a responsible adult*. Since she was a little girl, her only wish was to have a child. She was the most loving, caring and kind person I ever met." As Rodion took a picture from his pocket, Lapis recognized the woman in his dream.

Getting to know one another, the days passed quickly. Rodion had been pivotal in organizing, voicing and exposing corruption in the Soviet Union, now risking his life to do the same for Russia, the country he loved. "You grew up here, Lapis. You know well that by nature, after so many years, we Russians are pessimistic. Those who made billions when the Soviet Union ended are not only distrusted, they're hated. We're working, underground, to make changes. You'd be surprised at the help and support we're getting from outside the country. Word spreads quickly when people are arrested and brutally beaten for no reason."

Lapis couldn't ever remember having talked so much. He wanted his father to know about his rock star travels, favorite story, (things are not always as they seem), the move to Denmark, his wife and son, the scholarship to enter Medical School, how he planned to use his gift of Synesthesia, tone and color, to stop violence. Explaining everything that had happened in the past few years, communicating with animals, the trial, his commitment to the Interspecies Corridor, he expected disbelief. What he received was understanding, envy and endless questions. "You are a very lucky young man!"

Adrasteia, Samuel and Gentil hadn't yet returned from the veterinarian. The yellow Labrador had confounded three different doctors, all had no explanation for the fact that, maintaining his five month old fifteen pound weight, he was in perfect health. Gentil, the perennial puppy. Adrasteia was surprised to learn that Kruise, in the small country of Denmark, was one of the leading worldwide suppliers of veterinary equipment and accessories.

Preparing a surprise birthday dinner for Adrasteia, Emilie had been cooking all day. Late afternoon, running full speed into the kitchen, Chopper knocked her over. As she got to her feet, he quickly ran to hide under the table, knowing he'd done something he'd never meant to do. When Emilie went to him, "You are the best dog," he crawled from under the table, turning over on his back, hoping to be scratched on the deep mahogany colored fold on his right cheek. As she rubbed his belly, Chopper cupped his paw over her right arm.

With his regular harness missing, (suggested for a sixty pound bull dog) the single strand leash would have to do for today's walk. His rear end moving left to right, a combination of a saunter, waddle and swagger, he seemed always to attract butterflies. As he turned his head, they would change direction. A day with no wind, leaves fell from the trees, swirling in front of him as he walked.

Once at the park, Chopper stood at his regal champion stance, his right fore paw lifted, pointing downward, ready to play catch. Returning with the ball in his mouth, holding his head high, he pranced in triumph. Watching him turn round and round, looking for the right place to do his business, Emilie remembered what Striker the Lizard had communicated during the last meeting of the Council. "Animals are affected by the earth's magnetic fields."

The night before, reading that inventors in neighboring Sweden had begun to work on a device that will translate dogs' thoughts into language by picking up their brain waves, all she could do was smile. Another article explained how scientists had just discovered the reason dogs turn around and around before they poop. They want to be aligned to the north-south axis of the earth's magnetic field.

Entering the back patio, seeing Adrasteia, Samuel, Gentil and Elsbeth in the distance, Chopper broke into a run, yanking the leash around Emilie's wrist. When she fell, the right side of her face hitting the walkway, time began to stretch, a half second expanding into slow motion.

When Chopper was a puppy, he'd bitten her wrist, the sudden swelling leading her to contact a Professor Swelling at the University of Copenhagen. Now, the marble sized area on her right cheek reminded her to pay attention. Chopper began licking her face, moving his head left to right. "No trust." Penny the orange Tabby and Mattheisen the Turkish Angora sat at her side, their heads also moving left to right and back.

Adrasteia's birthday dinner was a huge success, langoustines with beets and mushrooms. Elsbeth, Hanna and Adrasteia joined Emilie in expressing strong opinions, one thought provoking subject after another: dogs being as sentient as human children, the importance of genetic vs. environmental factors for human memory and learning, the sensory perception of fish and birds, belief and knowledge not being the same thing, willful blindness, seventy percent of earth covered by water, one of eight of the human species hungry, the etymology of the word patience, the sanctity of money, is empathy learned?

Emilie - "Once the level of carbon dioxide reaches a certain level climate change could become uncontainable." Emilie and Elsbeth had been friends since they were girls. Elsbeth - "Emilie, you over think everything." Emilie laughed. "You're right. I do over think, why meditation is so hard for me. I'm horribly judgmental too." Adrasteia - "Negatives and positives. As a species we're wasting valuable resources, but we're also using robotics to help the sick." Hanna - "Did you know aerial drones are now being used to track other species?" At the end of the evening, all four decided to keep a dream diary.

The next evening, hearing that Elsbeth had been killed by a drunk driver, Emilie walked next door, politely asking her neighbor if she could borrow his sledgehammer. At the back of her parent's property was a four foot high brick wall separating the garden from the orchard. Sobbing, she began smashing the bricks. When the wall was completely destroyed, she dropped the hammer, returning to the house. Andraestia was waiting with all the love and support she had to give.

Emilie contacted Jane Green, Paul Osprey and Raoul Lapin, asking if they would find whatever information they could about Professor Swelling. A few days later, after telling Adrasteia how she'd discovered she had a half brother, (same father, different mothers), Emilie decided to make a long overdue call.

Soren Larsen arrived the next morning from Copenhagen wearing a white T shirt with dark blue letters.

\*\*\* NEVER HIT A DOG \*\*\*

After talking non stop for three hours, Soren and Emilie took a late afternoon walk, conversation turning to early memories of their shared father. Soren - "I was seven. We were moving that day. My mother had told the school bus driver the new address, but he forgot and dropped me off at our old house. Looking in all the windows, seeing empty rooms, I was so frightened. I'd never known what it felt like to be lost before. It was only a few minutes before my father arrived. He hadn't found out about the mistake, a voice inside his head told him I was in trouble."

Purposefully, Emilie hadn't mentioned that her mother and stepfather were missing. She'd said nothing about the interspecies internet. Soren was an expert in computer science, computer engineering, architecture and programming, data structures, design patterns and algorithms were second nature. Starting his own consulting business, he'd been contacted the first week by someone who wanted to hire him full time. The two had since become close friends and business partners.

Passing the local bakery, Emilie described how, months before when buying pastries, she'd heard "pickup for gbl" (their father's initials), in this case referring to gingerbread Legos. As they continued walking, a large white truck, the company name *GBL Deliveries* on the side, honked the horn as it drove by. A shared moment to remember. Arriving back at the house, Soren gave his half sister a hug. "Thank you for a wonderful day. It's getting late, better be on my way. Sorry I missed meeting your husband." Emilie - "We'd be pleased if you'd visit at Christmas."

Lapis was due home from Russia in two days. That Soren's business partner was Lapis' father was not a coincidence.

