

The Staff
and the
Sword

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The Staff and The Sword
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PROLOGUE

The darkness enveloped him as he turned off the lights. John Elias lay in his bed and lit a cigarette as he thought about his day, his eyes slowly adjusting to the darkness. John's heart had become encrusted by the scars that had been left in his life. One day he had been happy and overnight his life was filled with pain.

A voice in his head kept telling him to get out of his pity and move on with his life. Ten years had passed since John's divorce, but he still had conversations with himself. The voice in his head would say, "Get over yourself, and move on." Then John would go to sleep.

This night it was going to be different, though. John wanted to press the issue a little further. He spoke out into the dark. "What does that mean? Where am I supposed to move on to? My wife is gone. The world has pushed me aside. Where do you want me to go? I am where I am, with no purpose left in my life. I'm getting tired of waiting. It seems as though no one cares. Come on, John. Why don't you answer me? Or, can you only say, 'Get over yourself and move on?'" Well, I'm getting tired of hearing it and want to know when is it going to be time? Come on, John, answer that, when am I going to have purpose again? When is it going to be, time?"

John sat back in the darkness. The voice was silent. John felt he must have really pissed it off. The voice had

no purpose anyway, except to frustrate him. He decided to light another cigarette. He pulled the sheets up to his waist, and sat back. He watched the glow of his cigarette as he took a draw, then stared out into the darkness.

The silence was broken by a loud noise. John felt his bed shake. It sounded as though someone had banged against a wall, in his living room, downstairs. John decided to investigate.

Before leaving his room, John grabbed a baseball bat. He also picked up a flashlight. He decided not to turn it on, so as not to alarm whoever was there, as he made his way towards them. His eyes had adjusted to the dark. He figured he could hide in the dark and surprise whoever was there.

John made his way down the short hallway, being careful not to make a sound. When he arrived at the top of the stairs, he leaned over the railing, to see if he could see anyone. There was no sound, but he did smell a foul smell. He listened for a while then he could make out someone breathing. It sounded like a gurgling sound, as if the person was having trouble breathing. With the smell and sound, John figured some homeless person broke into his home.

He felt the floor vibrate as the intruder walked around. John thought this person must be big and wondered if he would need more protection than what he was carrying. He couldn't think of anything else he might have. John decided to stay down and work his way down the stairs, one-step at a time.

He carefully set his foot on each step, pausing in between. John got to the landing where the stairs made a turn. The floor creaked. John stopped. He held his breath.

The intruder moved towards the stairs. Without a sound, John laid the flashlight down. Both hands nestled on the baseball bat ready to strike. The intruder moved closer.

John readied himself, making sure to stay back, so as not to be seen. His breathing grew shallow, as he gripped the bat tighter.

The intruder stood there for what seemed an eternity to John, but never moved towards him. John, slowly, tried to lean forward to see what was going on, but was afraid that he would make a noise if he moved too far. His heartbeat pulsed in his ears. Surely, this intruder could hear it.

The stench coming from the intruder was horrible, his breathing rough. He felt the stairway shake, and could hear scraping along the handrail. John stood, frozen, as minutes passed. He prepared himself for the intruder strike he knew would be coming.

The only thing that came to John's mind was, 'What's going on?'

The voice in his head decided to speak. "See what happens when you piss me off?"

John ignored the voice.

The intruder pounded on the handrail, as John tightened his grip on the bat's handle. John heard a grunt. He heard the intruder take one-step then another. With each step, John felt the floor shake. The intruder was moving away.

John took a deep breath and let it out. The footsteps stopped. John readied the bat. More minutes passed then John heard the intruder move away. The door to his kitchen opened as the intruder went inside.

Slowly, John moved across the landing, towards the downward flight of stairs. His only hope was that the darkness in the room would hide him. It hit John that he had left his flashlight on the landing. He stretched his arm backward in an attempt to grab it, but it was out of his reach. He had to go back up a couple of stairs, to the landing, so he could reach it.

He again moved down the stairs, one-step at a time. As he reached the bottom of the stairs, he heard the intruder at the kitchen door. The intruder was coming towards him. Light from a street lamp filtered through the windows casting the room in shades of gray.

The kitchen door opened. What John saw was not human. When it came through the door, it was on all fours. John immediately thought it was some kind of dog that had somehow broke into his home. As it came through the door, it raised onto its hind legs and spread a pair of wings, which must have been ten-feet across. Its head was almost touching the ceiling, but the creature was humped over. It had pointed ears and glowing red eyes. The creature looked straight at John.

John couldn't move. Fear gripped every muscle in John's body. He knew he was going to die. John was sure, this thing must have come from some other planet, because it sure wasn't from any place on earth, and it was staring him down. It stood there, staring at John, and John wasn't moving.

Tears welled up in John's eyes. This thing was going to move towards him and, well, the baseball bat and flashlight didn't seem like enough protection. John thought about the voice in his head. He spoke out into the dark. "I didn't mean to piss you off."

The voice spoke clearly, in his head. "I have not given you a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." The voice added, "Use the sword I have given you."

John looked down at his hands. Astonishment filled his eyes, for the baseball bat and flashlight were lying at his feet, and he was now holding, a magnificent sword.

John pushed back his shoulders, stood, and held up the sword. The metal glowed brightly; the creature moved towards him. John brought the sword back and swung with

all his might. As he struck the creature, a bright flash filled the entire room. John had to shield his eyes. He felt himself falling. He heard a loud screeching scream then the room went quiet.

When John opened his eyes, the room was dark and the creature was gone. John lay on the floor, in a pool of sweat. He sat up, looked at the sword for a moment, and then laid it on the floor beside him. He put his hands over his face, and let out a sigh of relief.

John felt something touch his shoulder. As he turned, another bright light blinded him. John felt a feeling of dizziness come over him. As he was losing consciousness, he heard the voice say, "It is time."

Dr. Henry Jedidiah is a world-renowned archeologist, who has been on many expeditions over the years, being involved in several important finds. That morning, he was relaxing at his home, with his wife, Marion, when he received a phone call from his friend, Mike Gideon, asking him to come to Chicago. There had been a recent earthquake in Peru and it had devastated that country. Many lives had been lost; many left homeless. As planes and satellites turned their attention to the area, a discovery had been made. Mike wanted to discuss plans of going into the area.

When Henry had gotten off the phone, he turned to Marion, and asked if she wanted to go with him to Chicago. Marion said no, he could handle it. She had always called the meetings 'boring' and never went to these meetings. Marion, herself, is a renowned archeologist. She has been on many expeditions with Henry. The two fell in love. They've been happily married for fifty-six years. She would always accompany him on expeditions, except when she was pregnant with their daughter, Elizabeth. When he met with investors, she would usually let him go by himself. So Henry flew to Chicago, alone.

The busy streets were jammed. The cab driver honked his horn and yelled out the window. "Get your ass out of the way, you idiot."

Henry stared out the window, glancing at the driver, and back to the window.

The driver looked into his rear view mirror. "Sorry sir, I'm trying to get there as soon as I can, but you know how traffic can be this time of day."

Henry looked at the driver's eyes in the mirror. "It's alright son, just get me there in one piece."

Henry's cell phone rang. He put it to his ear. "Hello.... yes, I'm on my way....hold on a minute." He turned to the driver. "How much longer do you think?"

The driver looked into the rearview mirror. "It's just around the next block, if I can get these idiots out of the way."

Henry put the phone to his ear, "It shouldn't be too long, I'm about a block away...I'll see you shortly." Henry sat back in his seat. He stared out at the office buildings, and the pedestrians on the sidewalk.

As the cab pulled up to the front of the skyscraper, the driver turned around. "Here you go, sir."

Henry, quickly, paid the driver, grabbed his briefcase, and headed for the door of the building.

Henry noticed Mike Gideon standing in front of the building. Mike is six-feet-five inches tall, muscular, and along with his friend, Gabe Katriel, have accompanied Doc on several expeditions over the years. Both men are good friends to the Jedidiah family. Henry had often called the two, his guardian angels, because they had gotten him and Marion out of, more than a few, sticky situations. Mike looked uncomfortable in the suit he wore. Mike would rather be out on an expedition in khaki shorts and a t-shirt.

Mike waved at Henry. "Hey, Doc, it's about time. The meeting is about to start."

Mike and Henry shook hands. Mike patted him on the back. "I think you will be surprised by who's here."

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“Why, who’s here?” Henry asked.

“Well, most of the usual people.” Mike paused. “Your daughter is here, as well.”

Henry raised his eyebrows, as he looked at Mike. “Elizabeth? Is here?”

“Yes, Doc, do you have another daughter I don’t know about?” Mike laughed as the two walked into the elevator.

Henry wondered what seeing his daughter again, would be like. Henry loved his daughter very much. He wanted what was best for his daughter, but often had a hard time expressing it. They had an argument. Elizabeth had told him she never wanted to see him again. They had not seen each other in over ten years.

Mike opened the door to the boardroom and allowed Henry to go in first. The room was filled with several men and women. Most were investors. Some were on the boards of major museums around the world. Ignoring everyone in the room, Henry walked straight to his daughter.

Elizabeth’s blond hair stood out in the room. Her hair and blue eyes would attract any man, but Elizabeth’s work was always more important than any relationship. She gave one attempt at marriage, but when that failed, she had remained single. She was in her mid-fifties, but didn’t appear a day past thirty. Henry gave her a smile.

Elizabeth turned away.

Henry turned to the group. He gave a false smile. “What have we got?” The investors took their seats.

A medium built man, appearing to be in his thirties with brown hair, stood at the head of the table. “Okay, now that we’re all here.” The man pointed to another man sitting beside him. “Sam asked me to get things started. My name is Luke Nachash. I am founder and chairman of Nachash

Enterprises. As you all may, or may not know, I have financed many expeditions over the years. This has led to many great discoveries. Isn't that right, Elizabeth?"

Elizabeth smiled. "Yes sir."

Luke continued. "Mike, Sam told me you discovered something on one of the satellite images taken in Peru, after the earthquake. I think I will turn it over to you, so you can explain what you found." Luke sat down.

Mike stood and turned on a projector. The screen lit up. It was a satellite image of jungle and mountains. "This is a photo that was taken about a week before the earthquake. In case no one can tell, this is northern Peru." Mike pointed to the photo on the screen. He circled an area on the photo. "I need you to focus on this area here."

He pushed the controller in his hands. The picture on the screen changed. "On this next photo, you can see something that wasn't on the previous photo. This was taken within a day after the earthquake." He pushed the controller another time, revealing a closer view of the area. "What we can see here is what looks like the ground has opened up. Inside of the opening, we can definitely make out something white. We zoom in more." The picture changed, "and again," Mike clicked a final time.

Startled comments filled the room. There, inside the crevice in the photo, was an intact building, gleaming white. Someone shouted. "What does it mean?"

"We don't know. Officials in Peru only want someone they trust to go and find out. That's why I asked Dr. Jedidiah to come in." Mike pointed at Henry.

Henry smiled and raised his hand.

Mike continued. "Dr. Jedidiah is the most qualified to go in there, and find out what it is. The local officials are already upset at someone's attempts to get in there."

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Luke stood. "I think Elizabeth would be as good, or better, than her father."

Another man stood. "Mr. Nachash, Dr. Jedidiah is dependable. We need his expertise in this. I don't think we should even consider someone else, even if it is his daughter." The man sat down.

Luke leaned over the table. "What has this guy done for us lately? Elizabeth is a much better choice and I am prepared to finance the entire expedition."

Everyone at the table stood and shouted at each other. Henry and Elizabeth stared at one another. Elizabeth gave him a sly smile. She stood. "Mr. Nachash came to me, and wanted me to go in there. Henry is old and tired. He may miss something. We need young eyes in there so we can find what we are looking for."

Henry jumped to his feet. He pointed his finger at Elizabeth. "My eyes are just fine, young lady, and I can still run circles around you."

The investors argued. Henry stared into Elizabeth's eyes.

The door to the room opened. A person wearing a hooded long leather coat walked into the room. Everyone in the room grew quiet. The person had their hood pulled low over their face. It was obvious to Henry this was a woman. The woman approached the table. Everyone turned to the woman.

The woman leaned over the table. "Why not have Henry lead the expedition and send Elizabeth along with him?"

Henry looked at Elizabeth.

Elizabeth turned to the woman. "Because I won't work with this man."

The woman bowed her head. "All you see is not as it seems, Elizabeth. Walk through the door, and follow the

Path before you. It's time you allow the past to stay in the past." The woman walked out of the room.

Elizabeth ran to the door. She looked into the hallway. She turned to everyone in the room. "She's gone. She just disappeared."

"Listen up." Mike got everyone's attention. "I believe what we are looking at here could be the find, of a century. That woman does have a point, Elizabeth. Could you lay down your grievances for a little while?"

Elizabeth folded her arms across her chest. Everyone in the room stared at her. She looked at Henry. "I guess."

Mike threw up his hands. "Good." Mike turned his attention to the investors. "Now that we have that settled, what we would like from each of you is, quite frankly, money. Without money, we can't get the supplies we will need and get our team in there. The papers you see in front of you are a breakdown of supplies we will need and their cost. We have thrown in some for unexpected expenditures but you can see the breakdown. I do believe it is well worth your investment." Mike sat down. He turned the meeting over to Luke Nachash.

Luke stood. "Well, since Elizabeth is going, I will pay for this expedition. I must insist on a stipulation. I want to send one of my people. And I must insist on you keeping me abreast of your findings."

Henry stood. "I usually like to take my own people on these things. I had someone with me before, that I didn't know, and it didn't work out so well."

Luke snapped. "As I said, I will pay for the entire expedition. The man I want to send will keep an eye on my investment, if you know what I mean. He has worked for me for years and I trust him." Luke pointed at a man sitting in a chair by the wall. "His name is Marcos Dionysius."

Henry looked at the man. He turned to Gabe. Gabe

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shrugged his shoulders. Henry nodded. "Okay, I guess. I do have my team that will come with me. I want my wife to come along. I want Mike Gideon, Gabe Katriel, and about ten other men who can help in carrying supplies. Of course, a guide that is familiar with the area."

Luke turned to the investors. "It looks like everything is in order. Let's let the Doc here start getting things together. I can't wait to see what he finds. Can we all agree?"

The investors gave their nods of approval. The investors, slowly, made their way to the door. Before leaving, everyone came over to Henry, offering him congratulations and good luck.

Henry watched Elizabeth as she talked with Mike and Mr. Nachash, wondering what it would be like to work with his daughter again, after all these years.

Gabe patted him on the back. "Well, Doc, you ready for this?"

Henry kept his eyes focused on Elizabeth. "I don't know, Gabe, there's still a lot to do, and there may be a little more pressure on this one."

"Are you talking about the expedition, or Elizabeth?" Gabe asked.

Henry smiled. "Probably a little of both."

Mike walked up to Henry. "Mr. Nachash said we don't have to worry about a thing, Doc. He's more than willing to put everything up for this one."

Henry saw the troubled look on Mike's face. "You don't look too happy about it."

"Just a feeling I have inside is all, just a feeling." Mike looked at Luke. "He seems too--"

"Eager?" Henry finished Mike's thought with his own.

Mike looked into Henry's eyes. He nodded. "Yeah. It's like he knows something we don't."

Luke headed towards Henry. Elizabeth and Marcos followed him.

When Luke walked up, he held out his hand. "Okay Doc, I guess everything is up to you now. Let me know if you need anything. Good luck with everything, and, oh, I almost forgot. Let me formally introduce you to Marcos Dionysius." He pushed Marcos towards Henry.

"Good to meet you sir." Marcos extended his hand. Marcos was a medium built man who appeared to be in good physical shape.

Henry shook hands with him. "Pleasure to meet you. Hopefully, all will go well."

"I'm sure it will." Luke cut in. "Now I have to be going. Mike here knows how to get in touch with me, and of course, Marcos does, as well. How soon do you think it will be before you are ready to head down there?"

"I suspect the paperwork will take a few weeks." Henry said.

"Let me know if I can help with that." Luke walked out of the room with Marcos following, carrying Mr. Nachash's briefcase.

Elizabeth turned for the door. Henry spoke. "Elizabeth?" She continued towards the door.

"Elizabeth, we're going to be working together for I don't know how long. Are you going to avoid talking to me the whole trip?"

Elizabeth stopped but didn't turn around.

Mike turned towards the screen. "Gabe, I need to show you something on this one photo over here." He motioned to Gabe that they needed to give Henry and Elizabeth some space. Gabe followed Mike.

"Elizabeth, I have missed you." Henry leaned, attempting to look at Elizabeth's face. "Can you at least turn around so I can look at you?"

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Elizabeth turned, slowly, keeping her arms folded across her chest.

“You look nice. Are you going to be mad at me forever, for a, little misunderstanding?” Henry asked.

“Little?” Elizabeth’s face filled with rage. “What do you mean little? You have never respected me and I don’t think you ever will. You sided with that bastard of a husband over me, your own daughter, which I guess that makes you a bastard as well. I guess all men are bastards. Maybe there’s a medical cure for that, too. I’ll work with you on this expedition, because that’s what Luke wants, but I’ll have you know, it won’t be what I want, and as soon as this trip is over, I have no intentions of working with you, again. Now go screw yourself.” At that, she whipped around and walked out.

Tears came to Henry’s eyes. He was trying to save Elizabeth’s marriage, but she didn’t see it that way. He didn’t have a clue, as to how to mend the wounds, he had inflicted upon his daughter. Henry turned to Mike and Gabe. “That went well, don’t you think?”

Mike and Gabe walked over, put their arms around Doc, and walked out of the boardroom, together.

Gabe turned to Doc. “You know, Doc, sometimes just getting started is half the battle.”

Henry wasn’t sure if he was talking about the expedition or his relationship with Elizabeth.