

Chapter 9

“Written On My Stone”

It felt like they'd been walking for days, but it had only been a few hours at most. He could tell by the position of the sun in the sky. The day felt heavy.



The sweat ran like a river. The land offered no icy relief, except for when they got to a heavily forested turn which led to a welcoming pool of water. His skin drank in the humidity. The slow draining sun above continued to be relentless. Nasty nagging cramps shot throughout his legs. The many days of walking on rough terrain had taken its toll.

Is it wrong to wonder where you are? Who you are? Why you are? A lot of times, curiosity takes you to some very weird places.

He looked up. It was too quiet except for the exotic birds that seemed to rejoice in his misery. Their chatter was repeating the same rant over and over; here lies a simple man. It was like they were mocking his impending death, foreshadowing its inevitability. The black, strange-looking birds flew in a circle over him. Their confidence was unshakeable. They were waiting patiently.

He complained - to let them and the surrounding world know he was still kicking and able to voice his uncensored rhetorical observation for the day. "Shut-up ya' stupid birds, I'm not dead yet!"

They ignored him.

The Professor continued ranting. “What the hell’s wrong with this weather? It’s horribly hot, and I’ve got a knot in my gut that keeps telling me I should’ve stayed home. Why am I out here chasing the Nobel prize?” Was he the only one who regrets the things he’s done.

“Then what the hell you complaining for Doc? You’ve got a brilliant plan, now let’s make it work,” said Gorilla.

“Oh, my boy. You’re still a young lad, ever the optimist, but you’re right. I thought we’d have more adventure walking through this land’s steamy tropical jungles. Nothing exciting has happened here, though. Hate to say this out loud, but this is boring!” That last word hung in the air.

Charlie piped in. “Be careful what you wish for Professor. We should be thankful that we aren’t

running into natives or dinos regularly. Boring is good for us.”

“Yeah, Doc, careful what you wish for.”

“I suppose you’re right. This heat is frying my brain. This may seem like a stupid question, but do you kids consider me a hard worker?”

“Sure Doc, you’re the hardest working son of a bitch I’ve ever met.”

“Absolutely, Professor,” chimed in Charlie as she smiled widely.

Neither one sounded convincing. Their words were there, but the way they said it left a pit in his gut, and it drove right through the middle of the knot and into his knees. Both legs felt weaker than they were. It was almost as if they were ridiculing him.



The birds pecked once more at his mind. Squawk, ‘humble man who never quits.’ Good lord.

It felt like a desert out here, and he was actively hallucinating. The sky suddenly darkened, probably another hallucination. He continued walking and mumbling.

“Professor, look out!”

Charlie’s scream brought him out of his la la dreamland and back to reality. This was no hallucination.

Two giant pterodactyls were swooping in on their prey.

Gorilla screamed. “Someone rang their lunch bell. Incoming!”

They were caught in the open. There was nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. His pulse quickened. He saw one swoop down on Charlie. Her scream vibrated his heart sending shivers down his body. Gorilla shot it with a sling shot, but it just bounced off the tough hide of the reincarnation of the long extinct dinosaur.

The drawn-out, dagger-like claws reached out for her neck, promising a hearty meal for the bird’s young ones. Without hesitation, he took out his gun, aimed for the head and shot.

The ancient dinosaur screeched in agony, causing its partner to momentarily look away from the prey.

Gorilla grabbed Charlie and pulled her out of harm's way as the giant bird fell to the earth that was waiting below like an overprotective mother. It now lay dead, baking under the unforgiving sun.

Sarantos only had five bullets left. Suddenly, without thought, the rope was in his hands and he was attempting to lasso the head of the remaining pterodactyl. His grin hurt. Now this was what he called an adventure.



Gorilla panicked. His mouth fell open, and he grabbed one of his self-made spears and waited. "Bushwa, Doc! You're mad!"

He felt his chest protruding, like it always did when he was proud of himself. He glanced at Gorilla, and his grin deepened into one that belonged to a sadistic demon. “As you would say, kid, don’t be a bluenose!”

“What the hell, Professor,” Charlie reached for a dagger.

“Put that away, kid, it won’t help you here!”

“Professor, use your gun. Don’t take any wooden nickels!” Gorilla was racing towards him with his spear ready to pierce the dinosaur heart.

“This is my chance kid. An adventure, to be sure!”

The pterodactyl was cautious and screamed like its life was already being drained from its massive body. It wasn’t stupid. One of the dynamic duos was already dead, and its lunch was fighting back.

“Whoopee!” He’d finally gone mad. He was sick of the defeat painted across his face. His heart was scared and scarred from the never-ending race to prove himself to the science world. He would bag a pterodactyl. Who’d ever done that?? “Kid, there’ll never be another chance like this one. I’m fighting human nature...”

“I’m on board, Doc. I’m not a wurp!” Gorilla raced in when he saw the rope go around the dinosaur’s neck. “You got ‘em, Doc. What a fantastic sockdollager!”

“Great, kid.” All his teeth were showing until the beast pulled him with it into the sky.

The screech it made was deafening.

“Hang on tight, Doc.”



Gorilla threw the spear right into the side of the muscular body as its wings drew down to gain height.

The pterodactyl was hurt and plunged down, lowering the Professor back to the earth. The Professor was relieved when his boot touched the ground.

The creature was screaming and flailing about. Other animals all around looked in their direction, checking what all the commotion was about. The Professor pulled the rope, forcing the bird's head into the ground. He backed up bringing it further

down. Out of nowhere, Charlie ran up to it and stabbed it into the eye with her dagger, dodging back and forth between its flailing great beak and claws.

Gorilla let out a primal scream. “Whoopee, if that wasn’t hotsy-totsy, I don’t know what is.”

Charlie turned and grinned, then bowed. “Thank you, kind sir.”

The Professor confessed, “I have to agree Charlie, very pleasing to the eye, watching you hurl yourself onto the battlefield like that. What a gal you are!”

She turned and bowed again, this time facing the Professor. Nobody runs forever.

They all burst out laughing. They stood there in an insane kind of way until Gorilla broke it up. “What are we waiting for? I’m sure it tastes like chicken. Who’s game?”

“Good idea kid, but it won’t be long before the death of these beasts brings other beasts.”

Gorilla and Charlie were already gathering wood to make a fire. Charlie wasn’t shy. She retrieved her dagger out of the eye and started slicing up sections of the gigantic bird. “No time to pluck, we must eat the insides, it’s big enough.”

The Professor and Gorilla got the fire going in no time. It seemed comforting somehow, like a long-lost companion. He couldn’t remember the last time they sat around a fire cooking an actual meal. The aroma stirred up memories of childhood camping trips with his father. Soon, they were eating one of the tastiest meals they’d had in days. When you’re hungry, anything passes for a good meal.

“Sorry, Gorilla, but this might be better than your Baby Ruth bars.”

“No way, Doc. They’re both great and taste just the same. And it’s Babe Ruth bars.”

“Sure, kid, whatever you say.”



Gorilla pulled out a tired bag that had a sealed container in it. He smiled. “I brought this just in case we found something nice. And looks like we finally did.” He packed up some cooked meat, sealed it and put it in his backpack.”

Charlie was skeptical. “Is that a good idea? These mammals have a keen sense of smell.”

“Don’t care, we got the Doc. What animal would mess with him?” Everyone becomes a problem eventually.

“For sure,” Sarantos said while tucking in his lasso and patting it in place.

Charlie was relentless. “Well, you stay in the back then, and when you become someone else’s dinner, we’ll eat those leftovers and dream about you.”

“Sure Charlie. Let’s blouse!”

“Good idea, kid. We don’t want to become a snack.”

They’d walked for hours, scaling some small hills and rocky terrain, while listening to the ongoing battles in the background of hungry animals. Maybe they were fighting over what they left behind with the two corpses.

The sun was setting. The crunch of the fallen leaves under their feet disturbed the silence of the forest, the bugs scurried up the trees; the moment glowed.

They needed a place to sleep, and it didn't look like a cave was an option tonight. It would be under the stars then. That made Professor Sarantos nervous. The world was upside down and so were they.

Charlie insisted they walk a little further. They got lucky and somehow found what appeared to be a ruin. It was actually an aged hut made from a solid tree that had withstood the conditions of the harsh land. He didn't feel safe, but it was all they found. It would be better than being out in the open.



The interior had vines growing all over it. They were barren, almost whispering a warning. Before they made their home for the night, they checked thoroughly for spiders of the giant kind, or any kind. Being poisoned was not on the agenda. They still had three of the flowers, but the Professor wasn't sure if it would heal every poison in this world. It would be the first thing they'd try if anything happened, though.

It wasn't dark yet. There were pockets of light bouncing in the shadows. The water hole was about 500 yards away, not far enough, but it would have to do. The hut had no door, so they gathered some brush. After they all went inside the small makeshift hotel, the Professor placed it over the opening and used vines to tie it in place.

“Doc, that'll never keep out the big ones.”

“Yeah, I get it kid, but better something than nothing, right?”

“That’s right, Professor. At least it has no windows. Hopefully, they assume whatever’s in here is not worth the hassle.”

“Duh, Charlie, there’re no windows because it’s not that close together, you can peek through the gaps and see outside. Appears bright, might be a full moon tonight.”

“Great,” said the Professor.

Charlie pointed at Gorilla, “Yep. The beasts get wild during a full moon. Doc, you need to sleep in between us. I don’t want him getting any ideas and beasting out.”

“Sure, kid.”

Gorilla took offense. “What about the Doc? He has those weird dreams with hickies and real physical play. I wouldn’t get too close to him if I were you, Charlie, girly girl.” There’s pain without love, but also no love without pain.

“Oh, yeah. I guess I’m not safe locked in here at all with you two abused animals. This could be more dangerous for a girl than sleeping with hungry dinosaurs on the prowl under a starless sky.”

“I’m good, Charlie,” said the Professor, giving Gorilla a look that put slits in his eyes and made his nose wrinkle.”

Gorilla turned away and opened his backpack. “Well, I don’t know about you two, but I’m hungry and tired.”



They quietly ate the last of the meat and one candy bar each. When dinner was over, the yawns ran full circle.

“I’ve been thinking about what I would want written on my stone if I died in this place,” blurted out the Professor.

Gorilla sat back and said, “I give, what stone?”

“Well, the stone.”

“No, I don’t know.”

Charlie’s face went red. “What are you talking about your tombstone for? Are you planning on dying and leaving us to lasso our own pterodactyl?”

“What?” Gorilla perked up. He sat up, staring at him with such a fierce look that the kid forced him to turn away.

“No, I’m not planning on dying soon, but I was thinking about it today on our walk.”

“Our walk? You’ve got to be kidding me. Doc, I thought you were nuts when you pulled out your rope. I was glad it wasn’t your whip, but now you tell us on our little stroll you were thinking about what to put on your headstone?”

“Yes.”

“Why?” Charlie’s voice cracked.

“I don’t know. I wanted your opinion. If something happens to me, you’re the only ones I can count on to do me right.”

“Oh, is that all?” said Gorilla.



“Fire away,” said Charlie.

“Okay. What if it said, here lies a simple man...”

Gorilla's laughter stopped him. "Oh, man Doc, you've got it all wrong. No way in hell are you a simple man." He glanced at Charlie and laughed even louder. "What do you think, Charlie? Do you see a simple man here between us?"

She smiled. "Not even close. Wrong start, Professor, and sort of weird."

"Wow. Ok. What about here lies a humble man?"



The laughter roared back even louder as the two kids held their mouths, not wanting to draw any attention from the death march outside.

“Doc, you humble? You’re pulling my strings. That you said humble shows you’re not.”

“What?”

“Professor if you’re humble you don’t really know it, that’s part of being humble. When you say it yourself, that’s kind of conceited. Just my opinion.”

His face heated. He didn’t like the way the conversation was going. “Wow. Okay, so I’m a hard worker, can we say that?”

“Nope,” said Gorilla with a hint of mischief.

“Why not?”

“It’s all your own opinion about you? Shouldn’t it be another’s opinion about you?”

“Not really. Alright, what would you two say then?”

Gorilla said, “I’m not sure I want to blow up that ego any more than it already is, but here goes nothing. Here lies a man of epic adventure, a steadfast believer in bringing knowledge to the world.”

“Oh, I want to go next,” giggled Charlie. “Here lies Professor Sarantos, adventurer, teacher, publisher, and a man who discovered many other worlds. And in fine print underneath that - but took his two students with him to use as body shields and food getters.”

Both kids started laughing.

“Good night!”

He heard them chuckling for a while and thought maybe his youth had ignored the truth of troublesome times, because things seemed easier. There must be a reason we land where we do, he reasoned.

Suddenly, he heard her whisper his name, then felt her close. Her breath warmed his neck. This was the only way to live and get through it all. He closed his eyes.

Dreaming helped him escape. She bit his lip. He was alone. Alone with his thoughts, his words. His words echoed off the hidden corners of his mind. The darkness swallowed him whole...

