

AN UNCHARTED DREAM

ADVENTUROUS HEARTS

BOOK THREE



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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, Kings James Version.

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*To the girls who, like me, dreamed of being Indiana Jones one day.
Maybe you didn't get that adventure in the jungle, desert, or ancient
temple, but your life can still be filled with exploration and meaning.*

CHAPTER 1



JANUARY 1910

MILWAUKEE, WI

Leonora Thornton closed the doors of the Milwaukee Public Library behind her, shutting out the cold winter air and sounds from the busy street. She paused just inside, giving herself a moment to soak in her favorite place. There was nothing as wonderful as stepping into a library, with the smell of books permeating the air and the potential of discovering some wonderful new knowledge waiting on every shelf.

Looking upward at the domed rotunda that towered above the lobby, Leonora frowned. Could she call herself an adventurer if her favorite thing was the library? Shouldn't it be discovering a new place, trying exotic food, or mastering a difficult skill?

Rather than stand right in the middle of the lobby thinking about the qualities of an explorer that she seemed to lack, Leonora gathered herself and strode across the marble floor to a coat room, which was tucked into an alcove created by

massive marble columns. On the way, she waved to the librarian directing guests. “Good evening, Miss Draper. It looks like a nice turnout tonight.”

Miss Draper was one of Leonora’s favorites among the library staff. The diminutive older woman clasped both hands together in front of her plain gray skirt while smiling at Leonora. “I think so. I’m glad people are interested in this explorer’s lecture. We never know for sure if a topic will be of interest to patrons or not. Are you here to attend, as well?”

“Yes, and some of the club members are meeting me.”

Miss Draper was interrupted by a couple asking where to go, so Leonora continued into the coat room. As she removed her heavy wool coat and hung it on a hook, her hand grazed the pocket, a papery crinkle reminding her of the letter she’d slid inside when Mother handed it to her as she left the house. She had a few minutes before the lecture was scheduled to begin, so she reached into the pocket and tugged the letter out. It bore no address, only her name written across the front in unfamiliar handwriting. Mother hadn’t known who it was from when Leonora asked. She’d only said it was sitting on the front step when she came home from a ladies’ meeting at the church.

Leonora tore open the envelope and slid out the single page. More of the same neat, flowing script filled it. She skimmed the contents, then went back to read it a second time when the startling words refused to settle in her mind.

Dear Miss Thornton,

As someone who followed your father’s illustrious career in world exploration, I send you my deepest condolences on the tragedy of his death. Even though it has been five years now since that terrible day, you should know that many men were inspired by his bravery, intelligence, and commitment to his work.

It truly is a shame that no one has taken the time to further investigate the reports of what happened that night in Peru. I had

hoped you, as the most enterprising of his offspring, might take up the cause and discover the truth, which I believe has been hidden for nefarious reasons.

However, I'm sure that a young woman has different priorities than a man like your father, who dedicated himself to exploring the world and making historic discoveries. Certainly, you must be setting your mind toward marriage and children, rather than even considering something so perilous as a journey into the wild jungle. Your father always hoped one of his children would continue his work, should anything happen to him, but isn't that something all fathers want, regardless of how unrealistic it might be?

All that to say, you have every reason to be very proud of your father and the sacrifices he made for the sake of furthering our understanding of history. Even if the accident that caused his loss was contrived, he was a good man and remains an example all explorers should strive to emulate.

Signed,

An Observer

Leonora glanced over her shoulder at the coatroom and through the open door into the busy lobby, as if the anonymous author of the letter might be watching her read it right then. Emotions raced through her—pride in the legacy her dear papa had left for his fellow explorers, but also confusion.

The reports about Papa's death on a river in Peru had been quite clear. Father had been a faithful member of the Explorers Club, attending events at their headquarters in New York City as often as he was able, as many of the scattered members did. Because of that and their financial backing for the expedition, the club had sent representatives to gather information from the crew and locals and then gave Mother a copy of their findings. In the night, the crew's boat had hit an obstacle under the muddy water. Papa and a crew member, Hugh Randall, who were keeping watch together, had been thrown from the boat

and lost to the river. No one had questioned those reports in the five years since. Why would someone come forward now hinting that there might be more to the story?

And why did the author seem disappointed in Leonora for not questioning what they'd been told? She'd only been twenty at the time and deep in her college studies. She'd dropped her classes and returned home to be with her mother after word came of the accident, but she'd never had cause to doubt what had happened to him.

Shuffling feet and approaching voices broke into Leonora's thoughts. She stuffed the letter back into the pocket and spun around as two of her friends, twin sisters Charlotte and Alice Bauer, stepped into the coatroom. The sisters were deep in conversation, with Charlotte's hands flying around in animated gestures while Alice remained more reserved. Their matching blond hair was the extent of their similarities. Where Alice stood tall and slim, her brown eyes taking things in before she spoke, Charlotte's blue eyes usually flashed with a quick wit that made her seem more impressive than her diminutive stature would indicate.

Alice spotted Leonora first, flapping one hand at her sister to stop the endless flow of opinions. "Good evening, Leonora. Look, we almost made it to an event before you for the first time ever."

Charlotte huffed as she removed her velvet cape. "Our consistent lateness isn't my fault. You don't remind me to get ready soon enough, and then we don't leave the house on time."

Leonora smothered the laugh the sisters' antics almost brought out of her. "I'm quite proud of you both. Let's hurry so we can find seats with a good view of the stage."

Despite the strange letter and the questions it raised, she enjoyed the company of these women...and everyone in the Exploration Society, for that matter. The evening's outing for

members of her club to attend the lecture was just what she needed to keep her thoughts from spiraling.

Leading the way toward the lecture room, Leonora couldn't help glancing toward the lobby door. She would feel better once Marcus arrived. She could use the calming presence of her best friend. He was one of the few constants in her life since Papa's death and all the changes that had come along with her older siblings starting their own families. Through everything, Marcus was steadfast.

Inside the lecture room, Charlotte and Alice chose a row and went in single file, pushing down the folding seats of two wooden chairs far enough in to leave space for Leonora and Marcus at the end. Over the next ten minutes, several of the other club members arrived—their secretary, Effie Alder, and one of the few male members, Edwin Howard. Once Marcus got there, that would likely be all of the Exploration Society members who would attend. Her entire club wasn't big enough to fill half of the row of seats on a good day, but numbers weren't the most important thing.

Leonora prided herself on having begun the Exploration Society after learning it wasn't only her lack of field experience that would keep her from joining the Explorers Club as her father had. The prestigious organization was also only open to men. If her father had known that, he no doubt would have withdrawn his membership. Papa had always encouraged her dreams of going on expeditions like he did, supporting her hopes of discovering significant sites and digging up artifacts that could change their knowledge of history while spreading the truth of the gospel in the process. He'd called her desire a noble goal.

His belief that anyone could participate in discovery was what led her to start this club. It might be small, but it included anyone who wanted to join, no matter their gender, race, or level of experience. Papa would have loved it.

But did her members? After three years of running the club, Leonora was beginning to sense that they wouldn't be happy much longer with lectures and hikes and the occasional camping trip or museum visit. Enough time had been spent on organizing the new group. They wanted to move toward achieving the purpose she'd sold them on when they joined—exploration, discovery, and connecting with new cultures and experiences.

The grandiose words sounded wonderful in her mind, but the prospect of living them out kept Leonora awake at night. As much as she longed to live up to Papa's legacy, she'd never brought herself to so much as step foot outside Wisconsin except for when she and Mother took her sister, Cassia, to Chicago to complete her trousseau before her wedding. Despite all the plans Leonora had dreamed up over the years, Papa's death had forced her to confront the reality of the risks that were inherent to such expeditions. Hiking and camping were one thing. Leaving everything she knew for months on end and possibly risking her life and those of her crew were quite another.

The time was coming soon when the club would have to do more. But when it did, would Leonora be strong enough to lead them into the unknown?



A spray of chilly raindrops pelted Marcus Turner's face, giving him yet another reason to hurry down Grand Avenue. The first reason was the expectation of seeing Leonora's joyful expression when he walked into the lecture. Few things would drive Marcus to hurry toward a presentation on a faraway place he had no interest in, but the prospect of pleasing Leonora Thornton did the trick.

Thankfully, the sprawling public library building came into

view before the sky opened up and drenched him completely. Marcus hadn't paid enough attention to the weather when he decided to walk the five blocks from the bank to the meeting, or he might have caught an electric streetcar instead. The habit of saving money wherever possible had been formed out of necessity, though, so he would likely have chosen to walk, anyway.

Inside the hushed lobby, Marcus wiped raindrops off his glasses before glancing at his pocket watch. Five minutes until the start time. He went straight to the coatroom to hang up his overcoat, dodging several people who were coming out of the open doorway as he headed in. But the hooks around the room were already crowded with coats and wraps, leaving no space open.

No matter. Marcus was familiar enough with the library that he knew there was more than one place to hang coats. He made his way down a narrow hallway at the far end of the lobby, toward the back of the lecture room. There was another coat rack there, and sure enough, only two garments hung there.

After removing his overcoat and arranging it on a wooden hanger, Marcus smoothed his hair and straightened the vest and jacket that had gotten a bit rumpled while he hunched over loan applications at the bank that day. Once he felt presentable, Marcus glanced at his watch again. Two minutes to find Leonora.

He let out a slow breath and turned to head back toward the lobby. However, a booming voice echoing from around the corner brought him to a halt. "I most certainly will not give in to these types of demands, madam. You didn't complete the work I asked for. Therefore, I'm not beholden to pay you a cent."

Peeking around the corner, Marcus found the source of the angry words. A lanky, almost gaunt man about fifteen years Marcus's senior towered over a ragged older woman. The man

wore a sneer along with his tattered brown suit and the red handkerchief tucked into his collar.

“Please, I need that money. And I tried to do what you asked—truly, I did. I can’t help that I didn’t do it as well as you wanted. Please, pay me for the time I spent trying.” The woman’s slumped shoulders and pitiful voice signaled she was likely about to burst into tears.

But the man crossed his arms over his chest, looking entirely unmoved. “I think not. I’ve secured another source that suits my needs better. Now I need to go, or I’ll be late. Please remove yourself from this institution before you cause a scene.”

The woman let out a sound that was nearly a wail. Even if he didn’t know what was going on between the two, Marcus couldn’t let the man berate that poor woman. He took a step out into the side hall.

But then he stopped. It wasn’t his place to interfere. What if that man had a legitimate reason to be upset?

Still, cruelty in the face of her obvious distress wasn’t necessary. Marcus started toward them again, but he was too late. A librarian stepped through the door at the end of the hall and gestured the man through, to the area behind the lecture hall stage. After a whispered conversation with him, the librarian turned to the woman and gently tugged her toward a different door that led outside through the back of the building.

“Wait, Miss Draper,” Marcus called to the librarian, finally breaking out of his indecision and hurrying in their direction. “I saw a bit of what was going on. Can I help in any way?”

Miss Draper turned toward him while pulling the back door shut behind the other woman. “I’m certain you can’t. It was a minor dispute, that’s all. You should get into the lecture hall before you miss the opening. Miss Thornton is already waiting.”

Everything within Marcus screamed to do something about what seemed to be more of an injustice than a minor dispute.

But she was right. The lecture was about to begin. Plus, Miss Draper was a kind woman and seemed to know more about the situation than Marcus did. She wouldn't have sent the other lady away if something was wrong.

Doing his best to put the matter behind him, Marcus made his way back to the lecture hall and paused in the doorway, scanning the room for the one person he always wanted to see most, his spirits lifting when he caught a glimpse of wispy golden curls caught up in a loose pompadour. There was Leonora, with some of the club members seated on her right while the seat on her left was open—saved for him, he felt confident in assuming.

As he approached, Marcus got a better look at her, the mere sight like a breath of fresh spring air after a long winter. The Thorntons didn't have a great deal of money, but with four women in the family, they had plenty of clothing to swap, so he was sometimes surprised by her wearing a new dress. Tonight, she'd donned a gauzy black gown that had flowers and stripes embroidered in black across the top, flowing straight from her waist into a simpler skirt with the pattern repeated on a flounce at the hem. Now and then, one of the tiny gems sewn onto the top would catch the light from the ceiling fixtures, almost matching the sparkle in her eyes.

She was by far the most beautiful woman in the room.

But then, he'd known that from the first moment he'd seen her in her father's study—a gangly girl who already, at the age of seven, had the most enchanting hazel eyes. He could still feel the way the world had frozen around him as their fathers' voices faded into the background. All the information about Mr. Thornton's extensive map collection, which nine-year-old Marcus had been quite excited about on the way over, went unheeded as he stared at the perfect vision before him.

Until she caught him gawking, that was, and arched one delicate eyebrow, lips pursed. But she hadn't been able to hold

the faux haughtiness long, dissolving into giggles before Marcus could even begin to blush. She had immediately latched onto Marcus, prattling on about anything and everything that came to her mind while their fathers pored over the old maps. And they'd been friends ever since.

A smile came more easily to his lips than it had all week, and when Leonora turned her attention from the Bauers and noticed Marcus taking the seat next to her, the way her face brightened made everything and everyone else fade away. They might as well have been sitting in an empty room. Her hazel eyes crinkled around the corners, thanks to the cheerful grin she sent his way while one slim, graceful hand rose to smooth back tendrils of hair from her forehead. Marcus could finally release the breath he'd held most of the way there. He wasn't late. He hadn't disappointed her.

He might take second place to her desire to explore the world, but at least for tonight, his presence was enough to make her smile.

"Good evening, Leonora. You look lovely."

She beamed. "Thank you. I'm so glad you made it. The librarian who organized this lecture told me this Mr. Flemming is a marvelous speaker. And I'm desperate to learn if his experience intersects with what Papa was working on. He's been to South America, after all, and from the description of his lecture, he might have been to southern Peru, just where Papa was when..."

Marcus's stomach clenched when Leonora's voice trailed off. She hadn't been the same since her beloved father died. She still talked about exploration and all the places she wanted to travel to, and Marcus fully believed that when the opportunity arose, she would go. But she'd quit pursuing a degree in anthropology and instead devoted her time to her mother and siblings, as well as to ministries at her church, even teaching a class for immigrants wanting to learn English. All good things,

of course. But clearly, the tragedy had left a bigger impact on her than she wanted anyone to know.

Had it changed her dedication to remaining single? For most of the years Marcus knew her before her father's death, Leonora had staunchly declared she wouldn't consider any courtship until she'd been on several expeditions. Her siblings had often teased her about it, but Marcus had always tried to avoid the subject. Once Leonora set her mind to something, she followed through. He had no hope of changing her opinion, no matter how badly he might have wanted to all these years.

The room began to quiet as one of the librarians walked out onto the low stage and crossed to the podium in the middle. She waited for the final conversations to die down before addressing the room with a gracious smile. "Welcome, seekers of knowledge and those interested in discovering more about our vast world. I'm so very honored to present to you Mr. Vernon Flemming, renowned world explorer and our guest speaker for tonight."

While the polite applause filled the room, Marcus closed his eyes for a moment to keep from letting irritation show on his face. Such grandiose pretension wasn't something he preferred, although he encountered enough of it at Mother's society events that he should be more capable of controlling himself by now. Acting superior to others was a common trait amongst her social group, but it always hit him the wrong way.

He opened his eyes in time to see the lauded explorer enter from behind the stage. But the sight before him did nothing to help clear Marcus's frustration because it was none other than the angry man from the hallway. Now he wished more than ever that he'd confronted the man about his behavior. A renowned explorer shouldn't go around shouting at women or refusing to pay for whatever service she'd tried to render.

The man on the stage accepted the librarian's introduction with a dramatic bow. "Thank you, madam." Then he turned to

the crowd. “I’m honored to stand in front of you tonight and share about the wonders I’ve witnessed on my travels, as well as the exciting venture I’m planning next.”

Marcus had expected coarse, cruel words like the ones he’d overheard. Instead, Mr. Flemming spoke with a cultured, smooth voice that had almost every person in the room captivated in moments. It reminded Marcus far too much of another man he’d known once, one whose personality could turn in an instant. The horrible similarity left him almost breathless—because sometimes the people who appeared most reputable and trustworthy were the ones who most needed to be watched out for.