

THE BOOK OF BONES

Chapter 23

“**You stole the book?**” Bones gaped at Krueger. Why hadn’t the man said something before now?

“So you have it?”

Krueger shook his head. “Not exactly.”

“You are making zero sense, you know that?” Amanda folded her arms and scowled.

“I know, I know.” Krueger began to pace. “I stole the book from Los Alamos, but it’s a fake. A clever one, to be sure, but it’s not the genuine article.”

“How can you be sure?” Bones asked.

“Lots of reasons.” Krueger stubbed his cigarette out, pocketed it, and immediately lit another. “I first grew suspicious when I began translating it. Things that should have been there weren’t.”

“Like what?” The frown hadn’t left Amanda’s face.

“There were no stories about the Ant People. Nothing that even hinted at the existence of underground dwellers, or even sky people, for that matter. There was nothing but the usual legends.”

“Maybe that’s all there ever was,” Jessie offered. “I mean, you didn’t see the original.”

“No, but Klaus Fuchs did, and there was a lot in that book that wasn’t in my copy. Anyway, I took it to an expert who knows how to keep a secret and he confirmed the forgery.” Krueger sighed. “Someone went to a lot of trouble.”

“Any idea who?” Bones asked.

Krueger nodded. “I’m almost one hundred percent certain I know who has it. And I’m afraid I know what he’s done with it.”

Bones didn’t like the sound of that. “I’m afraid to ask.”

“I think Gregory Glade paid someone to steal it for him.”

Amanda rolled her eyes and let out a low groan.

“The name sounds familiar but I can’t place it,” Bones said.

“He’s that crazy millionaire who hid the treasure,” Jessie said. “Once a month he gives a new clue to its location. One of my friends thinks he knows where it is. He wants me to help him search for it over spring break.”

Now Bones remembered. Gregory Glade was an odd one, no question about that. He’d

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build a small, but luxurious home inside a cave somewhere in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. He was rarely seen in public, save for his annual appearance at opening day for the indoor football team of which he was the sole owner. What's more, his name had been associated with black market antiquities deals, though that was merely a rumor.

"And you think he hid the Book of Bones along with the treasure?"

Krueger nodded. "The Feds searched his home and his holdings and found no illegal artifacts. Not one week later, he announced his treasure hunt."

"Maybe the treasure consists of all the illegal artifacts he's collected," Amanda mused. "If anyone ever finds it, he's screwed."

"Only if the finder goes public," Bones said.

"And only if they find it before he dies," Jessie added.

"What makes you think Glade has it? Or had it?" Bones said to Krueger.

Krueger was about to speak, but a sudden frown creased his brow. "Let's get out of here. I see some actual tourists coming."

Bones snapped his head around, senses on high alert. He relaxed when he saw an elderly couple approaching. He stepped off the sidewalk to give them room to pass, and the others followed suit.

"Thank you, young fellow." The man paused and frowned. "Did anybody ever tell you you're one damn big Indian?"

"Only every girl who sees me naked." Bones winked.

The old man let out a loud cackle and his wife covered her mouth, her blue eyes dancing with delight.

"Don't believe him," Amanda called back over her shoulder as the group headed for the parking lot. "I've seen him naked and he's using all his length elsewhere."

Now everyone laughed. Everyone except Bones.

"Don't make me prove you wrong out here in public," he said.

"Please. Maddock told me the shrinkage story."

"It was cold water. Really cold," Bones protested over a new wave of laughter. "Ask him about the time I fished him out of the drink off Wrangel Island. I guarantee you he was... ah, forget it."

Back in the car, Krueger resumed his explanation. "Once I identified my book as a forgery, I started searching for the real book. I found a few clues. About ten years ago there was a scientist at

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the lab who shared some of my interests, if you know what I mean.”

“Little green men?” Amanda quipped.

“Among other things. Anyway, he kept it quiet because you know how the scientific community rejects anything too different, but we ran in some of the same circles, so I was aware of his leanings. He quit Los Alamos unexpectedly and moved to Crested Butte, Colorado. He bought a five million dollar home there. Now he spends his days skiing and his evenings writing about aliens.”

“He definitely wouldn’t make that kind of money at the lab,” Jessie said.

“He sold something valuable to someone,” Krueger said. “Less than a month after this man leaves the lab, Glade suddenly becomes a true believer in the ‘world beneath.’ He hops on message boards and assures people he knows it’s true, though he won’t say how he knows. He even grants an interview where he says the same thing.”

“It’s thin,” Amanda said. “You have anything else?”

“A picture. Glade allowed the interviewer to snap a single photograph inside his home. In the background, you can see what I believe is the Book of Bones. It’s only the corner, mind you, but it’s identical to my copy.”

Amanda pursed her lips and frowned. Her eyes remained locked on the road ahead, but she was clearly deep in thought. “If anyone is crazy enough and rich enough to make a copy of the book and have it switched out for the original, it’s Glade.”

“Even if he did include the book with the treasure, do you think he made a copy? Took photos? I’ve got a friend who could hack his network for us.” Bones was already reaching for his phone to call Jimmy Letson, an old Navy comrade and an accomplished hacker.

“He has no network. He goes to a coffeehouse to get online,” Krueger sighed. “I even tried bribing the reporter to tell me where Glade’s home is, but he was taken there in a panel van. He said it was like being abducted. He did, however, confirm seeing something that might have been the book. He didn’t get a good look at it but what he saw fits the description.”

“What does it look like?” Jessie asked.

“It’s basically a stack of tanned, scraped hides with fine writing burned into both sides. It’s wrapped in bones bound together with strips of hide, almost like a breastplate a warrior would have worn into battle.”

“I thought the Ancestral Puebloans didn’t have a written language,” Bones said.

“They didn’t. The stories were passed down orally and recorded much later. They’re written in an odd mix of Spanish, phonetic representations of Tewa, a Puebloan language, and pictures and

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symbols. It was probably written by someone educated by a Spanish missionary.”

Bones stared out at the hot, dry landscape whizzing past them in a brown blur, and considered their options. “Assuming you’re right about the book, option one is to comb the Sangre de Cristos looking for Glade’s home, hope we can get past whatever security he’s put in place, and hope he made a copy of the book, and hope we can find that copy.”

“What’s option two?” Amanda asked.

“Find the treasure.”

“I was afraid you were going to say that.” She shook her head. “Do you know how many people have tried and failed? At least one person has died in the hunt.”

“I do have experience with this sort of thing,” Bones said.

“Don’t forget about my friend,” Jessie said. “We can ask...” She broke off as her phone rang. She answered, and after a brief, quiet conversation, hung up.

“That was Manny. Your truck is ready.”

“Good. I’ve missed my Ram.” He noticed her frown. “What’s up?”

“He said Mari is in the hospital and she’s in bad shape.”