

CHAPTER

Six

“It’s your birthday present.”

His old chair creaked as Francis Young, Sr. stood up and dropped the tickets into his son’s lap.

“Peru?” Frank asked, studying them dubiously. “Are we going on another dig this summer?”

His father shook his head. His hair was shaggy and graying, but other than that there was a youthfulness about him that confounded his forty-eight years. Now, he bounced eagerly on the toes of his sneakers and grinned.

“Not us. *You.*”

“I’m going on a dig? By myself? But—”

“No, not a dig. Something much better—or at least, I think it will be. You’re going on a hike. Into the Amazon.”

“The Amazon?” Frank shrugged. “I’ve been to the Amazon before.”

“Not this part. Not where I’m sending you.” His father’s voice dropped to an excited whisper and his blue eyes danced in his sunburnt face. “It’s the place of my greatest discovery. My biggest find.”

“Your biggest find? You mean that partial skeleton that dated back to—”

“No, no, not that,” his father interrupted, waving the rest of the sentence away. “Something much bigger. Much more meaningful. Never mind—you’ll see.”

Frank sighed, knowing his father well enough to know that this “great find” could be something as small as a fragment of fossilized dinosaur or the remnants of some early medical implement. The prospect of the Amazon in July summoned such oppressive images of heat, bugs and wetness that Frank itched just thinking about it.

“Do I *have* to go?”

Frank, Sr. moved around his cluttered study. “I know I put it on one of these shelves . . .” he muttered to himself before replying, “Yes, son. You have to go.”

“But Dad, it’s my last summer,” Frank whined. “Steve and the other guys are just hanging out at the beach. The only kid I know who’s going anywhere is backpacking through Europe—”

“Europe!” his father scoffed at the bookshelves. “There’s no adventure in Europe! This journey makes Machu Picchu, let alone Europe, seem like Disneyland.”