

A mysterious deathbed letter launches Dr. Kate Shepherd and her husband, Bill Shepherd, on a perilous journey. Abandoning the creature comforts of Washington D.C in favor of the bare necessities of South Island, New Zealand, the Shepherds follow a series of clues that are too intriguing to ignore. The pursuits of a rare artifact and a priceless treasure are abruptly interrupted by a series of frightening natural events that quickly spiral out of control. Though sidetracked by unforeseen obstacles, the daring couple continue their hunt for the truth. Their scholarly research and clever deductions yield an extraordinary discovery.

Gold Fever

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Gold Fever

**The Continuing Tale
of
Discovery, Intrigue
&
Passion**

An Original Novel by

Donna Sherry Boggins

&

Robert S. Catan

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First Edition

Dedication

To my Perfect Stranger,
for keeping the adventure alive.
DSBoggins

To my Perfect Stranger
For keeping my brain functioning.
RSCatan

The Letter

If you're readin' this, I'm dead. I was born back in Kansas City, Missouri in the year of our Lord. 1821, September 28. My 3 brothers and 2 sisters I'm hopin' are still alive back there. My older brother, Charlie, Charlie just passed away here, with me. May he rest in peace. I'd be obligin' if you'd let my kin know that he's gone peaceful like with a fever and some dysentery.

Charlie and me, we left Kansas to follow the gold strike in the hills of California. We got signed on to do some surveying along the way and that paid us a dollar a day. We did our fair share of digging but never made a good strike. In fact, most of our surveying pay was lost tryin' to hit a vein of pure gold.

We got signed on to a surveying crew that was headin' out to a new strike in a far off place, New Zealand, so we packed it up and shipped out on a steamer. It took a long time crossin' the ocean and stops along the way to pick up fruit and supplies. We heard scurvy can hit a whole ship full along with sea sickens from the choppy water. Well. Charlie and me, we made it with no real serious sickness.

The sea captain, Marcus Dempsey, anchored off the south tip of New Zealand, a real pretty place. It was all trees and lakes and glacier ice up on the mountains but not much people. It seemed to be just miners and us surveyors buyin' supplies and grub, packin' up a mule train and heading out. We all chipped in a silver piece, some a few gold flakes to get a local guide, named Boris to show us the road to the gold fields.

It was wintertime but hotter'n Hades. Said it was opposite from Missouri, winter was summer and the other way around. Looked a lot like California gold country, to be sure. Maybe one of my brothers or somebody who's got the itch can follow my directions. Charlie and me, we ended up along a narrow little river that was told to be rich with gold as big as your thumb.

The miners started building a town along the river, namin' it Arrowtown and for all my travillin' it looked much like Julian,

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California, a minin' town that was just tappin' out. This Arrowtown was full of merchantiles, a stable with a smithy, and gamin' houses with plenty of hard whiskey and those pretty ladies teasin' and smilin' and hopin' to empty full pockets while shamelessly they're droppin' their bloomers.

Charlie and me, well, we did OK. The surveyin' was good and paid regular and we picked up a few gold nuggets, smaller than that here thumb of mine but we lost most of it to the gamblin' halls. Charlie and me, we both have no women back home to speak of so we enjoyed the company of the ladies and we both came down with the clap. So it burned and itched something terrible so we got some salve from the local Doc and that helped some.

After our surveying was finished up, we thought it best to go on our own for a while and see if followin' the river would lead to a good vein. Downriver a ways, we ran into a strange lookin' native, called a Maori poutamu hunter, meaning, jade hunter. For you who reads this and don't know, this Maori was all marked and scarred up on his face and body. Real strange like. Wore nothin' like our dungarees, but coverings from plants and grass. In the beginnin', he stayed clear of us, real shy lookin'. Then we gained his trust by sharin' our evening vittles. Soon, he's sittin' with us around the fire, makin' music with a strange lookin' wood flute. I traded my harmonica for his flute and he seemed pleased with the trade. I taught him a tune and he learned faster than most.

He couldn't understand a lick of what we said but he was good company. He showed us the green jade he collected and I swear, it looked just like that I saw in San Francisco that had come down from the Orient. Real pretty. We made our way down the river until it came to a split and he headed his own way but before he took off, he gave me a little present, I guess for puttin' up with him. It looked to be some sort of fancy bone or horn, all polished up nice and all and some kinda writin' over it. Looked real ceremonial like.

Not communicatin' real well, I figured he made it but he shook his head and pointed back toward Arrowtown. Best I can figure, he got it

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from a miner or maybe a ship captain for doin' some trackin'. Don't know for sure but in his way, said it was worth us holdin' onto.

A few months passed and Charlie and me, we find nothing except more lakes and a few small flakes of gold and our supplies are runnin' low, so we head back to Arrowtown. That's when I overhear some miners talkin' in the saloon about a map carved on some bone that got took and they're out to get it back and kill the dang thief. Well, Charlie and me, we don't want no trouble, least of it to get killed over a bone, so we took it and buried it good, hopin' to dig it up when it's safe, then see what happens.

Before we stuck it in the ground, I used my surveying tools and graphite to draw the markings on some paper. Before you start askin', yes, I had the carved up bone but no, I never could fetch it up. Charlie and me, we had just enough scratch left to book passage on a old sloop headin' north, makin' our way back to Missouri.

The ship, leakin' somethin' terrible stopped in every port headin' up the coast. Finally, we'z both got sea sickness and puking real bad so we get off that blasted ship in South America. Charlie and me, we get good and drunk and sleep it off in a bawdy house and first thing, the dang ship is gone, strandin' us. So right there and there, Charlie and me, we decide to stay a while and get our sea legs. Finally, when we sobered up, we found out we were in Peru ! Never even heard of Peru !

We got jobs doin' some surveying and settled in. Didn't pay much but the girls were pretty like, dark and friendly. That was 5 years ago when we last got stranded.

Now, Charlie's dead. I think he croaked from the clap or something worse. Charlie liked the ladies and they liked him. He got some bad rash all over him and the itching and sweatin' then he started talkin' crazy like. Ramblin' in his sleep. One morning, I find him all sweated up and dead as a door nail. I bury him real nice like outside a little church run by these missionaries. I made sure I carved a cross and wrote his name and birth date real clear.

She came from the church one day and comes every day. She's a blessing. I got a bad case of consumption and everyday it gets more

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worse. Damn painful, too. I think I'm dyin' though I guess it's my time so I can't complain.

You askin', 'Why all this story telling?' Well, I'll tell you. Charlie and me, we were surveyin' like they wanted and I was restin' on a big granite rock, when I saw a mud brick stuck between the rocks. So, being curious, I broke the clay rock and stuck my hand inside and real careful like, pulled out the damdest thing. It looked like a small, round pumpkin, hard as a stone, deep brown and carved up. Strangest thing, it had those same markings as my bone carvin' down in Arrowtown! I showed it about and someone said I better put it back 'cause there's some curse on it. Then someone broke into our room above the saloon and tore things up bad. But didn't find the gourd. So next week, we go back and hid it under the same rocks. We made a few mud bricks and hid it real good. Seemed like I had some curse followin' us. Then Charlie got real sick and my feet went bad and I've been limpin' around since.

That's part of the curse, Charlie and me thought. Guess we're not much treasure hunters, not even good miners but now, getting' to the end of my sorry life, I'm regrettin' not havin' the chance to write down the writin' and see where it all leads. I drew a map on the back so you can find the gourd and see for yourself. I'm hopin' it's just where I hid it.

Maybe now, whoever gets this letter can finish up where I left off. Find out about what's so special about the bone and the gourd. Pretty strange goings on and kept me awake many nights just thinkin', not doin'.

Dang, I almost forgot to tell you where I hid the bone. No good without it. There's a river right out back a town. You walk around the Arrowtown Bank, down to the river's edge then cross over, then take about 300 big steps, say 900 yards measurement, towards all those giant trees. There was an old pipe used to flush the bank. I found a piece, maybe 3 feet long. I wrapped the bone in a rabbit hide and some old flannel and oil-cloth from a weather coat and stuffed it inside the pipe. I buried the pipe and covered it with a pile of loose rocks. It's plenty safe there and no one will go snooping around it.

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*Whoever's readin' this last will and testament, I'm wishin' you
luck cuz mine just ran out.*

Your Friend or Relative, Thomas P. Bratworth, Deceased

Vetting

What Kate hadn't mentioned to the young interns when they questioned her uncanny knowledge of them was her CIA husband's complete vetting of everyone sitting around the table. William Shepherd was cautious to a fault but after the difficulties they'd encountered in Peru, he made a point of checking into everyone's backgrounds, including the jovial Jeremy and the fractious Dr. Brown.

Jeremy Marshall's dossier came back without a single blemish. He said whom he be and didn't lie. He remained discreet about his sexual preference and never let it interfere with his work either in the classroom or in the field. Within his profession, he was listed among the best, and brightest yet in recent years, his ability to be as effective in the field diminished as his waistline expanded. He attracted the brightest interns and these young assistants were destined to excel under his casual yet thorough tutorage. And Jeremy did his own vetting, turning away young scholars lacking the fire and passion he required.

Years before, Kate had been mentioned as a viable candidate and Jeremy wrote a number of flattering letters trying to gain her attention but Raymond had vied for her as well and apparently had successfully blocked the line of communication between Jeremy and his personal favorite. Kate was unaware that Raymond had guided her career to that extent. She would have been furious, but for now, her husband chose to withhold that information from her. Perhaps that time would come.

Jeremy received a gold star. Dr. Maggie Brown did not. Her thick file was rich with awards yet varied and troubling. It began with her earliest childhood. She was an only child, born to Eastern European parents of the working class. She was the second son her father had wanted. The first son unfortunately had died at birth. The older brother would have relieved the pressure.

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Enrolled in a Catholic school, Maggie was tested and the results came back indicating a child of extraordinary brilliance. The problem? She was told the truth and from that point on, she ruled her parents, treating them with unreasonable contempt. She was smarter and no one, including her own parents could influence her choices or control her raging temper and her uncanny ability to manipulate and control her illustrious future. When Maggie became a legal adult, she changed her name to cover her shame of her parents' foreign sounding name that ended in *ski*. Brown was her chosen name and it worked for her.

The Mensa member sailed along, becoming the first and youngest at every level of her academic career. People, including her professors, learned to keep a safe distance. She was never wrong or at least, she would not admit to being at fault. . She never apologized because "*if Maggie's always right, then why the need to apologize?*" And she would never forget. Cross her once and you became a lifelong enemy.

She was the center of her universe and everyone and everything revolved around her. She lacked empathy. She could charm the king but loathe the very sight of him. She'd feed a starving child then rush to wash away the filth.

Still, she was brilliant and excelled in spite of her functional disability, recognized as Narcissistic Personality Disorder. She preferred men to women and treated other females with contempt. On a positive note, a woman plagued with this disorder, could reject, manipulate to get her way and divide and conquer nearly anyone that came under her influence but rarely would a woman with NPD kill to support her desire to control the outcome of her important all encompassing world.

A male, on the other hand, could kill after his five-course dinner! Many of the classic serial murderers matched traits and were equally brilliant, lacked empathy and often experienced grandiose feelings of superiority.

Like athletes with quirky, dangerous habits, Maggie took steps up the ladder of success, predicated on her ability to deliver the

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goods while intimidating and manipulating anyone who dared challenge her. *"The ends justify the means."*

Earlier in the evening, Kate had read Brown's profile then covered her head with a bed pillow, "Damn, what a piece of work! Give me two hard working interns with normal IQ's and send the oddball back to London for a turn of the century lobotomy! How in the world can she work with anyone?"

Bill had to chuckle. "That's easy. She doesn't. That, meaning anyone who comes in contact with her, works *for* her or not at all. She is no team player. And I don't automatically assume she's without physical risk. I've witnessed women, trained in radical, political conditions, who would slit your throat as efficiently as any well trained, fanatical man. Or hire someone to do the deed. It's unusual but not unheard of. Dear Kate, we'll head off on our own as soon as we can."

"But, Darling, how do we do that without hurting Jeremy? And, come to think of it, how in the world does he maintain a relationship with her? I'm baffled. He's such a sweet guy."

"Well, one thing, Jeremy's gay. I didn't mention anything because it doesn't matter. The guy's a saint and I like him."

"Yes, me too but his being out of the closet has never been an issue with him. He's comfortable with his choice in life partners and the school accepted him because of his brilliance, nothing else. So you think that Maggie, sorry, the Doctor, has something else on him? Or maybe, she just doesn't feel threatened by him?"

"Yes, something like that. She likely outed him years ago and she's used threats to keep him in line. Something damning. If it's to her advantage, she'll use it. Jeremy works with her and uses self-deprecating humor to ward her off. All that laughter covers some, but not all, of his distrust."

"But why now? Everyone is coming out of the closet. What has he to worry about?"

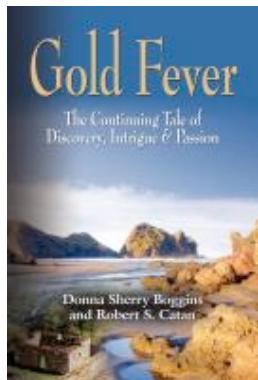
Bill Shepherd gave it more thought as they prepared to meet for dinner. Yes, they were running late but this was important. "I imagine there's more. Jeremy has a few skeletons and Maggie

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would love to haul them out for the entire world to see. I bet that extra weight he's packing comes from worry. He knows how dangerous she can be. Keep your friends close and your enemies closer."

"Well, she's as close as she can get. Damn her. Just, well, I was hoping for an informative, fun trip. Not another punch to my battered psyche." Kate combed her damp hair back and tied it loosely with a blue ribbon.

Bill came to her side and gave her a squeeze, Don't worry. I'll take care of Dr. Maggie Brown. Knowledge is power and we have both, knowledge and power. So leave that up to me. She'll deal with me better than you. She's programmed to compete with you. With me she'll flutter her lashes.



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