



Quest

by

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PART 1

CHAPTER 1

Bhutan--June

Ty opened his eyes. The dim light in the room lent an ethereal quality to the space, leading Ty to question whether he was truly awake. Nearby, a kneeling figure wearing a voluminous kira, was stirring a pot over a small stove. A sheet of obsidian hair, waving in sync with her movements, hid the figure's face. Ty contented himself with watching the shimmering movement with fascination for some moments more. The quietness, along with the slight movement, lulled him.

The figure raised her head and looked at him. Ty's eyes flew wide open as he remembered her kneeling and whispering over his father's body. The memory of the vicious attack that led to his death sickened Ty.

"Please, you drink." She extended a cup to him.

Ty hesitated. She could be giving me a drug, he thought.

A look of understanding crossed her face. "It is tea only." She smiled widely, as if to reassure him.

Her smile startled him, making his heart pound. Ty was sure the whole room became brighter. He wondered if there was a light behind her. The girl was the most strikingly beautiful person he had ever seen, with dark, tilted, teardrop-shaped eyes and brown, satin skin.

How can a person affect me like this? My fever was so high I was delirious before I got here. Am I still hallucinating? I'll drink it. That'll prove whether I'm dreaming.

He pushed himself up, leaned on one elbow, and took the tea. It was hot and yes, it was only tea. Ty thought about the young monk from Trongsa Dzong. He had told him that if you are

aware you are dreaming, while you are still dreaming, then enlightenment is not far off. He squeezed his eyes shut, confused.

I must be very sick, he thought.

“You sleep now,” the girl said, as she rose. She walked about ten paces away, sat cross-legged on the floor, and closed her eyes.

Ty watched her but she did not move. Time passed and Ty wondered if the rest of the team made it through the attack. Still, the girl did not move. The stabbing pain in his head and waves of nausea erased any urge to move and try to find the others. He settled back in his sleeping bag and dozed. When he woke she was still sitting in the same spot with her eyes closed.

New Jersey was usually warmer in May but Ty drove with his window down anyway, enjoying the cold air on his face. He pulled carefully into the long driveway, not yet used to the size and bulk of the Ford Explorer. His father, who loved to lavishly throw around his new-found money, had wanted to buy him a Range Rover. Ty opted for the Ford instead, not wanting to be singled out for an extravagant set of wheels. He paused for a moment and looked at the cold, imposing house.

It wouldn't be like this if Mom were here. For one thing, she would never have moved to a house like this. A vision, linked with longing, flashed through his mind of his old house, a cozy, well-worn cape.

Inside, the white, two-story foyer was as stark and sterile as the outside of the house. His keys resounded with an echoing clink as he tossed them onto a table near the front door and kicked off his shoes.

He thought about Jenna, on her way over, and took a few quick steps to gather some speed, then slid on his socks into the kitchen. The sun was about to set and formed long, golden fingers of light. He watched the shadows of the tree branches from outside, gently waving on the granite counter. Suddenly a large, dark presence blocked the sunlight and filled the doorway.

Ty jumped back in alarm. The shadow rushed at him and pushed him backward. Ty tried to resist but had to backpedal to hang onto his balance. His heart was pounding as the shadow laughed, pushing him onto the sofa in the family room.

“What’s the matter? A little jumpy, Ty?”

Ty relaxed as he heard his father’s voice and began to wrestle back. The two of them rolled on the floor, pushing the coffee table out of place. One of them kicked a pile of books on the floor, sending papers, handwritten notes, and books across the thick rug. Within minutes Ty’s father was laughing as he pressed his knee into Ty’s back, holding his arm behind him.

“I’m tapping out. I’m tapping out,” Ty gasped, as he felt the fibers of the rug digging into the side of his face and ear.

“Aha! I got you again!” Ty’s father laughed and released his hold.

Ty rolled onto his back and regarded his dad. “Next time *I’ll* get *you*.”

His father reached over and tousled his hair. “Not big enough yet, son...maybe someday, but not yet.” Ty’s father Vincent, was tall and muscular, giving a preview of Ty’s future body when his lanky frame filled out.

Ty rose to his knees and climbed onto the couch. “So how did it go today?”

Vincent waved a DVD, snapped open the case and smiled. “Great! Of course it was great.”

Ty had heard often enough how much he looked like Vincent, with the same chiseled

cheekbones, chin and thick brown hair. Plus, they both stood over six feet tall. Still, Ty marveled at his father's air of vain self-confidence, certain he'd never share that personality trait.

He started the DVD and fast-forwarded to the beginning of Fariba's show.

"Fariba gave me this DVD but this episode won't air for a couple more weeks."

Fariba emerged onto the stage waving both hands. The camera zoomed in for a close-up. "Today I have a very special guest. He is known worldwide and really needs no introduction. The author of *The Treasure of the Knights Templar*, the ruggedly handsome, Vincent Scalisi..."

Ty watched as Vincent walked on the stage, waving and flashing his white, movie-star smile. The camera panned the mostly female audience. Dr. Scalisi had a rock-star effect on them, producing a near hysterical response. Ty noted with disgust that some women were screaming and jumping up and down.

"Yeah, Dad, I think the Indiana Jones hat would have been over the top," Ty remarked, remembering his advice to his father that morning when the older Scalisi was deciding what to wear. His father looked enough like his movie counterpart without adding the trademark hat.

"Hah! I think you're right." He grinned at his son and redirected his attention to the television.

Fariba waited, with a little smile, looking surprised at the overwhelming response. She faced Vincent and started speaking so the audience would quiet down.

"I was looking for something a little lighter for my book club, something not quite so literary, and I came across your book. It's a fast, light read but the subject matter is deep."

Vincent leaned back with one arm slung casually across the back of the chair for a calculated, sexy effect. "You're right, Fariba. I wrote the book as a suspense novel to keep the reader interested in the material, but the fact is, I am a serious archaeologist. All the background

in the book is absolutely true. I've spent my whole career researching and investigating this subject.”

“And what a subject it is! I really could not put this book down. Could you give us a little background on the Knights Templar? Are they the guys you always see pictures of on horseback in armor, with the white frontispiece with a red cross on it?”

“Those are the guys. The Knights Templar started with a group of nine men who went to Jerusalem in the year 1118. They formed an organization of knights to protect the pilgrims from Europe who wanted to visit holy sites in Israel. However, what's strange is that they never set foot on the road to any holy sites to protect pilgrims. They were there for one specific reason...to find treasure. They knew it was right where they camped, on the site of Herod's temple and they wanted it. They must have hit the mother lode because when they returned to Europe, the Templars became an incredibly wealthy organization.”

“Okay now, for the benefit of our audience let's go back to the beginning. What exactly was Herod's temple?”

“Well, King Solomon...”

“King Solomon of the bible?” Fariba interrupted.

“Yes, the King who built the temple to Yahweh and I'm sure you've heard he had a fabulous treasure.”

Fariba nodded. “King Solomon's treasure.”

“His temple was destroyed, ruined. Many years later King Herod built another, much more expansive, elaborate temple on the same site in Jerusalem.”

“And the treasure? What was that all about?”

“In 66 A.D. the Jews revolted against Roman rule. The Romans cracked down on them

and by 70 A.D. it was apparent the Jewish people were losing badly.” Vincent leaned forward, hands clasped together. He managed to look both scholarly and like a matinee idol. “They were being slaughtered. The only thing for them to do was to hide all their treasure in the miles of networked tunnels underneath the temple.”

“What exactly was the treasure?”

“The treasure is both material wealth that they excavated, plus secret, esoteric knowledge.”

“The material treasure--was it gold and jewels?”

Dr. Scalisi laughed. “There were rumors that possibly it was religious artifacts. They kept the Ark of the Covenant in the temple. It could have been the ark or a piece of the true cross, the Holy Grail, or even the head of John the Baptist. It was also widely believed to be unimaginable riches beyond compare...619 vessels made of silver and gold...”

“Now how does anybody know that?” Fariba looked at her audience skeptically. “Six hundred and nineteen vessels...”

The audience twittered.

“Well when the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered in 1947 in Qumran, near Jerusalem, they found a copper scroll that described the hiding place of the treasure and exactly what was hidden.”

“Oh, but if this scroll was not discovered until 1947, how did the Knights Templar know where the treasure was hidden? How did they even know there was a treasure in the first place?”

“This is the most interesting part of what we believe happened, the thread that ties it all together.” Vincent leaned forward conspiratorially. He announced in a quiet, dramatic voice, “The Jewish high priests inherited their positions, fathers passing those positions down to sons

for many years.”

“When the Romans were about to destroy the temple, the high priests knew they had to preserve not only the treasure, but all the secret knowledge they had in their possession since ancient times. Because of their inherited positions, they held secret, esoteric knowledge that dated back to when their people were enslaved in Egypt.”

“So then?”

“So then the high priests took the treasure, hid it all under the temple and fled for their lives. They took the knowledge of where it was hidden with them.”

“But where did they go?”

“All over Europe, blending in with the local population. They appeared to be like the locals but they retained the secret, passing it from father to oldest son for generation after generation. We believe they became the ultra-secret group known as the Rex Deus, which means the Kings of Gods.”

“Do you really think that Jewish high priests could go to foreign countries and blend in?”

“Yes. To preserve the bloodline of King David and Aaron, the brother of Moses, they adopted the religions of the countries where they fled. They were faithful to those religions as long as they professed a belief in one God. Their real purpose was to maintain their bloodline until the day they could come forth when the kingdom of God on earth was established.”

“Fascinating, Dr. Scalisi. You’ve given us a lot to think about. I’m going to take a quick break and come right back to this intriguing story. Be right back.”

Vincent hit the pause button, turned and faced his son. “Great, right? This is going to bring in a whole new audience for the book.”

“You didn’t need this, Dad.” Ty thought about how so many authors wanted more than

anything to be picked for Fariba's book club. It meant that an obscure, poorly selling book could go directly onto the *New York Times* bestsellers list. It meant instant fame and wealth. But *The Treasure of the Knights Templar* was already world famous, successful beyond anyone's expectations.

"I know," Vincent laughed. "The publisher just informed me we picked up a couple more languages today."

"So what's the total?"

"We're up to twenty-two." Vincent grinned. "I don't want to stop until we're translated into Swahili, until we have a Knights Templar board game, Knights Templar video game, Knights Templar cereal and Knights Templar action figures."

"Any more bites from movie producers?" Ty was only seventeen years old but already knew the theme of his life would revolve around moviemaking.

"Don't worry, Ty. No deals unless you are involved in making the movie." Vincent sat closer to his son and put his arm around him. "This is going to be your big break too. And any production company on this planet would love to have the rights to this book. It's a matter of my finishing the screenplay and finding the best deal."

Vincent turned his attention back to the TV, aimed the control and hit the play button, but Ty was still thinking about what his dad just said. He was thrilled by the prospect of being involved but he hoped that when the time came, Vincent would remember his pledge. Vincent had a habit of making grandiose promises that never manifested. Still, he could easily leave Ty out of his search. Instead, he treated Ty like a part of the team, valuing his brilliant mind and his input.

"So, so interesting," Fariba said, looking down at the book in her hands. "Tell me,

Vincent, what became of the Knights Templar?”

“A French king had them all arrested in 1307. A few escaped his net and the Templars evolved into such organizations as Freemasonry.”

“And the Rex Deus? Do you think they still exist?”

“Oh yes, absolutely. I have been in contact with two Rex Deus that are alive today.”

“Really!” Fariba paused with genuine surprise. “And the treasure. What became of it?”

Dr. Scalisi flashed his most winsome, rakish smile at Fariba. “That is precisely what we are going to find out. Look for the sequel to the book.”

Fariba leaned in toward him and with a twinkle in her eyes, asked, “Are you close?”

Vincent flashed her his cocky, lopsided smile. “I’ll only say that we have contacts all over the world and every kind of resource at our disposal. We *are* going to find it.”

“In one of your interviews you stated that people have killed for this treasure. Is that true?”

“I assume the treasure is fabulous wealth and yes, people would kill for it. But, if it is secret, esoteric knowledge that has been withheld from the masses for millennia, then there are organizations that would kill to prevent me from publishing it.”

“Yes, but you stated someone had already been murdered,” Fariba pressed.

A fleeting dark look flashed on Vincent’s face. “A team member, in some ways, the most important team member was murdered for it.”

Fariba let the subject drop, murmuring, “I’m sorry. I didn’t know that.”

Ty wondered about his father’s statement—nobody had been murdered, not that he knew about. Was Vincent fabricating excitement to get a bigger audience for his book? Ty recalled the pain on his father’s face and thought, *I don’t think Dad’s that good of an actor.*

“Okay, I’ll leave it at that and open it up for audience questions.”

Fariba stood and pointed at an audience member. The giggling, middle-aged woman pulled the microphone out of the assistant’s hand. “Is it true, Dr. Scalisi, that you are still single and not dating anyone special and that there are some women on your team?”

Other audience members laughed quietly.

The camera flashed to Fariba, rolling her eyes and giving her “oh, brother” look.

“The women on my team are graduate students who are in the process of obtaining their doctorates. They are highly trained archaeologists.”

“And...?”

“And yes, I am still single.”

The audience laughed and Vincent lost interest in watching the interview any longer. He went into the kitchen and Ty heard him ordering dinner from the most exclusive Italian restaurant in town. Ty knew they didn’t deliver but made an exception for Vincent because he was friendly with the woman who owned it.

Vincent’s ego was riding high and he took advantage of his recent success. He went from being an unknown college professor to wealthy and famous, hanging out with celebrities, desired by women all over the world--a man who both the paparazzi and treasure seekers watched closely

Ty watched for a few more minutes without really listening to the content. His father was amazing. Where did a humble college professor learn to field questions with grace, or charmingly deflect inappropriate questions with a quick joke? The book had certainly brought out a new side to his father, one that Vincent obviously delighted and reveled in.

Ty turned off the interview and slipped his own DVD into the player, knowing that Jenna

wanted to see it.

The doorbell rang and Vincent called from the kitchen, “Your girlfriend’s here,” not bothering to open the door.

“Her name is Jenna,” Ty said as he hurried to let her in.

Jenna dropped her backpack near the doorway, flung her arms around Ty’s neck and hugged him.

Ty pulled back and admired how pretty she was, with the lightest brown eyes he had ever seen, a wide smile and thick, straight brown hair that he knew she flat-ironed every morning. His eyes traveled down to her athletic, compact body and he almost let out a happy sigh.

“You texted me that you got great secrets today. I can’t wait to see them. Who’s in them? Can I see them? I love a secret.”

“Hang on and give me a second.”

Jenna pulled his hand toward the family room. “I know Kerry told her secret today but I bet I already know it. And I’m sure I know exactly who the secret is about. I don’t think she really wants it to be a secret if she told you.”

Jenna chattered away and Ty marveled at how their personalities balanced each other. If Jenna were more like him, they’d have a mostly silent relationship. Standing in front of the TV, Ty clicked the remote on.

“Okay, let’s watch some of our friends’ innermost secrets.”

CHAPTER 2

Bhutan—June

When Ty woke again, he remembered how sick he was. He had to face the grim fact that death was a possibility. An illness that would be a nuisance in the United States had taken a deadly turn, with miles of snow-topped mountains between him and antibiotics.

The room was dark, lit only by the orange flames in the stove. The only sound was the hissing of the fire and the occasional sputter and crack of wood burning. The girl was still sitting in the same spot with her eyes shuttered. Ty watched the orange, flickering lights skip across her face as he wondered how she could sleep sitting upright. Her eyes opened and Ty noted how delicate her features were as she turned toward him.

“My father...he was dead. How did you...,” Ty’s face twisted in confusion. “I want to see him,” Ty demanded.

“Maybe better see him in morning,” she replied.

Her accent was a curious combination of both the lilting, hesitant sounds of Chinese and crisp, aristocratic British.

She regarded him for a few moments, then announced, “I am Ashi.”

“Uh, hello. My name is Tyler...Ty.” Ty assumed he was in a dzong, a fortress temple.

“Are there any monks here or are you the only one?”

“Monks? No, Tyler Ty. But many loyal disciples live here.”

“Loyal to what or who?”

“The path of light.”

Ty was silent, thinking about how Buddhism was the state religion. It was against the law for citizens to have their spiritual loyalties lie elsewhere.

“I make medicine for you now.” Ashi arose and placed brown leaves in a bowl, then poured boiling water from a teakettle into the bowl. After stirring, she poured the liquid into a cup and handed it to him. “Drink. This make you feel better.”

He sat up and took a sip. It was bitter and unpleasant but he wasn't afraid of what it might be this time. Her face was so open and innocent that he trusted her. She moved closer and put her hand close to his forehead. Ty thought she was feeling to determine if he had a fever but she didn't touch him. Her hand hovered a few inches from his brow.

He felt his forehead heat up and vibrate. As the heat became intense, almost uncomfortable, Ty suddenly felt as if he knew Ashi; she was like the moms back home, his friends' sisters, and just like Jenna. He felt connected to her, felt love pouring from Ashi to him and in response he felt a release, as if everything was okay with the world. His shoulders sagged, relaxing involuntarily. He wondered briefly if the brew was drugged but he had taken only a sip.

Ty felt his sinuses in his forehead and face open up, drain into his nasal passages and out his nose. Ty was embarrassed and disgusted.

Here I am with the most beautiful girl I've ever seen and globs of yellow and green snot are falling out of my nose, he thought.

The expression of caring did not change on Ashi's face. Unconcerned, she picked up a cloth she had ready and caught the foul discharge, still holding her other hand in front of his forehead. When it was over she sat back on her heels. With the faint odor of incense and the stronger odor of burning wood registering in his brain, Ty realized that he could smell something for the first time in a week. He felt energetic and whole. He was healed!

Months ago, Jenna persuaded Ty to work on the yearbook with her. He suggested adding

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