WENDINGTON JONES AND THE LOST LEGACY



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For my sister,
For whom I would race across this earth.
You run. I run.



'Whether lost in a desert, stranded in a collapsed mine,
or dealing with a heretofore undiscovered predator,
there are many things that can save your life. However,
I always felt the most important thing to have was
a friend. And failing that, a Madan pocketknife.'

from *Travelling the Amazon* by Pennington Jones
(published 1910)



CHAPTER 1

THE HOUSE THAT SHADOWS BUILT

WENDINGTON JONES WAS TRYING TO PICK A LOCK. She was not in some far-flung place, cloaked in secrecy and danger. Nor was she some daring ne'er-do-well trying to break into some highly fortified area. She was a young woman, just a few weeks shy of her sixteenth birthday, and she was trying to enter a small study in her home. It should not have been this difficult and yet the door remained shut. What is and what should be, as so often before, had not met on equal terms.

The door protected the private study of Wendington's mother, Pennington. All that seemingly was contained within were notes and pages from unfinished books she had once written. To most people this would seem nothing of any importance. Wendington Jones was not most people.

She knew that among the loose pages might be a trove of mystery and adventure. Wendington was desperate to get inside to look around. However, it was an endeavour that was

barred, for now at least, by six inches of oak and a metal locking mechanism she couldn't get her head around.

It was nearly two in the morning, and though the sensible course would have been to retire to bed and try again in the morning, Wendington knew it was just not an option. She wanted to get inside, but she also needed to accomplish this without Grandmamma knowing that she had done so.

After a few moments of fruitlessly trying to recatch the lock with her tools, Wendington became aware of an odd change in the silence behind her. As if something that was previously passively still was now actively trying to remain unnoticed.

'She won't be happy you know, Miss.'

'I wouldn't think so, Rohan. What are you doing creeping around at this time?'

'I heard someone sneaking about in the dark.'

'Then they can't have been a very good sneak.'

'No. They can't.'

'Needs must, Rohan,' Wendington responded, ignoring his jibe. 'Grandmamma has made her feelings plain.'

In truth, Grandmamma had been a little firmer than that. About a week after her return home from her last adventure, Wendington had grown restless. She wanted to taste the mystery and thrill of that excitement again; to chase the unknown and fantastical.

So, as the impatience evolved into desperation, Wendington had wondered if there were any more mysteries contained within her mother's works. If there was some overlooked book or map with a clue to something unexplained. Wendington had gone to her mother's study only to find it locked and the

key nowhere to be found.

'Grandmamma, is there a key for mother's study somewhere?' Wendington had asked in what she had considered quite a well-meaning manner.

'There is,' her grandmamma had replied, not bothering to look up from her book.

'May I have it?'

'You may not.'

Apparently Grandmamma had not cared for whatever mood Wendington had come to the library with that evening.

'Why not?'

'Because you are looking to be up to no good,' Grandmamma had responded, not moving her head but finally looking over the rims of her glasses.

'No, I'm not.'

Wendington had always been a terrible liar and Grandmamma an excellent spotter of fibs. So even if Grandmamma had not suspected the truth before Wendington had come to the library, Wendington's snapped response had ended any chances of getting her hands on the key for the study.

'You said you would put an end to all this, Wendington,' Grandmamma gently reminded her granddaughter, in much the same way that was also stern and unbending. 'All this adventuring. No more, please. Before your return to school.'

'Yes, Grandmamma,' Wendington had replied, careful this time not to say anything that could be spotted as a direct lie.

So, now laden with guilt as well as an impending deadline, Wendington decided to keep the peace during the day, instead opting to try and pick the lock during the middle of the night,

when the house was asleep.

Or at least when *most* of the house was asleep.

'What do you hope to find in there, Miss?' Rohan asked, a subtle edge to his question.

'I think if I knew that, I wouldn't need to get in there.'

'Do you want some help?'

'No, thank you, Rohan. I think I have it.'

'Suit yourself.'

Wendington did not move for fear of letting the lock mechanism slip. Behind her, she heard Rohan sit on the base of the nearby stairs and then the soft *swish-swish* of a brush over a pair of shoes.

'Do you think this is really the time?'

'Sorry, Miss,' Rohan offered, in a faux conciliatory manner, stopping polishing his shoes as he did.

Concentrating on her task at hand, Wendington flicked out the little finger of her left hand. With strained effort, she managed to wrap it round a third needle she had placed inside the lock to move the tumblers inside.

Steeling herself, Wendington carefully guided her finger upwards while twisting the same hand. For a moment, she felt elated as the whole mechanism began to rotate in her hands. And then something pushed back from inside the lock, and in an instant all the tension was lost as the tools shot out onto her lap.

She sank a little, deflated at how close she had come. A split second later the *swish-swish* returned behind her. Rohan said nothing his brush wasn't already saying.

Wendington began to pack away her tools into a rolled-up

handkerchief, annoyed that one of the thin needles had been bent in the complicated mechanical lock.

'I think I shall retire for the night, Rohan.'

'Very good, Miss.'

Wendington wound her way to her bedroom slowly, trying to bend her misshapen tool back into place. However, the metal was already too worn and the needle snapped in her hands.

She stormed into her room, jettisoning her instruments into the opposite wall in irritation. They landed with a loud thud, which woke Perceval causing him to tumble into a bowl of water.

A friend, an ally and perhaps most importantly of all, a newt, Percy had not expected the sudden return of Wendington to the room. Nor the throwing of the bent tools. Thankfully, Wendington was far too preoccupied to notice his slip into the water, so he causually just climbed out of the bowl again, as if nothing had happened.

Wendington was in no fit state for sleep. Her body ached from nearly an hour of crouching in front of the door but her mind was wound up like a coil. She sat at her dressing table and stretched her long frame out before placing some food down for Perceval.

'I couldn't get in,' she told him as he eagerly ate up the small pellets.

He turned ever so briefly towards her as she spoke. Because although he *was* hungry, Perceval liked to think he could always provide a friendly ear.

Wendington stared at her reflection in the mirror,

disappointed to see it looked tired. Though she naturally sported quite porcelain skin, her whole face carried marks from where she had foolishly tried to get a little too close to the lock to see if she could see anything inside. In fact, she got nothing from the inspection except an oil stain across her cheek that ended sharply at the nub of her button nose.

She tried fruitlessly to clean it away but gave up when she realised that the towel she'd been using the last two days had as much oil as her and she was making matters worse rather than better.

Wendington's long auburn hair was piled messily on top of her head in a vague attempt to stay out of her eyes – and, more often than not, her mouth – as she had been concentrating on the lock. But now it just looked like it had been pulled back so anyone could see the mess on her face and the beginnings of tell-tale signs under her eyes that she was not in fact sleeping at nights.

'What a mess,' she said to Perceval, who was now so into his food he barely responded.

She pulled a pin from her hair allowing it to swamp her face for just a moment. It was only as she pulled it aside again, to try and finally prepare for bed, that something caught her eye outside. There was a light in the garden. A light that was moving.

Wendington rushed to her window. A thick layer a snow covered the gardens, following nearly two weeks of freezing weather. Every tree and bush looked like small green imperfections on a cotton sheet. Mr Thorne and the gardeners had done their best to keep the paths clear and now someone

was walking along one of them with a bright light above their head, moving slowly to avoid slipping.

'Rohan?' Wendington said out loud to no one in particular.

It had to be him. The house was deathly silent apart from Rohan who, only minutes earlier, had been fully dressed and fully awake downstairs. The gardeners should have been well asleep and no one else would have navigated the grounds with such ease. So, the real question was not *who*, but instead *why*. Or, at a push, maybe even *what*.

Wendington thrust on her trusty boots and grabbed several layers of clothes from nearby piles in her room. If Rohan was moving away from the house at this late hour, she wanted to know why and that meant following him through the frozen gardens before he disappeared.

'Stay safe and stay warm, Percy,' she said before disappearing.

Perceval, in response, did nothing except dream of warmer climes. It was precisely the bare minimum he could do.



Wendington bounded down the stairs, but by the time she reached the piano room that led to the back of the house, she found Rohan by the window, looking as puzzled as she was.

'It's not the Dominos,' he said calmly, not wanting to stoke any worry that might have already begun brewing inside Wendington.

'And how exactly could you know that?'

'If they were to come,' he responded, though his voice

barely rose above a whisper, 'I'm not sure they would carry a Madan lamp to signal their approach.'

'Then who is it?'

'I do not know,' he answered, calmly and slowly. However, it was excessively clear to Wendington that what Rohan was really saying, was that he did not like that he did not know. He didn't like it one bit.

'You should go upstairs, Miss. Just in case.'

'You just said it wasn't the Dominos.'

'And you just said that we couldn't be sure.'

'Well,' began Wendington. 'There's only one way to find out, isn't there.'

And with that, she burst out into the cold night to chase the mysterious lamplight, leaving Rohan shortly behind, calling after her as he put on his newly polished shoes.

Wendington bounded over the crisp ground, sticking to the cleared pathways and wishing all the while that she had chosen a warmer coat to put on. After a good two minutes or so, she finally caught up with the stranger and his lamp that was shining out across a bare set of bushes that lined the snow-covered pathway. The bushes looked oddly green for such a wintery scene.

As she approached, Wendington could see that the mysterious figure was an older man, wrapped in gardener's greens. He was tending to the large bush by the light and seemingly paid little attention to Wendington as she walked closer.

'What are you doing?'

'Gardening,' was all he offered in response.

'In the dark?' she returned, confused.

The man said nothing, concentrating on the bushes, which Wendington now recognised as roses. He simply extended his arm to indicate his lamplight.

'I mean, it's the dead of night. Why exactly are you tending to the roses now?'

'They were dying.'

'It is a frosty night in the middle of winter. I would be surprised if every single plant is not dying in some fashion.'

Her curiosity seemed to affect the gardener, who carried a heavy accent that Wendington could not place.

'Yes. They all suffer. But I save the roses.'

'At two o'clock in the morning?'

'Whatever time I am called upon,' replied the gardener. He lifted his hand and the lamp to show the crisp buds of the roses were plump and healthy. They looked like they were ready to bloom, a full four months earlier than could ever reasonably be expected.

So astonished was Wendington, she glanced up at the gardener, in the dim lamplight. His face was cracked and sharp, and he was perhaps in his early fifties. A thick mass of black hair hung from under a woollen hat and one of his eyes was cloudy, either through injury or condition. A matted but well-kept beard hung from his chin that completed an angled, full face while his distinctive crooked nose gave him a rather singular look. His good eye focused intently on the rosebuds, seemingly delighted with the horticultural magic he had achieved.

He caught Wendington staring at him and quickly turned back to the shrub, obscuring his face in shadow once more.

With a swift but precise movement, he plucked a bud and held it out to Wendington to take.

'Take.'

She did, and he dropped his arm, keeping his tall frame away from the light.

'Is cold,' he offered, to break the ensuing silence.

'Yes. It is.'

Wendington was so entranced by this botanical wizardry, she barely even turned as a panting Rohan finally caught up with her, his own lamplight providing more brightness to the situation, but shedding no light on the mystery whatsoever.

'What are you doing?' Rohan asked the mysterious gardener, who had fully turned away from them both, obscuring himself again.

'I said, what are you doing?' Rohan repeated forcefully.

'Don't be a beast, Rohan. He's just gardening. Look at this.' Wendington interrupted his anger to show him the horticultural trick in her hand.

However, Rohan did not turn to look at it, or her, keeping his eyes trained on the mysterious gardener. An obvious tension began to cover the garden in much the same way the snow had for weeks now.

Wendington reached for Rohan to calm him, but he seemed too tense to even notice.

'I should go,' the gardener muffled into his hands, turning ever so briefly back towards a confused Wendington and the light of Rohan's lamp. If at all possible, Wendington felt Rohan's frame stiffen even more as he caught sight of the stranger's appearance.

'Yes. You should,' Rohan just about managed to say.

The gardener quickly grabbed his light and began to walk away, as Wendington turned, more than a little annoyed at Rohan.

'That was incredibly rude, Rohan.'

'Go inside, Miss,' he returned sharply, not even turning to her or taking his eyes off the retreating interloper.

'What's going on . . .'

'Inside. Please, Wendington.'

This time Rohan *had* turned to Wendington. It was rare that he ever looked that worried over any situation but this was one of those times. So Wendington did not argue. She turned and walked back to the house.

Rohan did not follow. Not straight away. He stood sentinel for a good few moments in the snow. Watching the retreating gardener as if he were the greatest threat he could have imagined. The sort of threat that had, even for now, pushed the Dominos aside.



It was a minute or so before Rohan finally returned to a pacing Wendington at the house. He ignored her initial requests for an explanation, instead leading her towards Grandmamma's library, where he began to search through the shelves for something that might provide an answer for Wendington.

Wendington's frustration at this point was about to explode and set fire to the highly combustible contents of the library. While Rohan searched, a tiny thought that had

been lurking at the back of her mind suddenly came forwards.

'When you found me outside Mother's study, you said someone was sneaking around in the night,' she said, as the pieces began to fit together in her head. 'You didn't mean me, did you?'

'No, Miss,' Rohan finally said as he found the book he had been looking for, laying it down on the table and flicking through pages that were littered with plate photographs.

'You think he was inside?'

'I don't know.'

'But you think?'

Rohan finally looked up at her as his fast fingers stopped their dance across the pages.

'Yes,' he finally admitted, his eyes filled with more fear than Wendington had seen in a long time.

'Who is he?' Wendington asked carefully, worried that too many questions might send Rohan rushing away again.

'This man,' he answered, turning the book around to Wendington to show a long passage of text next to a photograph.

The man in the picture stared blankly out, almost through the lens of whatever camera had taken it. His dark hair draped from his head. His full angled features lit up. His distinctive crooked nose and matted beard giving him his unmistakable look. And his two intense eyes stared directly at Wendington, just as they had minutes before when he had handed her the rosebud in the frozen garden.

'Who is he?' Wendington repeated, barely able to take her eyes away from the hypnotic stare of the photograph.

'That is Grigor Rasputin, Miss. A faith healer and close

friend of the last Russian royal family. And someone who died in December 1916. Over four years ago.'