

What Alexander was Looking For

by Victor Emmanuel

Alexander's arms had lost all their strength several hundred feet ago, all they did now was keep balance and swing the pick into the ice. All that was driving him upwards was his legs which would soon give out. The air was simply too thin for what his body needed, but then he saw it. In just 50 more feet was the summit. Strength he didn't know he had left in him surged through his body; it wasn't much but it just might get him to the top.

Alexander's buddy, Omar, hadn't complained in the last hour. Not because he didn't have anything to complain about, but rather he didn't have the breath or energy required for the effort. He began to gather up what was required to ask Alexander if they could take a break, when he saw, to his despair, Alexander was picking up the pace.

Finally, Alexander crawled over the ledge and onto the roof of the world. He laid there exhausted, breathless, and ecstatic. It was when he saw a hand waving from under the cliff, he remembered his friend. He grabbed the hand; no longer having any strength in his arms or legs but there was still some left in his back so he used that to aid his friend to his place at the top.

They both laid there too drained to do anything. It was a long while before Omar could finally speak. "Why...the fuck...did you make me do this?"

After a moment of heavy breathing Alexander answered "Because...I needed a buddy so someone would know...what happened if something were to happen."

"But...why me?"

"You were...the most physically...fit."

"I would...have preferred...if you asked me...to help you move."

"You would have rather...helped me move...than climb Everest?"

“Safer...and easier”

“Those are both words...that mean boring”

“I’d rather be bored...than dead...or unable to move...Why did you even want to do this?”

“Hold on.” Alexander, after finally finding the strength to do so, sat up looked around then stood. The view up at the top was incredible, but that’s not what Alexander was looking for. The sky was clearer than any he had ever seen, but that wasn’t what Alexander was looking for. There was no noise but for the wind, but that wasn’t what Alexander was looking for. The air was cleaner than any he had ever breathed, but that wasn’t what Alexander was looking for. What Alexander was looking for was here at some point, but it wasn’t anymore. Or perhaps it was here, just hiding. Alexander reached out his gloved hand, hoping to beckon it to him. But then, a Tibetan guide followed by a couple ascended the summit and whatever was left of what Alexander was looking for vanished.

The guide took a picture of the couple, who held up their climbing picks to pose. After handing the woman back her phone, the guide saw Alexander and Omar. Confused the Tibetan looked around then walked over to them. And asked, “Where is your guide?”

“We don’t have one,” said Omar still sitting.

“If you left without your guide then your waver is void,” responded the guide concerned.

“We didn’t sign a waiver,” said Alexander

“Do you know how many people die up here?” asked the exasperated guide.

“White people are crazy man,” said Omar, “They don’t care about their own safety.”

“Hey we’re white,” said the man as the couple had walked to be in earshot, curious as to what was going on, “and we aren’t crazy, nor do we not care about safety.”

Alexander looked them both up and down and simply said, “Clearly.”

“Is that supposed to be some sort of insult?” asked the affronted man.

Alexander sighed and answered, “It doesn’t matter.”

The guide and the couple walked away to set up camp away from them. Alexander and Omar agreed to descend Everest in the morning. When the Sun began to set, Omar got out the tent.

“Actually, I was thinking of sleeping outside tonight,” said Alexander

“Well if you aren’t going to help, I’m not setting up the tent.”

They both got out their sleeping bags and got in still wearing full winter gear, being sure to brush off any snow so that it wouldn’t melt and become water while they were sleeping. Once the sun had set, a sight appeared which neither had seen before. The entire milky way, in all its glory was on full display. At the top of the world they could see its full extent and constellations which should be beyond the horizon were it not a thanks to their height. It was harder for Alexander to breathe now than at any point on their expedition, such was the majesty that was before him. While this wasn’t what he was looking for, it was close.

“Ok, yea it is pretty,” said Omar

“Pretty?!” repeated Alexander and he began to laugh.

After Alexander’s laughing had died down Omar said, “You never did say why you wanted to do this.”

Alexander sighed. He first tried to figure out how to describe what he was looking for, but then realized that if Omar hadn’t seen it there would be no point in explaining. So Alexander settled on a joke. A joke that would hint at the truth. “I was looking for Dragons.”

“Dragons?” said Omar amused.

“Yep, but there were none here; I think there was one here, but it’s gone.”

“So,” said Omar, not sure if his friend pulling his leg or not. “Will you continue to look for dragons?”

“Yep.”

“Where will you next look?”

Alexander thought for moment. He realized what he was looking for wasn't likely to be on earth anymore. So Alexander pointed to the place in the sky that held the moon and said "There."