

## Chapter 23

They finished off their beers and went to the next pub they could find, ordered three more beers and got the same answers as before. They played the same scene again five times and were beginning to get tipsy. Finally, on the sixth stop they decided to have some lunch to try to counter the effects of the alcohol, not to mention the fact that breakfast had been very sparse and they had been tooling around for over 3 hours. They continued to comb pubs for the rest of the afternoon and into the evening. The trend continued for the next two days and Skeet was beginning to think it was a lost cause and that maybe they should head home, but Brian and Chapin insisted. At the end of the third day they returned to the hotel exhausted and dejected.

“I need to get some air. I’m gonna take a walk and try to clear my head,” Skeet told Chapin who was busy tapping away at the keys on her laptop computer.

“We’ve been walking around all day and you want to go for a walk? Are you ok?” Chapin asked.

“I’m just a bit burned out. I haven’t done anything except sleep and wander around asking about Stan, and with nothing to show for it. I’m glad we stopped early tonight, but I just need to get out of the hotel room and NOT wander around by the Stardust.” It had almost exploded out of him as if it had been building up the whole time.

Chapin was taken aback. She had been so tied up in the search and trying to keep up with work and her parents back in Chicago, she had apparently missed how much this was bothering him. “It’s ok, Skeet. Do you want me to go with you or do you want to be alone?”

“Oh it doesn’t have anything to do with you, Chapin. If you want to go, I’d love to have you. I just need to break this whole cycle of looking for just a couple of hours.”

She smiled at him, grabbed her shoes, coat and purse and they headed out the door. They had been walking hand in hand for about 15 minutes when Skeet stopped in his tracks and smiled. He was looking at a store front with brightly colored flags painted on the windows. The window also sported white letters in a script that Chapin didn’t understand but below the script, in English it read ‘White Lotus Meditation Center’.

“That’s what I need!” he exclaimed.

“What? You need what?” she asked.

“I need to sit!”

“You need to sit? Do you want to find a bench? Or we can go back to the hotel if you’re tired,” she said, somewhat confused by the whole line of conversation.

“No, no,” he said turning to her. “I need to meditate.” She could see the smile plastered across his face. “That’s what I need to clear my head.”

“Well, um, ok. How do you know you need to meditate?”

“I’ve meditated for years. I sit almost every day. I just haven’t done it since we’ve been here and I think that, along with all this other stuff, is why I can’t keep my head together. Come on. Let’s go in.”

“But, wait. I’ve never meditated before. Are you sure we can go in here?”

“Yes, I’m sure. I can teach you basic mediation. No problem. Come on!” He practically dragged her in the front door. He raised his index finger to his lips. “Shhh.”

An Asian gentleman appeared from around the corner wearing red and yellow robes and sporting a shaved head. Chapin was completely taken aback, but the man smiled very widely which gave her just a hint of ease.

“Welcome!” the man said. He bowed and extended his hand to Skeet, who returned the bow and shook the man’s hand. The man pulled him closer and patted him on the shoulder as if they were long lost friends. He turned to Chapin.

“Welcome!” he said and made an identical gesture. She looked at Skeet and bowed and shook the man’s hand also.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. I would like to come and sit for a bit if that’s ok,” Skeet said to him, returning his smile.

“Sit? Yes! Welcome!” he said again.

“I’m not sure he understands you,” Chapin said softly.

Another gentleman emerged from around the same corner, also dressed in robes of red and yellow and his head shaved. He was slightly smaller and wore a pair of granny spectacles. He spoke to the taller man in a language that Chapin didn’t recognize. The man responded then the spectacled man began to speak in English.

“Rinpoche welcomes you to the center. He is honored by your presence,” he said. The taller man smiled and bowed. Skeet’s eyes lit up and he returned the bow quite deeply.

“The honor is all mine. My name is Skeet Seaton and this is Ms. Chapin Hannigan. “

“My name is Loden Jingpa. I am the interpreter for His Eminence Tharpa Lodro, Rinpoche,” he said using his hand in a sweeping motion as if the larger gentleman was a prize on The Price Is Right. “Would you care for some hot tea to warm you? The air is rather cold this evening.”

“That would be wonderful. Thank you,” Skeet said.

The smaller man said something to the larger man and they scurried off.

“His Eminance?” Chapin questioned.

“Yea. We are in luck. This man is a great Buddhist teacher. Just to sit and talk with him is such an honor. I’m all giddy!”

“Are you sure we are supposed to be here? I mean, I don’t know what I mean,” she said, becoming somewhat flustered. She tried to calm herself. “I mean, a couple of heathens like us? We’re not Buddhist. I don’t want to offend him or anything.”

“Umm, I actually AM a Buddhist. I have been a practicing Buddhist for years,” he said, matter of factly. “And anyway, they don’t care. Trust me.”

The taller man re-entered the room and took a seat on an elevated platform with a tall yellow cushion on it. He was soon followed by the smaller man who brought a tray with a tea pot and four small cups. He set them on a small table that sat in front of the larger man and then invited Chapin and Skeet to sit on cushions on the floor. While they were seating themselves, the smaller man took a seat next to the taller one, but his seat was lower. He very methodically began to make the tea as the larger man smiled. He handed the larger man his cup of tea, bowing and then handed Skeet and Chapin their cups. The smaller man took his cup and settled back on his cushion.

The larger man began to speak in the foreign language again. Chapin didn’t understand a word he was saying but she thought he was just cute as a button. His cheeks were very round and Chapin had a distinct urge to pinch them. When the man paused, the smaller man began to interpret. “Rinpoche says it’s most auspicious that you have come here tonight. He has just returned from six months in India and Tibet and this is only his second night back. He told me this morning we would have visitors, but didn’t elaborate.”

“Actually, we just kinda stumbled across this place. I was just trying to clear my head and as soon as I saw the window, I knew I needed to sit for awhile. We weren’t really expecting to have an audience, but we’re honored.”

Loden Jinpa translated and Rinpoche began to speak again. When he paused, Loden Jinpa began interpreting again. “You are always welcome to sit in this place.” Rinpoche began to speak again and Loden Jinpa followed again with the translation. “Rinpoche wants to make sure you have meditated before.”

“I’ve meditated for probably twenty years, but I don’t think Chapin ever has,” he said, glancing at Chapin. She shook her head.

Loden Jinpa translated for Rinpoche who smiled and responded. “Rinpoche says that you are welcome to sit as long as you want. The main shrine room is in there,” he said, pointing down a hallway to the left. “Rinpoche says that he would be happy to teach the young lady to meditate if she would like, or if she would prefer to sit quietly and wait on you, that’s fine too.”

All eyes turned to Chapin who had no idea what to say. “If you have ever even been curious about meditation, this is the time to learn. This is like learning about God from the Pope,” Skeet said. Chapin pondered for a few seconds and decided that going with her gut had been remarkably successful so far and there was no reason to stop now. She looked at Rinpoche and bowed. “I would be honored to learn from him, if he would teach me. But I am a complete novice. I have no idea about anything,” she said.

Loden Jinpa translated, then Rinpoche smiled widely at Chapin, bowed in return and said something else. “Rinpoche says the honor is his to be your guru.”

Chapin looked at Skeet. She wasn't quite sure about the whole 'guru' thing but Skeet just smiled at her and squeezed her hand.

“Rinpoche says you should go to the main shrine room and sit. He says you need to center yourself. He'll meet with you after he teaches Ms. Chapin.” Skeet bowed deeply, got up and headed for the main shrine room. “Rinpoche says to tell you there is nothing to be nervous about. He is just a simple monk and we are just going to talk about breathing. No big deal.”

Chapin smiled and nodded. Through Loden Jinpa, Rinpoche explained to Chapin the basic points of meditation. He told her about posture and sitting position, how to breathe and how to watch her breath and what to do with the mind's activity as it occurs. Within a few minutes, Chapin was sitting quietly with Rinpoche and Loden Jinpa, meditating. Exploring her mind calmed her, at least for the moment. Plus she was becoming comfortable with Rinpoche. After they had been sitting quietly for about 15 minutes, Rinpoche rang a little bell, indicating that the meditation was over. He smiled and bowed to Chapin who returned in kind. He began to speak again and Chapin waited for Loden Jinpa to translate.

“Rinpoche says you did very well. You should try sitting for at least 20 minutes each day and come back and see him in a couple of months.”

“I'll try,” said Chapin. While she was intrigued with this whole process, she wasn't planning on being in Ireland in a couple of months.

Rinpoche began to speak again. “Rinpoche would like to know why you came here.”

“Umm, just like Skeet said, we were out walking around and we happened upon this place,” she replied.

“Rinpoche wants to know why you've come to Ireland.”

“Well, we are here looking for a friend. His name is Stan Balch,” she said. She pulled out one of the pictures of Stan that she had printed and showed Rinpoche. He looked at the picture and said something to Loden Jinpa.

“Rinpoche says he knows this man. He lives in Harlowton, which is one town over. He can take you there tomorrow, if you'd like.”

Chapin's heart erupted. She couldn't believe what she had just heard. "Yes, please! That would be wonderful! I have to go get Skeet and tell him." She began to stand up.

Rinpoche held out his hands and spoke followed by more translation by Loden Jinpa. "Rinpoche says we should just wait and let him finish. Disturbing him now won't change anything. He'll be out when he's done. He says that you will have many years to tell him anything you want."

"What? What do you mean?" Chapin asked, but Rinpoche made it fairly clear that he was done talking. He just smiled, picked up his cup and began to drink his tea again.

Skeet emerged from the main shrine room where he had been sitting. He entered the room slowly and quietly in case Rinpoche was still teaching. Chapin saw him and her face lit up. She was filled with excitement. Skeet sat down beside her.

"Skeet," she began. "Rinpoche says he knows Stan. He says he lives in a little town not far from here and he'll take us there tomorrow."

"You're kidding, right? He knows Stan?"

"He says so. It can't hurt to go with him. The worst he can be is wrong." Suddenly she realized that he was right in the room with them. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean..."

"It's fine. Nothing to worry about," said Joden Linpa. "So please come by in the morning and we will go to Harlowton."