

Chapter 11

“I JUST don’t care”



They chatted long into the night together, but they hadn't reached a decision about the information they found regarding a disaster that might or might not happen in the distant future. The Professor still felt they should guard the information but was unmoved by the moment and focused

on the task at hand. Whatever emotion he was feeling, he channeled inward and out of sight.

The sun had already flown high into the sky before they found themselves on the trail back to the city.

Sarantos pushed his hat back and wiped the sweat from his eyes that were already dripping from his forehead. He thought to himself, this is going to be extremely difficult, like bending a prison-cell bar except the pain will pass. It's temporary.

The kid moved next to him. Alvaro was out in front as the girls shuffled slowly behind him, giggling like schoolgirls.

“Doc, I agree with you. You still have the paper. When we get back, I'll go to the bank to get a safe deposit box and put it in there, at least until we can figure out what makes the most sense. I think everyone would agree with that, don't you?”

He patted the kid on the back. “I think that's a valid point. We need it somewhere safe for the interim.”

“Are we going to look for the artifact we came here to get, or are we heading back to the hotel?”

“I’m still thinking, kid. Odds are they have closed in on their prey. I’m not sure if we’d just waste our time and run into a dangerous situation.”

The kid jerked his head around. “What? Doc, are you mad? Since when do you worry about danger? I thought that was your first name, middle name, and last name!” Gorilla is a big ball of energy. He's always going, going, going.

Their laughter caused Alvaro to turn around, and he smiled back at them politely.

“Yeah, maybe I’m getting a tad old kid. Sometimes, I just don’t care.”

“Applesauce, Doc. I know I tease you about your age, but you’re not that old.”



He nodded. “Yeah, I kind of am.”

“Come on Doc. You’ve got a few years on you, but they give you wisdom, wisdom you need to fit into the system and resist any harsh criticism from your peers. I would’ve folded a long time ago.”

The Professor chuckled. “I suppose that’s partly true. I have always risen after the fall, silly as it seems. It never meant I could see what was coming next, and that scary part was always jumping back in.” He suddenly realized he always willingly had jumped back in line to ride a roller coaster that always seems to leave him nauseous, dizzy and in need of a medic. Not very smart.

“But you kept moving onto the next adventure. You were never afraid to fly too close to the sun.”

Sarantos again wiped the sweat with the rag in his pocket.

“Kid, I’ve always been on the run to prove myself, and believe me, I didn’t see what was coming half of the time. You’re young, kid. Every day is still fun for you but I’ve been there done that. Sometimes we flirt with madness, sometimes we embrace it with enthusiasm. Not sure which way is better.”

“No one can see it all, Doc. That’s just the short stick.”

The Professor smirked. “For a passionate and scarred adventurer, this whole vicious cycle has gotten old. Really, really old. Only the young can ride the waves, my friend. The rest of us have to find small ways to escape.”

“Balderdash, Doc. You ride them all the time. Heck, I know things aren’t simple, but you make it seem that way most of the time.”

“I suppose I sometimes make it look simple, but it’s not.”

“I know, Doc. I know.”

Sarantos changed the subject.

“So, kid, how are you and Charlie doing? Is love forever with you two?”

Gorilla’s eyes popped, and he shook his head. “Doc, who can tell? Maybe love is a symbol of something deeper. I always felt that there was more to love than love. If that makes sense.”

He frowned. The kid got him thinking. “Well, yes, it makes sense in a sick way, but remember that love is not about possession but freedom.”

“Sick? How so?”



He put his arm on Gorilla's shoulder. The trees leaned in closer as if to hear his words of wisdom.

“Kid, I can't find just plain old love without messing it up. If what you're telling me is a fact, I have a major problem. First off, I don't know what that means more to love than

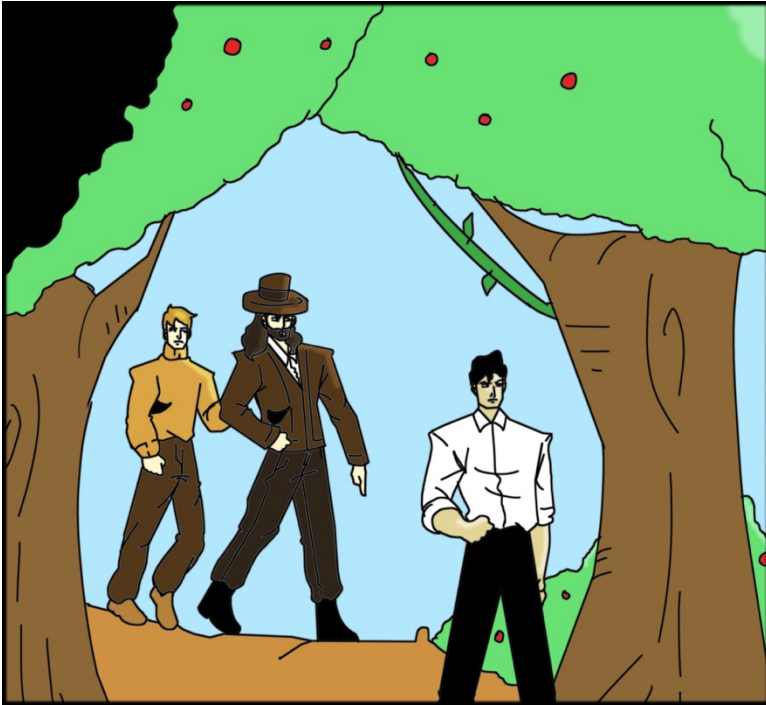
love. If I must think about relationships in a deeper way, I will fall short on the simplicity of love. That deepness is a sickness that makes sense, but a sickness that isn't for me."

The kid looked at him, confused. "Doc, that made no sense." He looked off to the right, trying to drop the subject.

The Professor complained to no one in particular. "It's hot as hell out here. I don't know how long I can continue."

Gorilla hurried to catch up. "Doc, I get it, it's hot, but I know what you're really doing. You're trying to avoid love. Truth is, you can't. Everybody loved someone in their life, even your parents fit into that category. And my friend, love hurts, but it also feels impressive. When you're trapped in love, the air smells fresh and the sky looks happy. You look forward to waking up in the morning and you go to sleep with a smile on your face."

The Professor's head hurt. Trapped wasn't a word he would choose to describe the way love felt for him. Or was it?



“Kid, let’s just say love changes everyone. We’ll never be the same after it, good or bad. My only advice is don’t stay scared and don’t be stubborn.”

As he finished those words, they finally entered the plush jungle full of overhanging trees that immediately brought a cool relief to their skin.

“Sure Doc, let’s just say that.”

Suddenly, the jungle came alive with sinister sounds after a loud noise in the distance. That created chaos around them.

Charlie hurried to catch up to them. “Was that a gunshot?”

Alvaro stopped ahead of them and eavesdropped. His head moved left to right.

Once the creatures of the jungle kicked up the music, it was hard to hear past that.

Charlie frowned, and Madeline moved next to him.

Sarantos heart was heavy. It was difficult to look anywhere else when her shirt was clinging to her damp breasts. The medallion hung deep in the ravine of her mountains and hid from his view. He wanted to find it.

Her tan skin had beads of sweat that looked as enticing as an innocent, solitary rose basking in the sunrise’s dew on an autumn day.

She looked up at him and smiled.

“Professor, are you interested in other peaks that you can conquer?”



He pulled his eyes away from the tasty temptations, but not before his urge showed itself in another form. His cheeks grew warmer. His eyes investigated hers and drank them like a hungry lion. Good lord, there was a deeper compulsion inside of him, and he longed to satisfy his craving.

“Madeline, I believe I am interested in developing a kinship with a soft pair of matching peaks. Would you be able to go there with me?”

She never blushed and held his gaze.

“Professor, I thought you’d never ask. Why don’t we discuss it when we get back to town? The exploration of said peaks will require extensive research leading to other territories that will need to be investigated.”

The flirting was driving him mad! He wanted her now. He was going to explode.

Her eyes travelled downward, and that explosive bomb didn’t go unnoticed. Her brows rose slowly, and her tongue licked her lips. Just a slick reminder that they both want the same thing.

She was a wildcat, and he wanted to tame her, but not take the wild out of the cat.

He looked away for a second to gather his composure and get control of his manhood’s throbbing.

The kid caught half their conversation. “Where are we going next, then? What peaks are we talking about? Aren’t we going back to the States first?”

Sarantos and Madeline grinned mischievously. The intensity of their urges wouldn’t allow anything but a slight smile.

“Kid, yeah. We’re going back to the States first.”

Madeline looked over at Charlie and winked. “Gorilla, I think I would like the Professor to accompany me on this trip alone. I hope that’s okay with you?”



The kid’s face reddened, so he took Charlie’s hand. “Okay, sure. That’s fine. I got plenty to do.”

The Professor interrupted. “Kid, we’re not dismissing you. That’s just something that Madeline asked me to do with her on our own.” His face dropped and his eyes lowered sheepishly.

Charlie smacked him on the arm. “Gorilla, don’t be a loser. It has nothing to do with you. Get over it!”

“Fine.” His voice forlorn.

“Applesauce, you idiot. They’re talking about having sex!”

Charlie was blunt, and her words shocked him out of his pouting mood.

Gorilla backed until he was behind them, and Charlie followed.

Alvaro motioned for them to continue.

The treacherous terrain slowed them down a bit, and it felt like hours until they reached the edge of the noisy jungle, but Alvaro had brought them out at a different location.

“Where are we now Alvaro?”

“Professor, we are closer to town. I bypassed the trail leading to the artifact. Those gunshots were coming from that direction. If you want to go back and see if they found them, I would suggest to do so on a different day once the area is clear of such criminals.”

“Okay, sure. That makes sense. How far is the town?”

“About another hour’s walk. We’ll be able to sleep there tonight.”



He patted Alvaro on the back. “Good job.”

His thoughts went immediately back to Madeline’s finely sculptured peaks, and he quickly got lost in his thoughts. Tonight then. Even at his age, he was eager to ride her waves and hopefully continue to ride them all night long.

He turned and looked at Gorilla, but the kid averted his eyes. Embarrassment ate the kid.

The Professor spoke to no one in particular. “Only an hour out from the town.”

They continued their move forward and never ran into anyone from the group of scavengers and criminals that raced toward the artifact. He wanted to go out again in about three days to check the kid’s map and see if the others retrieved the artifact. The gunshots led him to believe someone had found something, and they fought over it.

It was possible that the gangsters were killing anyone in their path, or that no one had discovered anything yet. They couldn’t stay here today because adventures always have to end.

No more thinking about it. Sarantos couldn’t wait to eat a decent meal. All was right with their world — provided they were dealing with some amnesia.

It seemed like hours instead of one hour by the time they finally arrived in town.

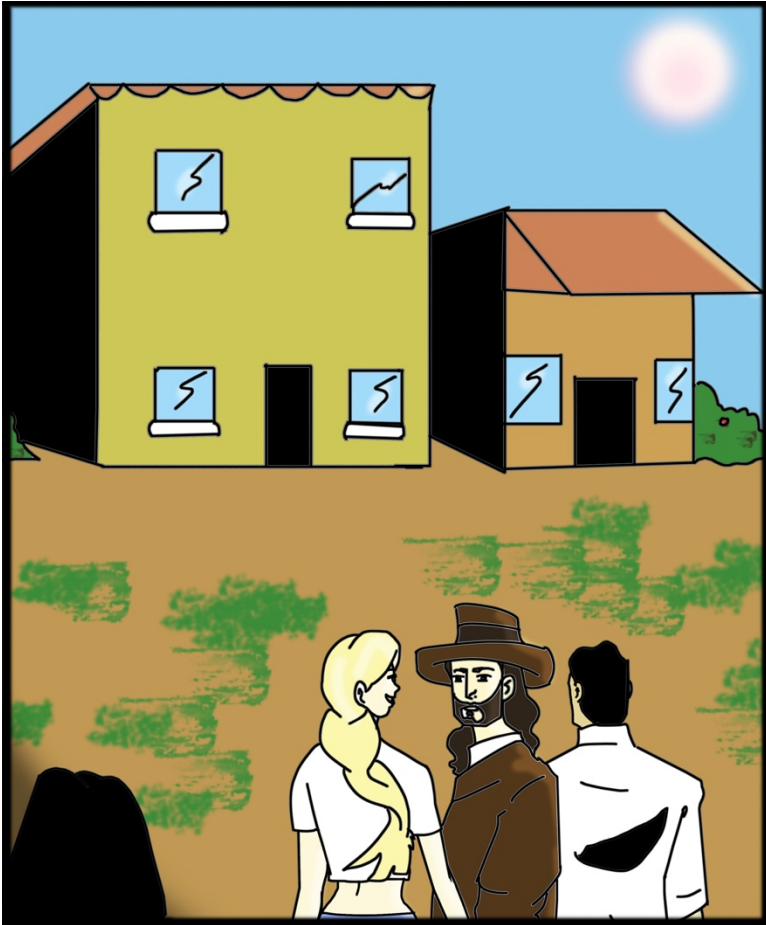
It was dusk and the cooler evening was a relief to their dry, sunburned skin. The falling sunset was lighting up the sky

behind the mountains with vibrant reds, oranges, and pinks. The small group stopped and turned to admire the beauty of the sky.

The kid pulled Charlie closer to him and they stood there under the colorful background. If he were a painter, he would want to paint them.

He looked over at Madeline. Her sly smile hinted at a deeper secret. Love was making him think deeply again.

The Professor thought of pulling Madeline into him and enjoying her body next to his, but it wasn't appropriate. He also thought about just hugging her.



Madeline smiled at him, as though she read his mind, and slipped her hand into his, leaning up against his body.

The long journey and returning without the artifact was worth the hassle because he met Madeline. He felt so calm, his heart rate seventy. At least, they were bringing something back that might be useful later in history and if it was real, his name would be linked to the find. That's something for

the history books. You can't always get what you want, but sometimes you can try to get what you need. Maybe he also found love?

Alvaro stood next to him and breathed a sigh of relief. "Well, Professor, that's an amazing sunset, and I don't know about you, but I'm hungry and can't wait another minute."

"I agree. Let's eat everyone."

They swiftly walked to their hotel and went to their respective rooms to clean the dust and grime from their bodies before reconvening at the dining area.

"Kid, hurry." He stood at Gorilla's door, showered and ready for dinner.

Behind the door, the kid yelled. "Coming Doc."

The door opened and there stood the kid and Charlie, sparkling like young lovers.

"You two kids are golden and beautiful. I'm so proud of you and I'm so happy for you."



“Shucks, Doc.” The kid winked at Charlie. “We are, aren’t we?”

Her smile lit up the darkened hallway. “Yes, we are golden and beautiful!”

They hurried downstairs and grabbed a table by the window.

Alvaro walked in as they were about to sit down. That man was as handsome as American movie stars, and all the ladies in the room turned to drink in an unobstructed view of the gorgeous man. Of course, he winked at each female in the room as he passed them. He played the room like a movie star.

The waiter came, and they ordered drinks while waiting for Madeline.

She sure was taking a long time. He worried she might decide to leave and forget their night together.

It wouldn't be the first time he'd run up against a female that walked away.

He tried to make small talk, but his mind was on her two peaks and his stomach growled.

The waiter came by again for their orders. Gorilla would not wait any longer, so he placed his order. The waiter went around the table, getting everybody's orders ending in front of Sarantos. Then, a goddess came into the room. A vision worth the wait.

Her golden hair hung down to her waist, wavy from her braids, and fell against her tanned, glistening skin. She wore a white silky gown that clung to her figure like they painted it on while her jewelry and diamonds on her red shoes sparkled each time light hit them.

“Love is forever, baby.”

He barely spoke the words.

“What Doc?”

“Nothing kid.”

The Professor quickly stood up to help her to her seat.

This was it. He felt it inside his heart. After all these years, love simultaneously touched his heart and his soul, and he knew he'd never be the same. Sometimes, it takes a certain someone to make you realize who you are.

She was the one, the light, the love symbol of his tomorrow.

Madeline squeezed his hand and smiled. It was simple; it was deep, and it didn't matter if he wasn't young anymore.

He was about to ride the best wave of his life. You jump into the unknown and you're set free.

He didn't care anymore. He just didn't care about anyone or anything but her.

