

Chapter 24

Chapin and Skeet could barely contain their excitement the next morning. They felt like two children who had just awoken on the morning they were going to Disneyland. They dressed a little nicer than they had been on previous outings because they truly felt that this mad search was finally coming to an end.

They went to have breakfast with Brian and told him of their meeting the night before with Rinpoche and him instantly recognizing Stan from the picture and his offer to escort them this morning.

“Wow, that Eastern hooey of yours is finally paying off for something.” Brian cracked.

They sipped tea and nibbled on crescents but were too excited to have a big meal. They spent much of breakfast glancing at their watches, each wondering to themselves if it was late enough to go meet Rinpoche and Loden Jinpa without seeming too eager.

Of course, they were eager and finally, at about 9:30, Skeet couldn't stand it anymore. “Well whaddya say we get going?” he asked. Neither Chapin nor Brian needed any further prodding. Brian dropped a tip on the table and they headed out for the White Lotus Meditation Center.

When they arrived, they saw Loden Jinpa waiting for them. He greeted them politely and they introduced Brian. Soon, Rinpoche appeared dressed in similar robes to the night before. Again they greeted and introduced Brian.

“If you're ready, our car is right outside,” Skeet suggested, not wanting to waste any more time.

“Rinpoche would prefer to walk if that's all right. He has been in India and Tibet for the last several months and just returned a couple of days ago and would really like to see the neighborhood again, if you wouldn't mind,” said Loden Jinpa.

“Oh no, that's fine,” Chapin said half heartedly, glancing down at the heels she had worn in an attempt to dress up. She was now thinking the jeans and sneakers idea would have been much better, but she was game. If it found Stan, it was worth the discomfort.

“Shall we go?” asked Loden Jinpa. Everyone nodded and Rinpoche grabbed a wooden cane. Both Loden Jinpa and Rinpoche donned English Driving hats. Chapin looked at them oddly. Something about the flowing robes with the English riding hats just didn't fit. Loden Jinpa looked at her and smirked. “Well we must keep our heads warm. It's cold out there you know!” They all laughed and headed out the door and began their walk.

“How far is it?” Skeet asked.

“Just a few miles,” Loden Jinpa responded. “It should take more than a couple of hours.”

Chapin immediately began scanning the shops for a shoe store. She didn't care how it would look. If they were going to walk miles, she was gonna find some more comfortable shoes.

Chapin watched Rinpoche shuffle down the street for a few blocks and finally, she leaned into Loden Jinpa and asked "Is he going to be ok to walk that far?"

Loden Jinpa giggled at her and then began translating for Rinpoche. Chapin was terribly embarrassed as she thought the question was obviously only for Loden Jinpa's ears. Rinpoche looked at and began to laugh a guttural laugh that seemed almost out of place. He leaned into Chapin, giving her a big hug and said something in Tibetan.

"Rinpoche says it's very nice of you to be concerned, but this is just a little stretch of the legs for him," Loden Jinpa said.

As they walked, Rinpoche began telling them, through Loden Jinpa, about his fleeing from Tibet after the Chinese had invaded many years before. He had walked for months over the Himalayas to reach India. His stories were riveting and he had such a matter of fact way of telling them that Chapin completely forgot about her feet and was glued to his side listening.

Brian on the other hand, was much more aware of walking such a great distance and he wasn't pleased. He expressed his displeasure subtly with the occasional sigh, groan or cough. He was very strong, but only in short bursts. He wasn't used to walking what he saw as a great distance.

Finally, they approached a sign that said 'Harlowton' which excited all three of them. Chapin began to realize how far they had walked and that her feet were not handling it all that well. She also noticed that Rinpoche, walking with his cane, was fresh as a daisy. He laughed and joked and continued telling stories.

"Well it's about time!" Brian said in his usual gruff tone. Rinpoche leaned over and grabbed Brian's left arm with his right hand and slapped him affectionately on the back and again said something in Tibetan.

"Rinpoche says you should join a gym. You need to work out more."

Brian gave a half hearted smile then appeared to ponder for a moment. "If you're translating everything for him, how did he know what I said?" Brian asked.

"He understands a lot more than most people think he does." Loden Jinpa's voiced lowered. "He understands what he hears very well, it's SPEAKING English that he has problems with. That's why I'm here. He also thinks it's a pretty neat prank to play." They all laughed.

They rounded a corner onto a narrow tree lined street with houses on either side. There were children playing in some of the front yards and a couple of dogs could be heard barking in the distance. It looked like a typical middle class neighborhood.

“Rinpoche says it’s just up here,” Loden Jinpa said. Mentally, all three of them sighed with relief, but only Brian let it be obvious on the outside.

They approached the sidewalk of a medium sized brick house, that was quite skinny but multiple stories. Rinpoche led the way and reached up and punched the buzzer with his cane. After what seemed like an eternity, the door slowly opened and a small woman who appeared to be in her mid forties poked her head around. She had long, straight black hair that was tied back in a pony tail and was wearing a house coat. Her eyes met Rinpoche’s and she straightened slightly. She glanced behind Rinpoche and saw what may have appeared to be an invading army. A puzzled look crossed her face. “Rinpoche. It’s good to see you. I’ve missed you while you were away. Please, come in,” she said, although she eyed the newcomers warily.

They entered the house and she politely offered tea which Rinpoche accepted on everyone’s behalf. Brian would have preferred a beer or a shot of whiskey after their long walk, but he was polite and let it go.

The inside of the house appeared a little disheveled. It was obvious that she wasn’t expecting company. While she prepared the tea, a concerned look crossed Rinpoche’s face and he and Loden Jinpa exchanged words back and forth in Tibetan.

As Skeet glanced around the room he noticed a picture on a piano on the far wall. It was of the woman and what appeared to be Stan on a beach. His excitement grew and he took Chapin’s hand, squeezed it and sent her attention to the picture with a slight head jog. Chapin’s eyes lit up and she squeezed his hand back. They could both barely contain their glee.

The woman came back in carrying a pot and several mugs. She served Rinpoche first, and then began serving everyone else. “I must apologize, Rinpoche,” she said in a soft, Irish voice. “I was not expecting company so I haven’t had a chance to tidy up. But I was sure you would come as soon as you returned and heard the news.” She glanced around at the other three. “I’m sorry, I don’t believe I have met any of you. I’m Holly Balch. “

Skeet looked at her and paused. Just hearing her say the name, he knew he was in the right place. “It’s such a pleasure to meet you. My name is Skeet Seaton. This is Chapin Hannigan and Brian Shaw.” I played with Stan way back in the day and Brian helped us manage the shows. I haven’t seen him in forever and we have come all this way just to find him. Is he here?” Skeet asked, the excitement building in his voice.

Holly just stared at him for a moment then she looked back to Rinpoche. Loden Jinpa reached over and patted Skeet lightly on the knee. “Oh my. Rinpoche. I thought you knew. I thought that was why you were here,” she said, the tears beginning to run down her cheek. Rinpoche stood up and gently guided Holly to his seat and hugged her. Loden Jinpa stood and gave Rinpoche his seat where he sat holding her hand.

Holly looked around the room, the majority of which she considered strangers. “Stan passed away from a heart attack four months ago,” she said and burst into tears. Rinpoche began to

comfort her and Loden Jinpa turned to Skeet, Chapin and Brian and suggested they step outside to give Rinpoche and Holly some privacy.

They all exited the front door as quietly as possible and gathered in the front yard.

“Doesn’t Rinpoche need you to translate for him?” Chapin asked Loden Jinpa.

“If he does, he will send for me. Like I said, he understands most of what he hears, plus, Holly speaks a little Tibetan. I don’t think there will be much talking anyway,” he said.

“Well, this was a big wasted trip,” Brian said in a gruff tone. Chapin punched him in the arm.

“A man has died, you creaton!” she exclaimed. “Show a little respect.” Brian hung his head low and muttered a little apology.

Chapin glanced over and saw Skeet with his back to the group leaning against a tree. He stared straight down at the ground. She walked over to him slowly and took his hand. He didn’t look up, but she could see tears dripping from his cheeks.

“I’m so sorry, baby,” she said trying to comfort him. “This has got to be tough. Just remember I’m here for you.” She leaned in to kiss him on the cheek and he almost collapsed in her arms, fighting back the tears as best he could but without much success. They held each other tight for what seemed like many minutes while Brian and Loden Jinpa stood across the sidewalk, trying to give them some privacy and exchanging idle conversation that neither one felt entirely comfortable with.

The door to the little cottage opened and Rinpoche motioned to everyone to come back inside. Chapin helped Skeet dry his eyes and cheeks and make him a little more presentable. He truly didn’t want to add any more difficulty to Holly’s current situation. He righted himself and they all made their way back into the house.

“I’m so sorry you traveled all this way for nothing,” Holly began. “I’m sure Stan would have loved to have seen old friends. He talked about Skeet regularly and I recognize him from some of the albums he kept stored in the other room. He used to tell me that you two were quite the team,” she said.

“He really got me started in the music business. I’m not sure where I would be if it weren’t for Stan. I’m just sorry I didn’t get to tell him in person.”

“Tell me, what made you come all this way to see him?” Holly asked.

They all looked at each other. “Umm…” Skeet began. He wasn’t sure how to begin the story in such a delicate situation. “It seems kinda silly, now. But, I thought he had… I mean…” Chapin patted him on his thigh for reassurance. Rinpoche smiled at him and nodded, as if telling him it was ok to tell the story. “This is kinda weird, so let me just start from the beginning.”

Skeet recounted the tale of the album and the mysterious track, how they couldn't think of anyone else who played that way except Stan and how they were trying to figure out if Stan was maybe trying to get back in touch with them.

"You see, it all seems kind of silly now. I mean, Stan had already passed before any of this happened. So now we are back at square one, although I'm beginning to think it doesn't matter a hill of beans anymore," Skeet said, his voice becoming more and more dejected.

Rinpoche leaned toward Loden Jinpa and began speaking in Tibetan again. Loden Jinpa said something back and Rinpoche got a calming smile on his face. He looked at Loden Jinpa and motioned his hand toward the others in the room as if he was saying, "Go ahead. Tell them."

"Rinpoche says this is all beginning to make sense now. When he was in Tibet about three weeks ago, he had a vision that Stan was taming a beautiful songbird. He said that in his vision, every time Stan would put the bird back in its cage and walk away, it became very agitated. When Stan would go back to the cage and work with taming the songbird again, he would calm."

They all stared at him blankly. "Ummm...ok...so?" Brian finally offered, to which he was met by glares from everyone in the room with the exception of Rinpoche, who just smiled at him.

Loden Jinpa glanced back at Rinpoche as if he were waiting for him to make things more clear for everyone, but Rinpoche just sat there smiling. He motioned his hand again indicating that Loden Jinpa should continue.

"According to Buddhist thought, when someone dies, their consciousness passes through a set of states called the Bardo. This is the 'in between time' between this life and the next, so to say."

"Oh! The whole reincarnation thing!" Chapin exclaimed.

"Yes, rebirth." Loden Jinpa continued. "In this process, the consciousness of the deceased would move slowly from this life to the next. Had he been here, Rinpoche could have helped it along, but in rare cases, like this one, there is a problem."

"Problem?" Holly asked.

"Yes, you see, sometimes the consciousness is very attached to the life he just left and doesn't want to let go. His attachment is great enough that he doesn't completely understand that he's died and is somewhat stuck in limbo. That seems to be what is happening with Stan."

Rinpoche poked Loden Jinpa and spoke. Loden Jinpa turned back to the group. "Rinpoche says that IS what is happening with Stan."

They all sat in astonishment. Finally Skeet broke the silence. "I'm confused. I've read a little about the concept of rebirth, but what does this have to do with the dream or the music on my album. I don't quite get it."

Rinpoche giggled slightly and began to speak again and Loden Jinpa began to interpret as he spoke instead of waiting until he was finished. “You see, part of what Stan’s consciousness is attached to in this life is issues with Skeet. He is basically interacting with Skeet the only way he can figure out from where he is, which is with this music. I have never heard of it happening quite like this but I have heard of similar situations, in theory.”

“So that’s what the songbird dream means?” Brian asked.

“Yes,” Rinpoche said, through Loden Jinpa. “The musical connection is basically his attachment to this life. If he lets it go, it forces his consciousness to confront the fact that he must move on to the next life, so he clings to it more strongly so he doesn’t have to let go. Had I been here and known, I would have helped him at the moment of his death, but since I wasn’t...”

“So, Stan is still around? He’s like a ghost or something?” Brian asked.

Rinpoche laughed uproariously and spoke.

“Something like that, from a Western point of view anyway.” He continued laughing.

“So what does this mean? I mean, can Stan keep ‘playing’ with Skeet?” Brian asked.

Rinpoche’s laughter subsided. “Unfortunately, no. We have to help him move on. He must move on to his next life,” he said through Loden Jinpa.

“No, wait,” Holly spoke up. “I don’t want him to go. If he can stay around, even without a physical body, then I want him to stay.”

“Yea,” Skeet agreed. I mean, if he and I can still make music together, even if it’s this kinda weird way, then I wanna keep doing it. I’ve missed so many years not playing with him, I don’t wanna give this up.”

“I understand your attachment to him, but he has to be allowed to continue on his path. Attaching ourselves in this way will not be beneficial for us or him.” Rinpoche said.

“No! I said I don’t want him to go!” Holly exclaimed. There was a sudden fire in her eyes that hadn’t been there before. “I’ve been feeling his presence around here ever since he passed away. I thought it was just me, but now that I know it’s not. I’m not having him run off and that’s final!”

Rinpoche recoiled slightly and sat silent. All of them sat silent.

“Look, Holly. We don’t know each other, but let me ask you something, please,” Brian said. Four sets of eyes widened and looked at him, wondering if he was just about to make a bad situation even worse.

“She took a deep breath and raised her head so she could look down on him slightly. “I’m listening,” she said.

“You obviously love Stan very much.”

“More than anything,” she replied.

“And you would do anything to hold on to him?”

“Yea.”

“You’d lie to him?”

“Of course not! We were always honest with each other!”

“Well, according to this guy,” he said pointing at Rinpoche. “And we all seem to believe him, Stan doesn’t understand that he needs to move on. So we’re just lying to him if we hold on to him.”

Skeet’s mind raced. Either Brian had just made a very good point or he had just alienated Stan’s widow completely. He was really hoping for the former, but thought the latter was probably closer to reality.

Holly sat silent for a moment. “I don’t know. I just don’t want to lose him again.”

“I understand. I really do. I’ve been there. But sometimes we have to love someone enough to let them move on to something that’s much better for them than where we want to keep them.”

“Look, just let me think. This is an awful lot of stuff to take in at once,” Holly replied.

Rinpoche leaned and to Loden Jinpa and mumbled. “Rinpoche says come tomorrow evening to the center. Everyone should come,” Loden Jinpa said.

“But, I don’t know yet just let me think,” Holly reiterated.

“Rinpoche says you should come, all of you. He has much preparation to do. We need to call a cab. It’s too late to walk back now.”