

## *Chapter 11*

### *“Comets Fade Away”*



Love is forever. His mind raced with that thought beating like a drum inside his skull as the woman of his dreams lay next to him, gently breathing. She looked helpless, but she didn't need his help. He needed hers.

Time was running out for him. He wanted to marry her, and that confused the heck out of him. Was this it? Was he a possessed hunter closing in on his prey? Maybe, maybe not, but yes, he was running out of time.

Her skin was soft, like a cloud, as he slid his caressing fingers down her arm. She smelled like a cool spring breeze that filled his senses with a refreshing calm. The only thing he could do was give up and give it to her. He kissed her lips. She moaned.

Would she marry him? He kissed her eyelids, licked her lips, and moved his mouth down to her neck. She drove him wild with passion and raised his fever to another level, a level too close to the sun, even out here in the frigid tundra of Alaska.

He'd been always on the run, and could never run far enough away from marriage, but this felt different. She even loved his adventures. No one had ever accepted him like this before.

Was her youthful innocence responsible for her joyous and adventurous nature? Her eyes were wide open now to the extremes of his life. But that could change. Helen might not see what was coming - his future was uncertain.

Everyone in their families had unique plans for their future, but shouldn't they be the ones to decide? They should do what they wanted, not what their families wanted them to do.

Silly as it seemed, that circus of extremes would trap them in a life of uncertainty, and that life could slowly grow into a nightmare. Wait, would it be a nightmare?

The Professor leaned back on the soft white pillows, thought about that for a second, then got up, and threw another log onto the fire. The chair by the fire invited him to gather his thoughts within its warm cuddle, like a mother's arms.

He bopped his head to music no one else could hear. The groove spoke to no one else but him. His spine felt it. The beat of the drum was coming from the beating of their hearts. The steel blue stars out the window were a pleasant background chorus. A strawberry scented candle by the window sill completed the harmony.

The message was obvious: love and be loved. The sky screamed I am the night and directive meant tonight was for loving.

They'd already made love, but would she accept the love he wanted to offer her for the rest of her life? Not a physical love, but a spiritual, eternal love.

Sarantos had no engagement ring anyway, just the full circle of the white moon painted across the night sky. How he longed to offer it to her. The silence of outer space never seemed so loud.

She was ten years younger than him, but he could still ride the wave. Her age did not bother him. When you're in love and in sync, the vibration of the mood settles strongly into place. Love is forever and only comets fade away. Yes, love is forever.



She stirred, opened one eye looking for him, then sat up, tossed her hair back and smiled at him.

He beamed right back.

The years had given him the wisdom to conform to society's system, a system that constantly built up his resistance to criticism.

Yes, those people on the school boards had their eyes open, but they lost the ability to see years ago. He vowed it wouldn't happen to him. To hell with the establishment and all the crazy professors drowning in the waves of academic futility. This Professor would practice the lost art of romanticism and live a fuller life because of it.

She stood up. Her curves were rapturous in the moonlight. If it's true that the moon is a goddess, then she touched each cell of Helen's heavenly figure with a well-lit brilliance that highlighted her curvaceous elegance.

He resisted the urge to run into her arms, instead enjoying the buzz of being drunk on her divine charm as she inched toward him in slow motion, eventually leaning down to kiss his thirsty lips.

Her breasts brushed his chest. Their perkiness and enthusiasm matched that of the fire, not the fire in the fireplace by their bed, but the fire that raged below his waist.



She slid onto his lap like a spider taking over a helpless prey caught in its waxy web. As she wrapped her long legs around him, he closed his eyes and realized he hadn't seen every natural wonder the world offered until now.

Her tongue dove inside his mouth, triggering his feral side, as his mind raced with thoughts no man should have.

If she denied him her hand in marriage, would he rise after the cavernous fall? Or curl himself into a bubble and wither away with the goddamn guilt that it was all his fault. It would be the first time he'd conceded that to himself, and he'd then be trapped in sadness forever. He felt these never-ending waves of insecurity, but they shouldn't be holding him back any more. So, why did they?

A heartbeat later, the spell was broken as she warmed his right ear with her tongue and as her teeth gently nibbled on his earlobe.

As she continued distracting his mind, he could no longer hold in his fury. He was brimming with enthusiasm as he finally took control.

Sarantos drank in her love, her skin, her hair, her passion for the next 35 minutes.

Then he crashed hard.

She would have none of that. Her fingers moved through his and she lifted them to her mouth.

He was driven mad with love, again. And again.

She sank into him, driving her love deep into his soul.

They made love for hours until they both fell asleep in the big chair.

Later, the Professor was frightened by a noise and was instantly wide awake a second later.

It sounded like it came from outside. He gently shifted Helen onto one side of the chair, getting up, and moving swiftly towards the window. It had snowed all night, and the snow painted the landscape white.

It was still snowing. As the bright snowflakes were swimming outside, he noticed footprints of a large boot in the snow that led out of the house and towards the river. Who would be out at this hour?





He checked his watch. 4am.

The imagined sound of laughter rang in his ears. What fun he and his classmates had had as they sat around the campfire in their simple lives, telling stories, eating marshmallows, and flirting with the girls next to them when it was snowing back in school. They'd spend the night finding animal tracks and guessing who they belonged to. Those were some wild times. Traveling through life's memories is complicated.

It wasn't simple, nothing ever was, but they just thought it was because they were delusional young lads. He grinned, enjoying the memory. Maybe things were simple, and love was the symbol.

The Professor pulled on his clothes, boots, and coat, then quietly slipped out the door.

The feel of his whip, knife, and gun reassured him he had enough protection with him to handle anything he found. He hoped it was enough to protect from the cold as well.

The house was deathly still, but the flames were burning violently in the main hall fireplace.

The night air bit into his exposed skin when he opened the door.

The tracks were clearer here. As he followed them down to the river, he saw no one. It appeared to be a man's boot, but it was hard to tell here because even women wore large boots to keep warm.

Nature's brushstroke had drawn scattered pine trees around the river as the bend steered away from the house. The prints matched the current.

Suddenly, a colossal figure appeared before him out of the pine forest.

The tall man stood in front of him wrapped in furs, but the most notable thing about the man was the gun in his hand. He pointed it at his head.

“Hell, what are you doing pointing that at me?”

The gun wielding man never answered the question. “I know who you are, Professor Sarantos, and I know what you’re looking for, the chest of Genghis Khan, and it belongs to me.”

“It belongs to no one.” What was he thinking? If the man with the gun pointed at his brain said it belonged to him, then yes, it absolutely belonged to him.



The trigger clicked. Knowing what you want is half the battle. This is often the hardest part.

“Again, Professor, the artifact belongs to me, and when you find it, I will be with you to claim it. Do we have an understanding?”

Where did he know that accent from? As he scoured the encyclopedia inside his mind, a part of him thought about the life he might miss with Helen. Maybe this was it? The big

ticket to heaven had just been handed to him and the train was leaving.

“We’re not leaving for a few days. Are you staying at the main cabin?”

“That is not your concern.”

“Well, I’ll be staying in one of the cabins tomorrow night and every night after that.”

“I don’t care. Are we agreed on the artifact?”

“It’s along the river somewhere.”

As he motioned to the water, a woman’s voice broke the heaviness, and increased it at the same time.

“What the hell is going on here?” It was Helen, and she sounded angry.

Her voice startled the man, and the mysterious man turned to shoot. Sarantos could see the magic of the stars arcing across the darkness as if showing him what to do.

He'd already had his whip tip in his hand, ready to go if needed. His heart pounded in his head at the thought of Helen getting shot.

Before the man's gun went off, the whip danced through the air and smacked the gun away from the crazy man's hand.

The stern man stared at his empty hand because he was no longer in control of the situation. The tide had turned.

Before Sarantos could speak, Helen was on the gun, now holding it at the currently terrified man who had played his game, lost, and was at this moment clearly pissed.

It was like love, a total crap shoot.

As Helen melted the ice off his heart by throwing a whimper in his direction, he looked at her and immediately knew he would follow her anywhere, to any corner of the globe. She was his soulmate. Now he was sure of it.



Helen tilted her head, winked, and grinned. “I was worried about you.”

God, he loved her so much.

“I’m glad you were.”

“It appears you had it under control with that fancy whip slinging thing of yours. I need to learn that trick, if it’s okay with you.”

“Oh yes, absolutely. I’ll teach you any trick you’d like, my dear.”

“Good,” she said.

It was the wrong place to be flirting with each other. Bad timing aside, soon they were escorting the criminal back towards the main hall, but they’d never be the same. Something had changed for both of them. They had taken the risk.

Sarantos heard the comet moving inside his head. He couldn’t let it fade away into oblivion.

He could not control his mouth. This was not a first for him. The words just fell out.

“Will you marry me?”





There he said it. The words hung in the frigid whistling wind, sending icicle chilled daggers hurling into his heart. It wasn't romantic like he imagined; it was not what any sane woman would wish for, and it was lame.

She continued their trek to the house.

He had wanted to give her permission to experience something uninterrupted and unbroken, instead he fell flat ruining the most memorable romantic opportunity of a woman's lifetime. How much time had passed since he asked, hours, minutes, seconds?

She was done torturing him. “Bloody hell, yes.”

They both grinned at each other while keeping their pace. As much as he wanted to jump into her arms, they had to get this guy back to the cops first.

It was 5am when they arrived back at the cabin and Kallik opened the door for them as they approached.

He nodded. “I saw you coming to the house and called the authorities. It will be a few hours before they arrive, but I got this.” He held up a strong rope. “I didn’t like him when he came to rent a cabin 2 days ago, but Tapeesa said to let it be because things always have a way of working out. That woman knows it all.”

“I think Tapeesa knows what she’s talking about. You should listen to her more often,” said the Professor.

“I agree,” Tapeesa said, stepping out from behind the counter.



The couple placed the man in a chair in the room's corner and Kallik tied him up, using some unusual knots Sarantos hadn't seen before.

“Mind showing me those knots sometime?”

“Not at all, but first breakfast is in order.”

The house already smelled great. As they inhaled the hearty Alaskan breakfast waiting for them, the four of them sat down to eat. Just then, Gorilla, who had slept in his own

cabin last night and somehow always had incredible timing, burst onto the scene.

“Just in time.”

The kid ran into the room and joined them.

No one asked a word about the guy in the corner that was tied to a chair. He couldn't ruin their merriment.

The Professor loved these people.

Charlie waltzed next into the room and sat down to eat, but first drank a whole cup of coffee before coming up for air.

“What's new Helen? Who the bloody hell is that man tied to the chair?”

Helen responded with a matter-of-fact attitude that the Professor adored. “Oh, some guy who tried to shoot my Sarantos.” She never batted an eye as she continued to eat. “The Professor and I are getting married by the way. Tapeesa, do you have anyone who could perform a small ceremony?”



Charlie's mouth dropped open, and so did the kid's.

While they were speechless, Tapeesa answered. "Kallik. He can do it. Tonight then?"

Helen drank more coffee. "That's good for me. Can't let this good man get away. Good for you, babe?"

He nodded. "Sure, love is forever, baby!"

Charlie recovered. “What? No planning at all? No big event? Your father will be furious. What are you thinking? You can’t marry him.”

The kid spoke up. “Yeah, doesn’t he have to be a duketon or something weird like that?”

“First kid, it’s not a duketon, and she can marry whomever she wants to.”

The Professor glanced at the fireplace noticing a beautifully carved box on the mantel.

He stood up and walked across the room like a zombie and as he reached for the box, almost passed out.

Helen had followed him. They were in-sync. She opened the lid as he held it.

The Professor reached inside, smiled at her and then held up the knife. There it was - the box, the knife, the artifact.

The kid and Charlie leapt to their feet. All four of them danced around the room.

Kallik said, “That old box has been sitting up there since my grandfather’s time. I didn’t have the heart to get rid of it.”

The four of them laughed.

They found it! They made it to the end of another journey.

Comets fade away, but not today.

