

A sample of
THE SECRET OF THE LOST PHARAOH
by Carolyn Arnold

CAROLYN ARNOLD

**THE SECRET
OF THE LOST
PHARAOH**

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Sample of *The Secret of the Lost Pharaoh*

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PROLOGUE

THE WESTERN DESERT, EGYPT
MONDAY, JUNE 21

THE SUN HAD BARELY BROKEN the horizon, but Alex was wide-awake and strapped into her safety harness. She had dreamed of this moment her entire life, and now that it was becoming reality, she could hardly believe it. Here she was at the age of forty and leading her first archeological dig in Egypt's Western Desert. Even more incredible was the fact that she and her team were on the brink of a monumental discovery.

They had detected a manmade tunnel that ran thirty-five feet beneath the ground and over 3,600 feet to the east. Where the tunnel ended, there was in a large open space that the ground-penetrating radar couldn't identify.

Alex stood at the opening of the hole with her site foreman, Jeff Webb; a hieroglyphics expert named Jasper Blair; and two of four laborers, Seth and Timal. They would be responsible for lowering her down.

She took a deep breath, preparing her mind for the descent and the cramped space. Her team had only dug out a well of about four feet in diameter. The position she was in when she went down would be the way she'd stay, as there would be no room to flip over.

She wiped the back of her arm across her forehead to wick away the sweat that kept dripping down her face. She pinched her eyes shut, wishing she had her favorite blue sweatband from high school, when wearing one had been all the rage—back around the time when belonging to a Tape of the Month Club was *the* thing to do.

She let her long, blond hair down from the ponytail she'd had it in and redid it, tighter this time, pulling it into a messy bun. Back home in northern Michigan, she rarely put her hair up, reserving that for times

when she was focused on her work or studies, but in this part of the world, she often wore it up. Even a warm breeze on the back of her neck was better than none at all.

“Good thing you skipped the second course last night,” Jeff teased her.

Not that size was an issue for either of them. She was lean and athletic, and while Jeff had a solid build, he was trim with narrow shoulders.

“Same goes for you,” she tossed back with a smile. She’d known him for years and worked on several digs with him. He’d been the one who had removed two of the stone bricks from the tunnel’s ceiling to create the small opening through which they could descend. He’d been down there to set up a radio module and transmitting antenna that enabled communication between whoever was underground and whoever was on the surface.

Jeff moved behind her and tightened her harness. “Ah”—she sucked air in through gritted teeth—“maybe just leave enough room for me to breathe.”

He loosened the restraints slightly. “Good?”

She managed to slip her fingers between the straps and her rib cage. “It’ll do.”

He turned to face her again. “Here’s your radio.” Jeff handed her an earpiece that worked with the radio he’d put in place.

“Talk into it for me,” he told her.

She tapped a button on the earpiece and said, “Hello, hello, hello.” She smirked at her mock echo.

Jeff laughed. “I heard you loud and clear. In surround sound, actually. All right, one more thing.” He popped a miner hat on her head, and she fastened the chin strap. “I think it’s best if we lower you feetfirst so that you can be positioned upright in the tunnel.” Jeff’s demeanor became serious.

Alex nodded and looked down again. It was a good thing that she wasn’t claustrophobic or afraid of being suspended by a rope and lowered helplessly into the ground. And while she might not battle with many fears, part of her was as terrified as she was excited about the prospect of setting foot where no one—besides Jeff briefly—had likely been in thousands of years. But this was just meant to be a brief look-see, and she’d be going solo. When she set out in earnest to explore the tunnel, she’d take members of her team with her.

She reached for the gold chain around her neck and pinched the tiny pendant that dangled from it. The Eye of Horus, also known as the Eye of

Ra, was an ancient Egyptian symbol of protection. Out here in the desert, she needed all the help she could get. She kissed it and tucked it back beneath her shirt.

“Are you ready?” Jeff asked.

She met Jeff’s eyes and flicked on the headlamp. “I’m ready.”

Jeff pulled an LED flare from his back pocket, turned it on, and tossed it into the hole. Watching the light descend emphasized just how far down it was to the tunnel.

Once it hit the ground, Jeff rolled his hand toward Seth and Timal. “You heard her. Down she goes.”

More sweat dripped from her brow, and she wiped her forehead again. And things were just heating up out here—if you could call already being a hundred degrees “just heating up.” As it was, waves of heat were cutting through the air like ribbons on the horizon, and it was only eight o’clock in the morning.

She looked around at her crew, steadying her thoughts and locking on to her resolve to make history. Great men and women made a habit of stepping outside their comfort zones, living on the edge, and testing out uncharted waters. And she wanted to be among them, to make a difference in the world by unearthing what remained of long gone great empires. Sometimes that required delving into the unknown.

She shook her fanciful musings aside. After all, they may not have discovered anything more than an empty tunnel.

She sat on the ledge, dangling her legs inside the hole. She tugged on the rope secured to her harness, which was connected to a rigging system that Seth and Timal would use to lower her. She glanced at Seth and Timal, confident in their abilities to guide her safely down and back up again. And with one more look at Jeff, she pushed off, letting herself become suspended.

Her heart thumped against her rib cage as she was lowered. She reached out and touched the makeshift walls that her men had put in place to prevent a cave-in. Her fingertips brushed against some sand, and it was slightly cool to the touch, but the air around her was still hot. A few of the granules sprinkled down the shaft.

She was only six feet beneath the ground, but she felt incredibly alone already. Although, it was also quiet and peaceful.

As Jeff’s form continued to become smaller above her and the space she was in became more shadowed, brief apprehension lanced through her. But the taunting of what lay ahead silenced her anxiety.

“Looks like you’re almost to the bottom,” Jeff said to her over the radio. She looked down. “There are probably only a few more feet to go.”

“Press the button,” Jeff shouted into the hole. “I can’t hear you.” She rectified her oversight before repeating herself.

Seth and Timal slowed the speed of the rope they were giving her, and seconds later, she was extending her feet so the tips of her boots met with the stone blocks to the sides of the opening. Straddling it, she looked down again. “I’m about five feet from the bottom,” she said into her radio.

Jeff’s voice carried down the hole as an incoherent mumble. Into the radio, he said, “They’re just going to lower you the rest of the way nice and easy. Extra slow.”

She closed her eyes briefly and replayed the ritual with her necklace in her mind. She took a deep breath, stepped back into the air, and was lowered the rest of the way.

Her feet touched the floor of the tunnel. “I’m here.” Her gaze followed the light from the flare until it met with darkness, about thirty feet or so into the tunnel. The radio module was there, and the transmitting antenna was looped and laid out on the floor.

She felt the hair rise on the back of her neck, and her sweat suddenly felt like ice pellets on her skin. She pulled out her necklace and squeezed the pendant between her fingers.

Alex drew her eyes back to the area immediately in front of her. Letting go of her pendant, she pressed her fingertips to the stone bricks that formed the walls. She pulled her hand back, looking at the sand on it before wiping it off on her pants. The walls were made of the same stone bricks as the ceiling, just as Jeff had reported. And the tunnel was about five feet high.

What was beyond the light? She crept forward without thinking, angling her head to the side so as not to hit the ceiling. Images of a pharaoh’s tomb and great treasure filling her mind. She pictured the media coverage the discovery would attract, the flashing lights of cameras. Her name would go down in history books, and her career would really take off.

“Alex, are you all right?”

Jeff’s voice plucked her from her daydream long enough to say, “Give me forty feet of slack.” She had to find out where this tunnel led. Exploring was in her blood.

“Don’t do anything careless.” Jeff sounded like a father warning his child, but he was only eleven years older than she was. His personal roles as a husband and father to two daughters must have been creeping in.

"I know what I'm doing, Jeff," she replied curtly.

"This was only to be a brief evaluation of the tunnel," Jeff added. He was nothing if not stubborn.

"I'm aware of that." She didn't want to pull out the fact that she was his boss, but she would if she had to. She had no intention of returning to the surface right now.

Jeff didn't respond, but more rope fell to the floor of the tunnel.

"That's forty. Let me know if you need more," he said through the radio.

"Will do." She walked hunched over toward the edge of darkness, letting her hand trail along the wall, her fingertips gathering dust and sand as she went. She was about five feet from where the light from the flare's reach ended when she ran out of rope. Maybe it was a sign to turn around, but she'd never been good at heeding caution. "I need at least ten or fifteen more feet."

She felt the rope go slack and turned back to see more coming into the tunnel. Jeff hadn't even bothered to verbally acknowledge her request the second time, which meant he might be in a bit of a snit.

Still, she pressed on. In the light cast from her hat, she saw something on the wall about ten feet ahead of her. There was a texture to the area. Carvings, perhaps?

She picked up her speed. "I think I found something."

"What are you doing, Alex?"

She was panting. The limited oxygen underground didn't facilitate moving quickly. "I think I—" She reached the spot and stared. There was definitely something marked on the wall. She wiped the sand away to reveal hieroglyphics inside an oval frame. She started laughing.

"Alex?" Jeff pressed in her ear.

"I found a cartouche!" Her eyes trailed over the inscription, and even though her ability to read hieroglyphics was limited, she recognized part of this one from history books.

Khufu.

Her heart hammered in her chest. Khufu was an Egyptian pharaoh who had ruled during the Fourth Dynasty. But his tomb had already been found, and it was located hundreds of miles from her dig, beneath the Great Pyramid of Giza. So why would his name be in this tunnel?

The clue was probably in the lettering above and below his name, but that would require Jasper's expertise to decipher.

She walked farther down the tunnel as if something was magnetically drawing her forward. Tremors quaked through her as doubt flooded her.

But then she spotted more hieroglyphics.

"I'm going to need Jasper down here right now," she said.

"What for?" Jeff's words were tight and clipped.

A wave of anger crashed over her at his questioning. "Just send him down."

Jeff's end of the radio went silent, and she imagined him pacing with formed fists and a clamped jaw. That was his typical reaction when she did something that he considered going off the rails.

"Jeff?" she prompted.

"We're getting him rigged up. Give us a few minutes."

She waited for what seemed much longer than mere minutes and then heard a scuffle in the tunnel behind her. She turned, putting her back to the darkness, and saw Jasper coming toward her.

"This way." She waved him on, hoping that he'd hustle. But given his six-foot frame and the constraints of the tunnel, she'd probably be out of luck with getting too much speed from him.

"This must be good if you couldn't wait." Jasper walked with his neck craned to the side and bent knees. He reached where she was standing next to the cartouche.

"This says *Khufu* from my knowledge, but what is this?" She pointed to the symbols she didn't recognize.

Jasper leaned in. "The top part says 'son of'."

She stared at him blankly. "'Son of Khufu?' But he had nine sons. Are you sure it doesn't give the name of which one?"

Jasper stared at her, not about to dignify her question with an answer. "Well, these lines at the top and bottom—"

"Indicate the name enclosed within them is royalty," she finished.

"Uh-huh." His tone was terse at her interruption.

She gave him a small apologetic smile but continued anyway. "So this son of Khufu ruled as pharaoh at one time." Her heart fluttered, followed by her stomach. "But only two of Khufu's sons were believed to have been successors of the throne, and the pyramids housing their tombs have been found..."

"I'm just telling you what it says."

"What does the bottom part say?"

"It indicates that his tomb is nearby."

She grinned and her eyes beaded with tears. "You're positive?"

Jasper's mouth turned downward, indicating he wasn't about to reconfirm.

“Wow.” She stood there, basking in Jasper’s interpretation. It seemed certain now that she was on the verge of finding a lost pharaoh’s tomb. *Just wow.* “There’s something else I need you to see.” She hurried toward the second set of hieroglyphics, then turned around to gesture Jasper forward. But she came face-to-face with him. She stepped back. “You move pretty quickly, considering.” She smiled awkwardly. Her entire body was shaking with excitement, and the only thing that would calm her down would be getting some answers.

Jasper looked away from her to the hieroglyphics, and he started reading.

Waiting on him was doing little to quell her nerves. “Even if you can’t make out all of it, anything would help.” She was all but tapping a foot.

Jasper drew his gaze from the wall. His mouth was set in a straight line at first, but transformed into a genuine smile. “If I tell you what it says, you won’t believe me anyway.”

“Try me.” Exhilaration rushed through her, stealing her breath.

“It mentions the Emerald Tablets and says that this tunnel is the path to great enlightenment.”

“The Emerald—” She slapped a hand over her mouth, her eyes scanning his. She lowered her hand. “Are you kidding me? As in the tablets that are rumored to possess the ability to turn base metal into gold? To give man the ability to traverse Heaven and Earth?”

He raised an eyebrow. “I’m not sure if there are any other Emerald Tablets.”

She swallowed, uneasy. She’d always clung to reason in the past, and it had served her well. “There’s no way they can be real.”

“Well, according to this—” Jasper pointed toward the hieroglyphics “—they are real and we’re on our way to finding them.”

“Whoa.” Alex took a few steps and looped back. “But if they are real and we find them, and they fall into the wrong hands, it could mean the end of the world as we know it. And terrorists, world powers, they’d all be clamoring to get ahold of them. This discovery could destroy the global economy.” She paused, the enormity of this find sinking in with a sickening swirl in her gut. She locked eyes with Jasper. “If all this is true, then the fate of the world could be at stake.”

“Not to make too dramatic a statement, but yes, it could be.”

She stood there, her gaze going through him. This was certainly a case of “Be careful what you wish for because you just might get it”—and then some.

“You look like you’re going to be sick,” Jasper said.

“Probably because I *feel* like I’m going to be sick.”

“You find the Tablets, and you will make history.”

“I’ll make history all right,” she mumbled. “But will there be anyone around to learn about it?”

“As you said, if it falls into the wrong hands...”

The risks were great, but the reward—if managed properly—could be, too. Her thoughts went back to the cartouche and what else it could mean. “The open space that didn’t read properly on the ground-penetrating radar could be a tomb, then.”

“It could be.”

Her breathing shallowed. It seemed the prospect of finding a lost tomb was paired with a legend that, if found, could destroy the world. But could she give herself over to accepting the implausible? That these tablets did exist and that they actually contained the knowledge of the universe? She’d always sided with the indisputable, the scientific, the logical. But the Emerald Tablets were attested to in the hieroglyphics mere feet away from her... Surely, that alone should be enough for her to consider the possibility of their existence. And legend *did* associate the Tablets with Khufu. In fact, it was believed by some that they lay hidden in a chamber beneath the Great Pyramid—the construction of which Khufu had allegedly commissioned. But hiding them out here, miles from his burial site, would be a far safer location to store something of such great value. Regardless of whether there was merit to the Tablets’ existence or not, though, she couldn’t just walk away from an unnamed pharaoh’s tomb.

She looked thoughtfully at Jasper, her mind going over the repercussions if she were to find them. Worst case, there’d be global annihilation. Best case, she could save the world. After all, it was better that they wind up in her hands than someone else’s. And she expected that the private party funding her dig would be ecstatic. Her pulse began to speed up again, the promise of what lay ahead stealing her breath.

And while it would be best to keep her team to a close few, she knew just the man who would love to join her. It had been at least five years since she’d worked with him, but they’d become fast friends, and he’d had a fascination with the Emerald Tablets even then. From what she understood, he now made it his business to uncover legends and myths. In fact, just less than a year ago, she’d read about him finding the Incas’ lost City of Gold.

“How are you making out down there?” Jeff asked in her earpiece.

“We’re just about to come up,” Alex answered, not wanting to disclose everything over the radio, just in case an outside party picked up on their frequency. But once she got to the surface, she’d call Matthew Connor from a secured line and invite him to join her for the discovery of a lifetime.

CHAPTER

1

THE ROOT GLACIER, WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS NATIONAL PARK, ALASKA
TUESDAY, JUNE 22

MATTHEW SWUNG THE ICE AXE with his right hand until it found solid purchase in the face of the glacier. He repeated the process with the axe in his left hand, then carefully stepped up one leg at a time and pushed his feet against the ice. The crampons on his boots bit into the glacier and gave him solid footing—or the best footing one could hope for out here.

But the uncertainty, the danger, was all part of the fun, part of the rush, and it's what kept him coming back for more. Even today, the first day of summer, when his friends would be back home in Toronto seeking out a patio, he'd opted for glacier climbing in Alaska. There was just something invigorating about being bundled up with the cold air nipping at his nose.

But it wasn't just this particular extreme sport that lured him in. His friends had called him an adrenaline junkie on more than one occasion, and he definitely deserved the label. Whether it was skydiving, bungee jumping, white-water kayaking, or snowboarding, he was in. He'd even jumped off a cliff in a wingsuit like Lara Croft in *The Cradle of Life*. These activities were a great way to fill the time between expeditions, and they kept him physically fit and on his game. And while he welcomed the rush, adventure had to be tempered with caution so that he could live to do it again another day. He really didn't have a death wish.

He looked up and figured he'd be cresting the moulin within minutes. But instead of urging himself onward, he paused and glanced down—something any experienced guide would discourage. Easily forty feet beneath him, water rushed by, sweeping away everything in its path without prejudice. Yet, there was something peaceful about being here, essentially suspended in the air with no one around to request anything

of him. He savored the quiet that came with this excursion almost as much as he did the adrenaline rush.

But now wasn't the time to sink into meditative thought. He had to focus on the task at hand. Sure, he wore a harness that was attached to a line secured at the top of the moulin and monitored by a guide, but screws didn't always hold, and people sometimes made mistakes. That's why axe placement and solid footing were crucial. One misstep or error in judgment would leave him dangling. If the screw gave way at the same time, well, then it would be sayonara.

He swung out again and took another step. As he did, the rope went slack and fell behind him.

Was this really happening? Blood rushed into his head, and he smiled.
Bring it on.

He focused on the glacier, on keeping his grip on the axes strong and his balance steady. All he'd have to do was hold his position until another rope was sent down for him.

"Hold on," his guide shouted.

Matthew rolled his eyes. Really, what else was he supposed to do?

Then he felt his right axe give. He looked up, his heart racing. The axe was, indeed, slipping in the ice. At least the left one was holding strong. The weight of the rope dangling from his harness and gravity were conspiring against him. He had to break free of it as soon as possible.

He let go of the right axe and unclipped the rope from his harness. He watched as it cut through the air, twirling like a ribbon until it met with the water below. Shifting his attention back to the abandoned axe, he slowly reached out for the handle. As he grabbed hold, the axe broke free of the ice.

He pushed his body against the glacier, clinging to it as if it would have mercy on him and save him. But he was down to one handhold and two footholds.

I've got this...

He took a few seconds to center himself and dug the freed axe into another section of ice. Thankfully, it bit in. Yet, he was still afraid to breathe in case it upset his precarious balance.

"Another rope's coming down. Just hook yourself to it," the guide called to him.

Matthew was starting to regret telling the guide to have a hands-off approach with him.

He looked up for the rope, and his gaze drifted to his left hand. It was

cramping up, and his grip on the handle was slipping.

“Just grab the rope,” the guide repeated.

Okay, Captain Obvious.

The promised rope snaked into his peripheral vision on his right. He'd have to shift his weight to his feet and rely on them and the axe in his left hand to keep him from falling to his death.

He squeezed his eyes shut, a dark part of him tempting him to just give up and surrender to the icy water.

Hell no!

He opened his eyes and looked over at the rope without moving his head. It was within a foot of where he was—a rather easy reach. But it would require trusting his holds.

“It's right beside you. Grab the rope.”

If it's so easy, you get down here and take my place.

Matthew counted to three in his head and reached out. His gloved fingers touched the rope but failed to hold on to it. The momentum had him going off balance and swinging back to the left, making him feel like a human pendulum and giving him a brief sensation of weightlessness.

Now his right foot was breaking free of the ice. He struggled desperately to shift it but had to do so carefully or risk—

Both his footholds collapsed. Now the only thing anchoring him to the glacier was his left axe, and his grip on it was compromised. Searing pain shot through his shoulder and up his neck.

Shit! Shit! Shit!

He struggled to get some sort of hold reestablished with his feet and found shaky purchase.

“I'm coming down,” his guide said.

I'll be dead before you get here...

Gravity was working like an anchor and pulling on him. He didn't have time to wait for the guide if he wanted to survive. But the rope that had been a foot away was now swaying from his earlier attempt to reach it, placing it easily three to three and a half feet away. He'd have to time his move for when the rope came closer.

One, two—

The remaining axe slipped some more.

He pushed on the glacier with his left foot to nudge himself to the right. His fingers played over the rope and—

In an instant, his life flashed before his eyes. Images of past expeditions layered on top of one another—the finds he'd made, the legends he'd

proven real—and then his father’s face, as clear as if he were standing in front of him. Matthew imagined the newspapers’ headlines back home reading something like, MAYOR’S SON DEAD AFTER GLACIER CLIMBING ACCIDENT IN ALASKA. Then he saw the faces of his friends Cal, Cal’s fiancée Sophie, and Robyn. Ah, beautiful Robyn, the love of Matthew’s life. Only he’d die without her knowing just how much he loved her. He’d die without having left behind a—

He got a firm grasp on the rope just as his left axe dislodged from the ice. He released it and gripped the rope with both hands. His feet fell out of their holds, and he pinched the rope between his boots.

Now, I can breathe...

“You weren’t kidding when you said you had this under control.” The guide lowered down beside him and hooked the clasp at the end of the rope to Matthew’s harness.

Moments later, Matthew was climbing on top of the moulin. His legs were shaky beneath him and threatened to give out. He bent over, set his elbows on his knees, and took a few deep breaths.

The guide slapped him on the back. “Way to go.”

Matthew straightened up, ready to lay into the man about what a useless piece of—

The guide was grinning. “I’m sure that was a rush you’ll never forget.”

Matthew let out a whoop and raised his arms in the air. He’d faced death but had survived. God, that was worth celebrating!

“Uh, hey, man, you’re ringing.” The guide pointed toward Matthew’s chest.

Matthew smiled at the guide. With the man’s laid-back attitude, he would fit in quite well beachside in California, catching waves and chasing bikinis. Matthew took out the satellite phone he had tucked inside his coat. “Hello?”

“Is this Matthew Connor?” a female voice asked.

“It is.”

“Well, you may not remember me, but this is Alexandria Leonard.”

It took him only a few seconds to place her. Hot sun, sand, and mummies. “Alex? It’s been awhile.”

“That it has, and you’re not the easiest person to get ahold of.” She went silent briefly. “But I have an expedition I think you’ll be quite interested in...”

CHAPTER

2

TORONTO, ONTARIO
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23

MATTHEW RUSHED BACK TO TORONTO on the first flight he could get out of Alaska. The plane had touched down at Pearson International Airport around three o'clock in the morning.

Now it was nine o'clock, and he was in his office, feet up on his desk with a book in his lap. He wasn't reading at the moment, though, but rather admiring how the stained-glass ornament on the window caught the morning sunlight and painted his floor with strokes of color.

His suite was situated in the south wing of his father's estate, a 26,000-square foot mansion in Toronto's affluent Bridle Path neighborhood. That was how William Connor did things—big.

Only two other people shared the mansion with him and his father: Lauren Hale, their housekeeper, and Daniel Iverson, the property manager whose duties varied widely.

Yes, Matthew lived at home, but the house was palatial, with plenty of space to stretch out in. His father lived his life and respected Matthew's privacy. And Matthew's two-story suite with loft had all the amenities most would want in a house. He had walk-in closets, a private bathroom, an office, a living room, and a king-size bed. To top it off, a wall of windows extended from the first floor to the second-floor ceiling on one side, and he had a balcony with a view of the tennis court in the backyard. All that and he was rarely even home. When he wasn't traveling for an expedition, he was away for recreational purposes.

He looked down at the tome he'd been reading. It was dedicated to the Emerald Tablets, and he was reacquainting himself with the legends that surrounded them—not that he'd ever actually forget such an intriguing

“myth.” But brushing up on them seemed like a good use of his time, especially given that he was too excited to sleep and needed to kill some time before approaching his friends.

When he’d mentioned Robyn and Cal to Alex, she seemed hesitant to bring in more people, but he, Robyn, and Cal were a package deal. She’d take all three of them or he’d decline her offer. The line had gone silent after his ultimatum, and just when he was starting to regret putting it to her that way, she’d said, “Tell me about them.” So he had.

Robyn’s work as a curator at the Royal Ontario Museum and her love for ancient culture, with her special enthusiasm for Egyptian history, made her ideal for the expedition. Cal was a renowned photographer, and his work appeared in many prestigious magazines, including *National Geographic*. He took a little more selling, though. Alex already had someone on her team who took *pictures*, but there was weakness in her word choice. Matthew had managed to capitalize on that slip and finally sold her on the importance of having a professional take *photographs*. Of course, if the Tablets were found, they’d be kept out of the media and away from Cal’s lens. But if they found the pharaoh’s tomb, that was fair game.

Matthew glanced at his desk and his closed laptop, wishing that he could look at the cartouche and hieroglyphics that Alex and her team had found. But she had been adamant about not sending them through cyberspace. She wouldn’t even share the details of the expedition until he could get to a secure phone line. But, man, it had been nice to hear her voice.

When he’d worked with Alex on a different dig in Egypt five years ago, he’d just gotten his doctorate, and he was wide-eyed and curious, soaking in everything around him. He had spent his days yapping her ear off about the pharaohs and what life must have been like in ancient Egypt. But his fascination with the legend of the Emerald Tablets was never far from his mind since the day he’d first learned of it. And from there, he’d found himself obsessing about other myths.

At the time, Reda Ghannam, the Egyptian Minister of Antiquities—then and now—had told him to get his “head out of the sky.” Matthew hadn’t been able to gather the courage to correct the idiom. But the man’s point had been clear, even if Matthew decided not to heed his advice.

And really, clinging to the intangible had come to define him. He was borderline obsessive about trying to prove the existence of what everyone else had given up on. It had become his life purpose, and it was the legacy

he'd leave behind.

Legacy. That was what he was thinking about when he was losing his grip on the glacier. He didn't want to die without leaving behind a legacy.

Many people said that having children was the way to create a legacy, but legacies came in many forms, and they weren't always flesh and blood. Restoring artifacts and lost cities to the world had to be, in itself, a legacy. People would enjoy his discoveries long after he was gone. And if that wasn't a legacy, what was?

He turned his attention back to his book, realizing that he had steamed through it and only had a handful of pages left. First, he'd finish up, and then he'd go see Robyn at the museum.

There was a knock on the door.

He straightened up, removed his legs from his desk, earmarked the page in his book, closed it, and flipped it over in his lap with the cover facing down. "Come in."

Daniel entered holding a tray with coffee. "Good day, sir."

"How many times do I need to tell you not to call me 'sir'?"

"Call it an occupational hazard."

Daniel had worked for his father for as long as Matthew could remember. And in the past few years, he had also helped Matthew prepare for his expeditions by arranging local contacts, flights, passports, legalities, and things like that. Daniel often presented Matthew with a buffet of potential expeditions to tantalize him. But today that wouldn't be needed.

Daniel held the tray out in front of Matthew. "It's made just the way you like it."

"You have no idea how badly I need this today." Matthew picked up the cup and took a long draw. "Thank you."

"Of course." Daniel pointed at the book on Matthew's lap. "Is that the reason you need the coffee?"

Matthew tightened his grip on the book and covered more of it with his arms. "Yes and no. I hardly slept last night." He took another sip of the brew.

"Let me guess, sir—*Matthew*—you can sleep when you're dead?"

Matthew smiled at Daniel's dry attempt at humor. "Something like that."

Daniel set his tray on a corner of Matthew's desk and sat in a chair across from Matthew. His gray, Norwegian eyes fixed on Matthew. "The tomb of a missing pharaoh, eh? That's exciting."

“That’s right.” Matthew had told Daniel that much earlier this morning, and that’s all he would share. The Tablets would remain with him, because the fewer people who knew, the better.

Daniel was still watching him, as if he expected an elaboration, and while Matthew owed him no explanation, he wanted to extend something.

“From the look of it, the tomb may belong to a son of Khufu.” Matthew delivered this with mild excitement. But when compared to the Emerald Tablets, the Tablets would win every time. Even if the pharaoh’s reign had previously been unknown.

“Then you have your mind set on this expedition?” Daniel came across leery and unconvinced, proving the man’s strong detection skills once again.

“An opportunity like this? How can I refuse?” Matthew leaned back with his coffee, careful not to upset the book that was still on his lap.

Daniel remained silent for a few seconds. “We’ve always communicated openly.” He paused, seeming hesitant.

Matthew gestured for him to continue.

“I just never expected the day to come when you’d go back to working on a regular archeological dig.” Daniel scanned Matthew’s eyes.

Matthew held the man’s gaze. “Because it’s not in search of a legend?”

“That’s right.”

“Well, this is a unique opportunity for me.” Matthew shifted in his chair. “And it’s intriguing. Khufu was buried beneath his pyramid, so why would his son be buried nearly two hundred miles away from him? Something’s not adding up.”

Daniel nodded slowly, still unconvinced. “What do you need me to do for you?”

“I’ll take care of this one.” If Robyn and Cal were joining him, it would only be another awkward thing to explain. If Matthew were just taking part in a regular archeological dig, there’d be no reason for them to go.

Daniel’s gaze drifted to the book in Matthew’s lap again. “Very well.” Daniel crossed his legs. “And when do you plan to leave?”

“Tomorrow morning.”

Daniel uncrossed his legs and leaned forward. “Tomorrow? Why the rush?”

“The—” Matthew clamped his mouth shut. He’d almost said *the Emerald Tablets*. “If I want to be a part of this historic find, I have to move quickly. Alex and her team are already under way.”

“Beg your pardon, but he’s been buried this long—”

“And that’s why he needs to be found.” Matthew looked past Daniel toward the door, giving Daniel the nudge to leave.

Daniel settled back into his chair. “You said Alex. Do you mean Alexandria Leonard?”

“That’s right.” Matthew was impressed by Daniel’s memory. “You remember her?”

“I do. She came to visit once.”

“Wow. That was a long time ago. She only stayed a couple days.”

“Yes, but she got you to play tourist with her—the CN Tower, Canada’s Wonderland, the zoo. You even went to a Blue Jays game.” Daniel inclined his head.

“I know,” Matthew said with a laugh. “And I hate baseball.”

Daniel watched him knowingly, and Matthew felt his old feelings for Alex coming to the surface. When he’d gone to Egypt that first time, it hadn’t been long since he and Robyn had broken up. He’d been vulnerable, and the first chance he got, he’d invited Alex to Toronto. He’d whisked her around the city in a poor, pathetic attempt at stealing her heart away from her fiancé. Vying for her affections at the time was not one of his more noble moments.

“She was engaged, if I recall correctly,” Daniel said. “So she’d be married now...”

“Unless she’s already divorced.” That came out too quickly for his comfort, and he struggled to backpedal. “Statistically, most marriages do end in divorce.”

Daniel pulled his head back and tucked his chin downward. “Uh-huh.”

“Anyway...” Matthew looked at the clock on the wall: 9:30. Robyn should be at work now, and he wanted to speak with her before he broached the subject with Cal. “Well, I better get going.” He stood up, hugging the book about the Emerald Tablets to his chest, and exited the room, no doubt leaving behind a confused and curious Daniel.

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