

Chapter 6

“Olympic Games”



The morning sun was cruel, creeping into the cave and burning the body of the woman he wanted to marry. It landed on her skin, highlighting everything his fingertips were missing. He could hear and smell her from across the cave as the sunlight danced across her shell.

It's what they'd done in the dark that gave the sunlight the air of evil. It pushed the memories of them into the light. The cave shook him as the angel disappeared.

It hurt like hell. But he needed to keep in mind how she must've felt too. It was the sacrifice, the sacrifice that she made for them, for their lives. The sacrifice she made and continues to make in the dark.

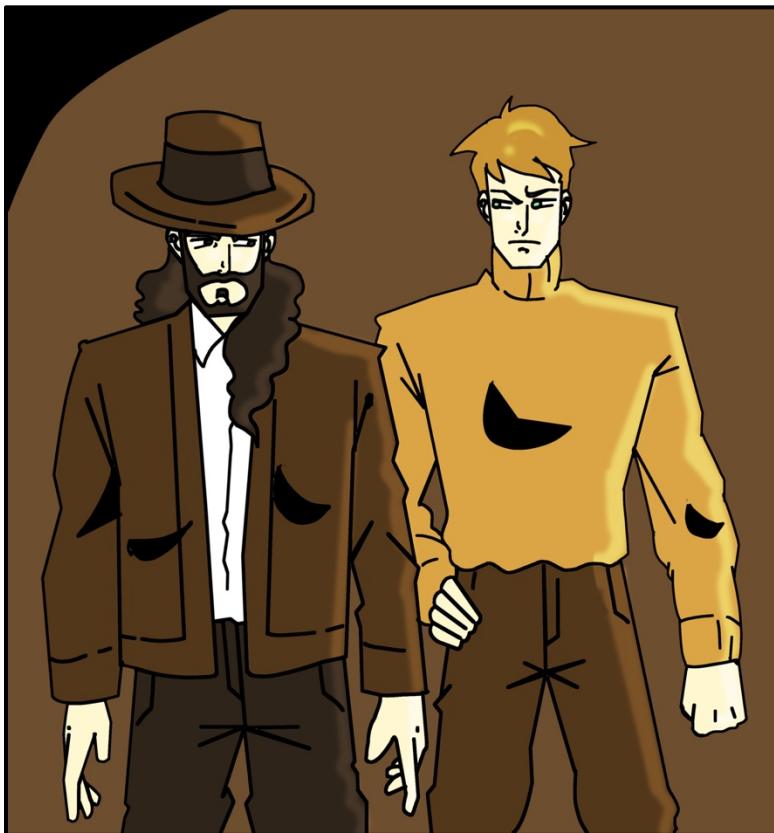
Then he remembered their noises last night, way into the wee hours of morning. The commotion did not sound like a harsh sacrifice. Not at all. He wanted to throw up.

Everyone was still sleeping except for whatever his name was. Had the giant been up all night? Maybe he did not need to sleep much like mere mortal men?

The giant had a swagger and obviously represented his people well with his mighty, motivated, muscled, and mythical stature.

It hadn't mattered. They probably would not have worked out long term. Marriage is a strong word. He wasn't really the marrying kind, anyway. That thought would have to keep him on track and help him transfer his disappointment to the mission.

The kid stirred.



“Hey, ya, Doc. Lord, I couldn’t sleep last night. The noise they made was worse than barking wild dogs howling at the moon.” He wiped his eyes. “Are you okay? Sorry, Doc, I didn’t mean to put thoughts into your head.”

His sensitivity was overwhelming.

“No worries, I’m fine, kid. You know that I’ve never been the marrying kind. You know that about me, right? Too

stifling and I can't be tied down. I'm a rambling man." It's amazing that he could do gymnastics while sitting on the cave floor.

"Yeah, Doc, a rambling man for sure." The kid smiled and sat up. "Bees knees, it's warm in here. I need water and coffee, and I don't care what order it comes in."

"Agreed. Let's get a fire going, kid." He stood up and prompted him to follow his lead. He did.

The two men moved past the giant, who watched them like a hawk. Catalina's new husband didn't look tired. He looked like he wanted to bump him off. Such thoughts can consume a great deal of emotional bandwidth within a mind.

"Did you see the way he looked at you? He wanted to wipe you out. That's what I think." The kid moved further into the jungle and glanced over his shoulder, as though he wondered if the giant would follow them.

"Exactly my thoughts. I hope this journey works out. I suppose we should be glad she came along and was the marrying type, and sacrificed herself for us, or we might all be a breakfast on a spitfire."

The kid shot him a look that made his face squish into a series of wrinkles that turned him into a bulldog right before he shuddered.

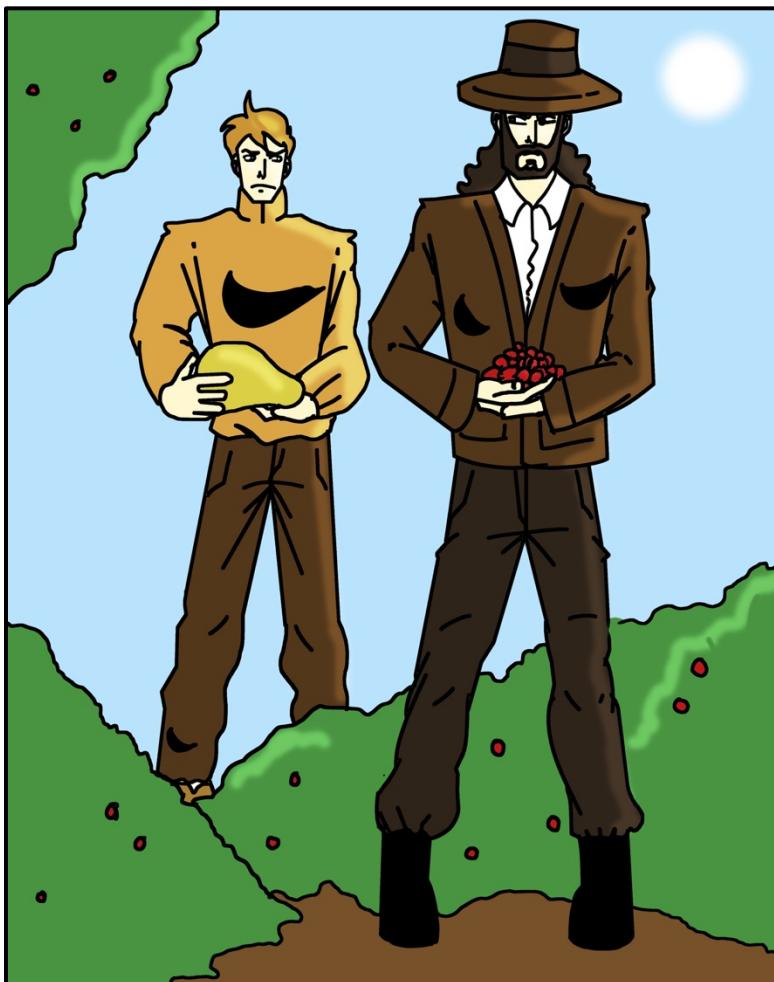
“And how, Doc, and how.”

He bent down and picked up some kindling. His stomach growled. The Professor had eaten a little last night, and today he felt the effects of undernourishment.

“Hey kid, I’m starved. Let’s see if we can find any food, berries, meat, anything.”

“Sure, Doc. I feel famished myself.”

The Professor glanced upwards. The sky was as emotional as he was. To the left sun, to the right dark clouds.



At least an hour had passed by the time they re-approached the cave opening. They had two distinct types of berries and an exotic-looking fruit. They weren't sure what was edible, so they brought it back to be checked out by the natives who were more familiar with the surrounding foods.

The kid lifted his head into the air, sniffing like a dog.
“What’s that smell?”

Sarantos did the same. “I’m not sure. Smells good though.”

“Hey Doc, it’s coming from the cave.”

The smell of freshly cooked meat made their mouths water as they hurried faster towards the opening, nearly sprinting when the cave’s mouth met them with open arms.

The aroma was heavenly.

Like the movement of the ocean tides, there was the giant cooking with one of their pots. It looked like a variety of meat with some interesting herbs and flakes of something colorful, maybe a vegetable or fruit.

The giant had the girls gathered around him with plates, eagerly waiting to be served.

As the Professor turned, the kid already had a plate in hand and had joined them in line.

“Doc, look at that. A perfect breakfast, just what we were looking for and didn’t find.”

“Rub it in kid.” He muttered under his breath, “It’s like you’ve put me in a lifeboat and sent me across the stars.”

His initial reaction was anger, but he realized quickly he was wrong. He couldn’t help but feel good about it. He was hungry, and the smell was indeed intoxicating.

The Professor got in line and held out his plate. Everything after that was a blur.

Everyone laughed, talked, and ate like they were at a pleasant picnic. The berries they brought back were edible and sliced, made a deliciously flavorful addition to the meat dish. It was a win for all.



It amazed him how comfortable Catalina and the man she married were together. If anyone saw them, they would've thought they'd known each other for years. They seemed very much in love. His heart ached, but he swallowed hard and continued to enjoy his meal. There's only one way to stand still, but many ways to go forward. And go forward, he must.

The first bit of conversation that he heard clearly was when Charlie spoke.

“Catalina, I’m so happy for the two of you. I think you make a great couple. How many days are we away from our destination?”

“About two days, possibly three. It depends on the rains and insect bites. Anything out of the ordinary could slow us down, though,” confessed Catalina.

The Professor noticed how she averted her eyes from him. He was okay with that because it would hurt to crack the depths of them and see pain, or worse, happiness. Why did their instant fondness upset him? He was also willing to marry her just after meeting her, too. There was something about her. What had he been thinking?

He suddenly had an urge to continue the journey on his own, or just him and the kid. Women were too complicated, and this was getting them nowhere fast. If they hadn’t had Catalina with them in the first place, the natives might have ignored them. The Chief might’ve been looking for a bride for his son and they found a beautiful woman for the taking. He continued to rationalize that women complicate everything.

The civilized world was crazy. As the conversation continued all around him, he calmed down. His breathing slowed. Maybe this might be the way to live, Catalina looked happy.

In a heartbeat, his mood flipped again. Adrenaline spiked and his pupils got smaller. There were too many people on this adventure. He didn't need anyone else; he was better by himself.

It had taken him a long time to get to the stage he was at in life. The Professor refused to lose track of where he was and how hard it had been to get there. He represented the prime character of someone that turned his dreams into reality. He was the master of this adventure, just like he always was.

No more thinking. It served no purpose. He interrupted and announced, "I need the map of this area, and then you can all head back to your homes. I'm going out on my own and taking the kid with me."



Mouths dropped.

Charlie lost the berries she was about to put into her mouth. She got angry and her cheeks grew flushed. “Bloody hell. What am I supposed to do then?”

She wouldn’t like his answer, but he didn’t address her. Instead, he looked over at Catalina. “Make sure she gets back into town and find her a comfortable hotel.”

Catalina was shaking her head and denied what she heard.
“You can’t go alone. It’s too dangerous.”

“I can and I will. I’ve faced danger before, many times all over the world and without all of you. It’ll be safer and quicker without so many people holding us back.” His words sounded brutal.

“What the hell? I’ve been with you on journeys, and being brutally honest, sometimes you wouldn’t have made it back without me. I’m coming with you.” Charlie’s face was tomato red, and now she was on her feet in a fighting stance.

His voice lowered. “No, you’re not, Charlie. I’m in charge of this mission and you will return to the city. You have two options, you can fly back to the states, or you can wait for us. We will be quicker alone, probably only two weeks.”



The kid continued to stuff food in his mouth and nodded his head in agreement.

Charlie turned his way, which was unfortunate for the kid. She raised her hand and knocked the bread out of his hand right before he took another bite.

“Bushwa, Charlie. Why’d you do that? It wasn’t my decision. It’s for stuff like that the Doc wants to go it alone. Too much emotion in your veins.”

She hit him upside the head again. “You kidding me? It might as well be your decision; you’re not sticking up for me. Emotion! You haven’t seen emotion yet, frat boy. Wait until you get back.”

“Why do you always have to be a bluenose? Girls! I’d rather date a bearcat.”



The kid went too far.

“You louse, you cake-eater, you bimbo. I outta hit you harder on the conk, the first two times didn’t work, apparently.” Charlie was raging.

She moved to the cave opening. It appeared she’d given up, but the Professor would be surprised if that was the case.

He needed to speak up. “Look, it’s my decision, my journey, my mission. There’s nothing left to say. Pack it up, kid we should head out in a few.”

“Doc, I need my strength. Be with you in a minute.” He picked up the bread on the cave floor, brushed it off, and chewed away.

The kid would eat anything. Survival.

Senta looked confused over what was happening, but Catalina ignored her husband and stared at the Professor until he looked away. She quickly realized there was nothing she could do to change his mind.

Alvaro said, “What’s wrong with you? At least take me with you. I can help and I move quickly.”

The native had a point. He wouldn't slow them down. It would be convenient if they ran into a situation. This territory was treacherous.

"Yeah, okay. You can go. Let's get moving."

"Thank God you showed some sense," said Catalina.

"I have a map, and we'll be fine. Professor, I'm not a chump and you won't regret taking me."

"I know. We could use you."

They packed up their belongings. All the while, Charlie wouldn't look at them and paced the cave like a lion about to attack but waiting for the right opportunity.



The kid approached her and grabbed her by the arm.

“Let go of me, you... you dingus!”

“Don’t be that way, Charlie. I’ll miss you. Can’t I have a hug or something? What if I bite the bullet? You’ll be sorry you didn’t say goodbye.”

Her eyes threw daggers.

The Professor couldn’t stand by and say nothing. “Knock it off, Charlie. It was entirely my decision, not his. Now give the kid a smooch.”

She growled and turned away.

“Professor, you are a louse, as well. How could you do this to me? I am your student. We’ve shared many adventures. I’ve held my own. Let me be angry!”

“I know you have, and this has nothing to do with your abilities. I’m tired of the drama we face on this mission. Please go with Catalina and let us go this one time on our own. We’ll bring you on the next one, I promise.” He was trying his hardest to not act how he felt.

Her eyes clipped his heart. Lucky it wasn't a real gun. It would be like Chicago lightning. The escalator of reason was nowhere to be found.

"You'll be sorry, Professor." She turned and walked away without giving the kid the time of day. Poor kid.



"That's cold, Charlie," said Gorilla.

The Professor looked towards Catalina. "Make sure Charlie gets back safe." She could smell the lies hidden in his heart.

“Sure, Professor.”

Ouch, she called him Professor. He ignored it and threw his sacks over his shoulder and followed Alvaro out into the warm sunshine. He heard the kid behind him running to catch up.

“Man Doc, she’s cruel.”

Gorilla moved next to him and had a small knife in his hand. The kid would never quit. He would keep dreaming of future bright nights spent with Charlie.

The naïve kid needed a little advice. “Kid, it’s all copacetic. You need to quit carrying a heavy torch for Charlie. It’s a crush kid, nothing but a crush. We need to focus on what we’re actually here for and move on. Charlie will be okay. She always is.”

He knew Charlie wasn’t okay, but the kid didn’t need to hear that right now. She might never get over what they did, but he didn’t have time to worry about someone else’s feelings right now.

“Sure, Doc. She’ll be fine.” The kid’s voice didn’t reflect his words.

Alvaro was moving quicker than they were. Sarantos picked up his pace. The kid followed.

He was sweating already. They pushed on becoming dripping wet in a heartbeat. He wanted to remove his hat, but that wouldn't be advisable in the scorching heat. At least the sweat went somewhere and didn't run down his face. At this pace, he'd put out enough sweat to fill at least one of the seven seas.

Alvaro stopped suddenly in front of them and took out a giant knife, like a small machete. He started hacking grasses in front of him and looked back.

"We will need to do this for about two miles. I'll start and then we'll take turns to keep up a brisk pace without feeling exhausted. It'll give each of us a break."

"Sure," Sarantos agreed.

The two miles seemed like two days. They ran into several poisonous spiders and large spiky plants. Luckily, Alvaro was with them. Although the Professor knew a lot about these things, it was good to have local help. He hated bats and hoped they'd see none, but he knew better.

His mind wandered back to the girls and hoped they'd be okay. When it'd been his turn to hack at the grasses, it had given him a chance to think about all he'd sacrificed to be in the position he was in, to just go when he wanted for a dig or in search of an artifact.



Excuses don't get results. The cutting of the grass was great therapy. It's the hard work and time, it's the sacrifice...