



Chapter 16: Expedition to the Tomb of a Ruling Maya Queen

May – June 2005

Hillary Jacobs

Three days before the zenith passage of the sun at the onset of *invierno*, my expedition team departs Todos Santos for Lake Turtle Macaw in the jungle west of Nebaj. The grad students, José Juan Trejo and Pedro Molina Hernandez, have arranged for our camp equipment and for the muleteer and his mules to carry it. Luis, the man I met on the trail to San Juan, and Julian, my Mam language teacher from the Proyecto, are guiding us to the site. They have a vague idea of the cenote's location but I'm helping out with the use of GPS and Google maps. I'm also using Bradley's antique compass and following the coordinates he outlined in his diary. It makes me feel like he's guiding the way or at least like I'm living as he lived over one hundred years before. The thirty-year-old wife of Luis, Zak-Kuk, is our camp cook and curandera. Like Antonio's wife, she knows how to use the medicinal plants of the forest and can diagnose ailments by reading the pulse.

We first ride horses along dirt roads through pine and oak groves. Halfway down the mountain slope we enter the cloud forest with ferns, orchids, mosses, and bromeliads growing on

tree branches and trunks. When we reach the rainforest of the valley floor, the vaqueros return to Todos Santos with their horses and our team forges through the unmarked jungle with the mules and muleteer trailing behind. In places, Luis and Julian resort to clearing our path with machetes. Of course, I'm using Bradley Nolan's machete to clear my path while picturing my virile great-great-grandfather forging his own way to the queen's tomb.

By late afternoon on day one, clouds begin to gather and soon thunder booms and lightning flashes. We hastily pitch our two tents beside a stream running through the dripping canopy of the rainforest. During the night, Chaac ceaselessly pelts the canvas roof of my tent where Monte and José Juan sleep on one side of the center pole and Frank and I on the other, each in our own sleeping bags. Frank is now completely a man and the nonsense of Antigua is far from my mind. My thoughts almost exclusively entail what treasures we might discover in the queen's tomb. So far, no one has said much about what lies ahead perhaps because he does not want to jinx the expedition by dreaming of possibilities and building up hopes. But in my mind, I have already gone way beyond this and am expecting to uncover priceless artifacts including the codex of Jaguar Blood Moon. Everything has gone so smoothly since I discovered Bradley's trunk that I feel like Mom and Daddy are looking out for me and I know they will not let me down.

When morning arrives, it is still pouring outside and we remain cooped up in the tent waiting for the storm to end. To pass time, I write in my field notebook and the men play Three-Card Monte and Monte Bank. It is the first time Frank and my mentor have interacted beyond a few cordial words. Most of the time they have been avoiding each other. Now they're discussing Maya culture and the museum's artifacts like they're old colleagues.

“What’s new at the museum, Professor Vasquez?” Frank asks. He’s just dealt the cards to himself, Monte, José Juan, and Pedro who has joined us in our tent.

“Jade figurines from Chiapas,” Monte replies as he studies his cards. He is playing a game among men. “A beautiful god with a slanted forehead. Like a Moab of Rapa Nui.”

“Ometeotl?” Frank asks, dealing himself another card.

“Maya God. Itzamnaj, more likely.” Monte picks up a card. “God of the Iguana House.”

“Milky Way god of duality,” Frank clarifies. He appears to be on the verge of making his play.

“Por supuesto, Señor Guillemont.” Monte sounds irritated, I note. I’m well aware that the two men dislike each other.

“King to a Queen,” Frank slaps down his cards.

“Picaro! Estafador! You are a cheat!” Monte declares and throws down his hand.

“I take offense, Professor!”

“I saw your crafty move, tu engano,” Monte insists.

“You’re mistaken, Mr. Three-Card Monte. . . stud.”

“Gentlemen,” I intervene and set aside my notebook. “Don't be so literal or don't play the game.”

At noon the sun appears and the wetness begins to evaporate. We break camp and resume hacking through the jungle with Julian and Luis blazing our trail. The day’s humidity grows intense. In my protective REI cargo pants, a long-sleeved tee, a bandana around my neck, and Bradley Nolan’s safari hat, I’m sweating, constantly batting away mosquitoes, and closely watching my every step to avoid venomous snakes and ant hills. Leaf cutting ants are notorious in the region for stripping foliage and following their trails of pheromones. Upon seeing them, I

think about the Polpol Vuh episode in the House of Knives where leaf cutting ants help the hero brothers outwit the Death Lords of Xibalba.

By mid-afternoon I'm exhausted and call out for a break. No one wants to stop because we're near the lake and hope to set up camp before dark. But I need to catch my breath, wipe my brow, and take a drink from the canteen that once belonged to Bradly Nolan. I sit on a fallen ceiba tree and spray my canister of deet at the buzzing mosquitoes and flies gathering around me. Everyone is quiet but the jungle birds and monkeys are busy making their screeching and howling noises. I inhale the thick musty air that smells of damp rotting leaves or perhaps someone's wet moldy socks, I'm thinking. Before I can say I'm ready to forge ahead, a scratchy sound suddenly rings in my ears, like radio static or like aliens transmitting a cryptic call. A long thin insect then appears in my sight. "A wasp!" I scream and everyone glares at me.

"Don't move. Don't swat," Monte yells from ten feet away. He sits on a fallen log in the thick undergrowth. Zak-Kuk and the muleteer are nearby.

Frank shouts, "Soyez tranquil."

But it's too late. I swat the wasp away from my face and it drops to the top of my boot and hiked-up cargo pants and begins to sting my ankle through my thick sock. Again. And again. And again. I scream, "It's stinging me and it hurts like hell!"

Zak-Kuk and Frank rush to my side. When they reach me, the wasp is clinging to my ankle. Frank smashes it with his thumb, flicks it away, then takes off my boot and sock and rubs my foot and ankle. "Mon petite oiseau," he says. At the same time, Zak-Kuk feels my head and reads my pulse.

"And I was worried about ants, snakes, and jaguars," I say, sweating from the pain of the stings. "Not wasps."

“The jungle is its own master,” Frank says. “You never know what might be lurking in this place.”

“Let’s get going while we can,” Monte suggests.

“I don’t think I can put on my shoe,” I say, feeling headachy and nauseated

“Por supuesto.” Monte relents and steps forward. “We’ll camp here for the night.”

The men begin stringing hammocks between trees because no one believes another storm front is in the forecast. At the camp stove, Zak-Kuk prepares a mixture of plantain, tobacco, aguardiente, and a vine from a forest thicket. She applies the paste to my swollen ankle immediately easing my pain and headache. She makes a tea from the same mixture but without the alcohol. The tea brings me further relief.

That night I am barely able to sleep on my hammock under a mosquito net and when the sun comes up, I’m ready to continue. I apologize to everyone for delaying the expedition when we are so near our destination.

By late-afternoon we come across a round pool of clear, aquamarine water that matches our GPS coordinates. Before it grows dark, Luis cuts a path to the cenote’s edge while the rest of us set up camp and Zak-Kuk prepares the evening meal.

In the diminishing light, I stand at the lake shore and take pictures. Tree roots and vines, palms and ceiba trees are creeping up to the pool from all around. Ferns and saplings grow from scattered boulders before the limestone cliffs at the opposite shore where I notice a pyramid mound of rocks at a dark cave entry. “I see the waybill,” I shout. “I see the queen’s lineage shrine!”

Monte quickly appears beside me and takes his own pictures.

“It’s just as Bradly described in his diary,” I say to him. “Do you remember the passage?” I suddenly realize that I’ve blurted out something I shouldn’t have and look around for Frank, hoping he hasn’t heard me. Several times I’ve told Frank that no one can read Bradly’s diary until after we find the tomb. What will I say to him now if he’s overheard me? *I love you Frank, but respect Monte more, academically*. Fortunately, Frank is out of earshot at the camp table listening to the shortwave radio.

After a meal of quinoa and beans, Frank, Monte, the grad students, and I are sitting on boulders at the edge of the lake. Several mosquito coils are burning around us. The evening star Venus has followed the setting sun and the full face of Ix Chel the Moon shines on the water and cliff walls. Everyone is feeling invigorated about finding the cenote and cave.

At midnight, the moon flushes out most constellations but we see Jupiter near Spica and the Peccary--Pollux and Castor--at the upper right of Saturn. When the Summer Triangle fully appears, I suggest to my team, “The Celestial bird Itzam-yeh is perched atop the Milky Way Tree.” Everyone laughs from the excitement and anticipation of the moment.

Frank is sitting beside me smoking his last cigarette. I squeeze his hand feeling happy beyond reason because I’m at the threshold of discovery. My mind flashes with wayob dancers like it had at Frank’s party in Antigua. I’m about to meet Bradly’s ruling Maya Queen and hopefully find her priceless codex.

May 23, 2005 the Day of the Zenith Passage

On the morning of the zenith passage of the sun, I peer outside the tent and see a clear, blue sky above our field camp. I inhale the warm air and think *the hero twins are dancing because their father is reborn on the back of a fiery serpent*.

Zak-Kuk is at the stove on the camp table making coffee and the graduate students are at the top of the south cliff hoisting down equipment for our exploration of the cavern and wood for the sacred fire. We eat a quick tortilla and quinoa breakfast then Monte, Frank, the two graduate students, and I wade into the clear and cool water that sparkles with an orange sheen. We have two hours before the zenith sun strikes Lake Turtle Macaw. The grad students plan to take pictures from waybil to see if an alignment exists with the solar zenith but the rest of us want to record the event at the cenote's opposite shore.

Wearing diving shoes, shorts, and a J. Crew T-shirt over my swimsuit, I plunge underwater and feel warm and cool currents caress my body like veils of silk. When I resurface, I notice Frank is already at the waybil lighting his ceremonial fire and Monte and the students are climbing out of the lake. It's somewhat disappointing that I'm not the first to arrive at the cave but I just don't have the stamina of a powerful man.

When we're all standing around the waybil, Frank tosses crystal resin into the flames, sprays a mouthful of aguardiente over the lineage altar where candles are burning on the remnants of old candle wax. Then he summons the queen's spirit with words I helped him write.

"We honor you Jaguar Blood Moon, founder of your dynastic tree. We reestablish this ceremony at Lake Turtle Macaw to mark the date of your entombment. On this day of the zenith passage of the sun, your Ta Ochle returns to announce your greatness to the world. Allow us to enter the cavern of your tomb. Do not curse us but guide us to your treasures and secrets."

After Frank completes the rite, all four men, like gentlemen, or at Frank's insistence, await at the cave entrance for me to enter first. With the morning light behind me, I uphold my lantern and walk down the declining path into the dwelling of Chaac and his daughter Ix Chel, keepers of the portal to Xibalba. I inhale the stuffy air. There's no breeze, no odor, no sound

except for echoing drips of water. My heart flutters with each step. At any moment I'm expecting to see Maya kings, priests, and warriors dancing on the walls.

As the rest of my team follows, I head deeper into the main chamber watching each step until I stop to shine my lantern at the ceiling. Bats stir. Some fly outside the cave entrance. The ammonia smell of guano suddenly accosts me. It's a new odor, not the scent of the musky humid jungle. I survey the cavern with my beam of light and see colorful limestone stalactites and stalagmites that appear like the Earth's blood hardened to stone.

Everyone carefully surveys the cavern like detectives walking the grid at a crime scene searching for evidence that someone had previously been here, whether an ancient or modern Maya, Conquistador or Bradley M. Nolan himself. No one speaks or even sighs. The only noise is the seeping mineral water, our echoing footsteps, and the occasional scuttling of bats.

An hour passes and no one discovers anything other than offshoot chambers, passageways, mineral outcroppings, and puddles. No one sees any sign of a tomb or Maya glyphs chiseled on the walls. No one finds any frescoes, relics, or coins. It's as if we've stumbled onto a virgin cave untouched by humankind. Perhaps the murals and tomb lie in deeply hidden chambers, I keep telling myself as I continue to explore the cave. At times I can't help but wonder if I misinterpreted Bradley's diary or if this is the wrong cenote cavern.

By ten o'clock the team grows anxious and frustrated, especially Monte. Like everyone else he's been hoping for a great treasure at the end of our expedition, a payoff for his investment of time and money. Arriving at the cenote yesterday was a thrill in itself, but a treasure trove discovery with worldwide acclaim is what he and everyone else is really after. Even Fulbright wants that from its scholar.

“Doctor Jacobs,” Monte’s words echo in the chamber. “Are you sure this isn’t a fool’s folly? *Una busqueda inutil?*”

Before I can say anything to appease my academic host, the voice of José Juan echoes through the cavern. Within minutes, Monte, Frank, and I locate his call at the other end of a tunnel about three feet in circumference.

I ask the men to go ahead of me so I can catch my breath. I’m dirty, claustrophobic, and feeling enough dismay to think that nothing lies at the end of this tunnel. This *is* another fool’s folly. But after taking a deep breath, I change my mind and decide that this could be the tomb Bradley described.

I crawl through the narrow passage for about twenty-feet then enter an offshoot chamber illuminated by the lantern José Juan is holding. I don’t see any treasure or artifacts on the floor or glyphs and dancing kings on the walls. I see only a piece of woven cloth atop a jumble of bones in a niche carved into the limestone wall.

After we’re all standing at the niche, Monte puts on latex gloves and touches the cloth and examines the skeleton. “Female pelvis,” he suggests.

“Maya weave. Todos Santos,” Frank suggests.

Monte agrees. “Si, Señor Frenchman. This is no queen a thousand years old.” He turns to me and flashes his light in my face. “Doctor Jacobs,” he says. “There’s nothing in this cave that you described in your emails and during our many discussions. Nothing but the bones of a Maya woman who died perhaps fifty or a hundred years ago!”

I turn from Monte’s light, shocked by this reality. I feel ridiculous about myself, my achievements, my goals. Was I misled? Have I misled everyone else in the process? I remain silent, finding no words to explain this mystery. “Dr. Vasquez,” I finally utter. “Don’t give up. I

have money to search the forest around the lake. Perhaps this is the wrong cenote. Maybe there's another cavern nearby. We're destined to find something significant. The lost kingdom of the ruling Queen."

Monte's frustration turns to anger. "We'll spend two more days documenting the cave," he declares to all the team members. "Then we head back to Todos Santos, in disgrace."

Why is he making orders? I'm wondering. When this is my expedition. But I'm too frozen in disappointment to say anything more.

As if reading my thoughts, Frank steps up and exclaims, "Don't belittle our team leader, Professor Vasquez. When we head back is the lady's decision." He stands beside me, takes my hand, and further shocks me when he says. "I'm also frustrated, Señor, the Mexican man. My dreams of treasures and the codex seem foiled. But I respect our leader. It's not her fault that the cavern contains nothing but the bones of a modern woman. Besides, I still hold out hope that the codex exists. I can't believe the Almighty would forsake me now. No, I haven't given up on a game I intend to win."

Frank's words strike me like a bolt of Chaac's lightning. I am overwhelmed with emotion. What Frank just did is the kind of thing my father Sheldon would have done for me or for my mother. He has defended my honor and encouraged me not to give up on my pursuit. He truly loves me.

"I'm returning to camp, caballeros," Monte quietly snarls and awakens me from my thoughts. He then leaves the cavern and swims back to the field camp. Frank and I follow him and the grad students begin setting up their camera equipment for the solar crossing.

By 11:15 AM, our team is sitting around the camp table drinking coffee while quietly awaiting the zenith sun to strike Lake Turtle Macaw. I suggest to everyone that perhaps another

offshoot exists that hides the real tomb and treasures. “We really didn’t have enough time to thoroughly explore the entire cavern and I believe we’ll find something worthwhile this afternoon,” I say as optimistically as possibly.

“I hope you’re right,” Monte remarks, but says nothing more.

At 11:30, Frank and I leave the campsite and head to the cenote. Frank wants us to be swimming in the lake when the sun reaches zenith so, as Frank puts it, we’ll absorb the spiritual vortex of the celestial event, the meeting between Lord Sun and Ix Chel.

About ten minutes to noon, Monte appears at the water’s edge prepared to take pictures. He sits on a boulder and looks through his camera but doesn’t seem to notice Frank and I skinny dipping in the center of the lake. His camera is focused on the far shore where the Guatemalan students are taking pictures from behind the waybil.

I watch Monte sweep his camera to where Frank and I are treading water and splashing each other in play. He puts down his camera with a look of disgust. Obviously, we’ve ruined his picture. But he remains at the cenote edge to witness the event.

At precisely noon, the tropical sun seems to stop directly overhead on its passage across the sky. Lord Sun’s white light vertically falls on Frank and I like a pillar from heaven is anointing us. When the light hits the water, it bends and Ix Chel reveals her rainbow of colors from sapphire blue at the surface to blood red at its depths.

I notice that Monte isn’t taking pictures probably because we are inside the sunlit beam. “This is a hoax, an embarrassment. I’m leaving today,” he yells but he remains at the lake shore as if waiting for me to reply, as if to draw me from the water. But I remain silent. “I don’t believe there is a codex. Doctor Jacobs,” he adds.

“Quitter,” Frank utters as he treads water.

“The Frenchman corrupts you, Doctor Jacobs,” Monte yells, staring at me. “Now you too, are a liar and a fraud.”

I stay in the lake and wait for Monte to leave so I can towel off and dress without him seeing me naked. I’m humiliated. How can I possibly appease my academic host? I then ask myself if I even want him to stay. He’s shown his true self and he’s not a man of stamina.

After dinner that evening, as the moon spreads light over our field camp, Frank is in the tent listening to the shortwave radio while Monte and I are at the portable camp table compiling data by lantern light. Citronella candles and mosquito coils are burning around camp emitting a lemongrass scent.

I’m trying to make amends and convince Monte to search the area even though our team had returned to the cave that afternoon and no one discovered anything. We argue back and forth until Monte finally says, “The expedition failed, Hillary. We find nothing but a woman’s bones from recent times. There are no panels, no antiquities, no hidden treasures, and no codex. And if there ever was a tomb with treasures, looters took everything. I’m afraid your ruling Maya queen is only a legend.”

“But I have Kodak Brownie pictures of the codex. The ancient book of Jaguar Blood Moon. It mentions an unknown classic city. At the museum, I wasn’t just studying ancient Maya glyphs for my postdoc. I was secretly deciphering the text from the Kodak pictures. I deciphered the name of her city. Bone Dog. Bak Tz’ul. She was daughter of Pakal.”

“Brownie pictures? Jaguar Queen? Lost City? Daughter of Pakal? Doctor Jacobs. Your friend Monsieur Guillemont has truly twisted your thoughts.”

“After we return to Todos Santos, I’ll show you the Brownie pictures on my laptop.”

“It’s all a scam. You showed me diary files you composed under the name of Bradley Nolan. Clever but unreal.”

“I have the real diary in Tucson,” I protest.

“A forgery. You’re trying to take a bite of history you have no right to take,” Monte tells me.

“Dr. Vasquez, you make me sound megalomaniacal,” I say, suddenly hearing the sharp screech of a bird, monkey, or maybe even a ghost. It’s an eerie sound from the dark jungle.

“I apologize, Dr. Jacobs. Hillary,” Monte says and I can tell he’s trying to pull in his frustration and disappointment. “One more day in the cave. Two around the area. Then I return to Mexico. The expedition has gone nowhere. But I will examine these Brownie pictures you claim to have. I can tell a forgery when I see one, even in pictures.”

Frank Guillemont

From inside the tent, I hear Hillary and Monte talking and I’m thinking, almost aloud, *that little bitch*. Again, she has lied to me about the diary. Now she talks about Kodak pictures I know nothing about. Pictures that confirm the codex exists. The treasure I’m after! One worth millions to the right buyer. And she doesn’t tell me about her translations of the codex, about the words my soul aches to hear. After all I’ve done to bring her into the Maya spiritual world. C’est radicule! But I won’t let this little sparrow get the best of me. I will have the codex for myself. By the powers of Ometeotl, I will prevail.

Hillary Jacobs

Early the next morning, Monte informs me that he’s returning to Todos Santos.

“But last night you agreed to stay for at least a few more days. What happened?” I ask while drinking coffee at the camp table.

“I slept on it,” he tells me but says nothing more as he begins decamping. By noon he leaves with both the Guatemalan students and Julian.

Frank sits across from me, sips his coffee and then confronts me about the Kodak pictures of the codex and admits that he overheard my conversation with Monte the night before. He’s not really angry about it, it seems, but I’m embarrassed and try to persuade him that I was going to tell him but was waiting until after we found the tomb and the real codex.

“Why, little dove?” Frank asks. “I’ve shown you my secret side, taken you into the Maya heart and spirit. We are lovers. Why don’t you trust me by now? I’m hurt.”

“I’m truly sorry, Frank,” I tell him. “Everything you say is true. You’ve become everything to me.” I hesitate a moment, trying to rationalize why I kept the Brownie pictures from him. Then I think to say, “When I spread my parents’ ashes in the Seine during the Venus transit, I promised them I’d keep quiet about the contents of Bradley’s trunk until I made my discoveries. I vowed to make them proud and I didn’t want to jeopardize this by revealing too much. To anyone. Don’t you understand, Teddy Bear?” I touch his hand on the table and he doesn’t push me away. Which is a good sign, I conclude. What I’m telling him is only partly true. I’m not really sure why I didn’t tell him. Maybe deep inside he’s been so mysterious, superstitious, and even irrational at times that I find it difficult to fully trust him. Or maybe I just wanted to keep the pictures secret for selfish reasons.

“Never mind,” he says and squeezes my hand. “We’ll keep looking. We don’t need Fulbright or Monte Vasquez or anyone else. Just you and me, little sparrow. Together we’ll find the codex and achieve great things. Together we’ll become what we are meant to be.”

Frank and I decide to remain at Lake Turtle Macaw to take pictures of the bones and explore the surrounding jungle. When I promise to triple their salary, Zak-Kuk, Luis, and the muleteer also stay with us at the fieldwork camp.

Unfortunately, after a few days of slugging through the surrounding jungle and going over every inch of the cavern, no one finds anything but jungle rot, mosquitoes, anthills, and guano. By consensus, we pack up the mules and hike up the Cuchumatanes back to Todos Santos.

When Frank and I return to the shaman's homestead, Antonio is building cages for his turkeys. Frank greets him and describes our expedition and search for the codex. Antonio laughs and suggests we take prayer beads to the grave of Grandfather Thunder and ask the ancient shaman to lead us on our quest for this ancient text.

"You know where his grave is?" I ask, astonished mostly with myself for having failed to ask Antonio this question. Or had I? I'm suddenly feeling confused and wonder if this is just another ruse. The long hike and the terrible disappointment over our expedition have completely exhausted me both mentally and physically.

"I've always known," Antonio tells Frank as he whittles a stick for one of his cages.

"What if Bradly instructed someone to bury the codex with Grandfather Thunder?" I ask Frank. Before he can reply I quickly add, "Tell your master that we must dig up the gravesite."

Frank scowls at me perhaps thinking I'm being disrespectful to his old master, but he nevertheless asks Antonio about digging up the grave of Grandfather Thunder.

Antonio stops what he's doing. Frank translates what he says in Mam. "This is an ill omen. You cannot disturb the old shaman's grave."

“Frank,” I plead. “I’m sorry I’ve kept secrets from you and wasn’t up front about the codex pictures. And that I haven’t let you read Bradly’s diary. Maybe I had my reasons, I don’t know, but none of that matters now. Don’t you see. We’re so close. You have to convince your master to let us finish our quest and dig up the grave.”

I quickly see that Frank doesn’t need my encouragement. He’s as eager as I am to find the treasure. He negotiates back and forth with the old man, offering him cash for the All Saints Festival horse races, for his milpas, and for his daughter’s doweries if they should ever marry.

Antonio hesitates one final time before he finally agrees. “But I will accompany you to rebury the bones in the name of Jesu, the Virgin, and the caballeros of los Sierra de los Cuchumatanes. I determine what day we go, according to the calendar. It must be a day blessed by all the Saints.”

With a little extra incentive, plus a bountiful bonus if we find the book, Frank convinces the old shaman that the present moment is auspicious enough.

Within the hour, Antonio and Rita are escorting Frank and I to a cemetery across the village and down a mountain ridge trail. Rita leads the way on foot. She wears pink plastic slip-on shoes with her traditional woven huipil and skirt. Along the way, she keeps saying in Spanish and Mam, “We go to the grave of Ix Chel’s father, Grandfather Thunder.”

Antonio rides Thunder and brings his costumbre bundle for the reburial ceremony. He leads a pack horse carrying a shovel, pick axe, and a caged rooster. Frank and I follow behind carrying backpacks with our own supplies. I don’t bring my camera because Antonio forbids us from taking pictures of the ceremony.

The grave turns out to be a mound overgrown with grass and weeds. Etched on a stone against a pine cross is the name Mam Ah Peku in the Latin script. In the 1600s, the Spanish banned the use of Maya glyphs and forced the Mayas to use a modified Spanish alphabet.

Behind the cross, Antonio spreads out a white cloth which he calls his mesa. He opens his costumbre bundle and places on his mesa his bag of mixes and a clay bowl called a pichacha. Rita sets beside the mesa the complaining caged rooster doomed to bleed to death during the rite.

Antonio lights a small fire in his pichacha, swallows aguardiente, and sprays alcohol over the grave and his white mesa cloth. He then holds his bag of mixes in his right hand, raises it to his forehead, chest, and mouth while saying, “Dios Padre, Dios Hijo, Dios el espiritu santo de los mixes.” He cuts the rooster’s throat and its blood flows onto the burning copal in his pichacha. “Caballeros, the blood moves, the blood speaks.”

From the sacred fire, the aroma of copal wafts around Frank and I as we are removing stones and clumps of vegetation. After we clear the grave, Frank begins digging. About three feet down his shovel hits something hard and he uncovers a copper case. Frank heaves it out of the grave while the shaman’s chanting grows louder and the copal smoke intensifies.

Frank places the case beside the mesa then quickly begins reburying the grave and neatly replacing the rocks on top. At the same time, I cut open the lock on the copper case and put on latex gloves before looking inside.

Among corn leaf packing, I find a thick leather-bound diary fastened by a rusty lock. I immediately know it’s Bradley’s diary because it’s identical to the one I have back in Tucson. I dig deeper into the case and finds a package of Brownie pictures wrapped with a string. The old sepia photos show the sites Bradley had visited and the treasures he described inside the tomb.

“Y Rika!!!” I declare. “I knew there was a treasure. But what happened to Jaguar Blood Moon? Whose bones are in the cavern tomb?”

No one answers and I look further beneath the corn leaves and uncovers the aged and worn pelt of a jaguar. The shaman’s prayers grow forceful as I carefully remove an accordion book that is aged and reddened but amazingly well preserved. I unfold ten sheets of glyphs in red, black, blue, and yellow. The book is twelve inches wide and long, the dimensions Bradley recorded in his first diary. I already know each ancient picture and glyph by heart.

“Frank,” I say as he’s placing a stone back on the grave. “Grandfather Thunder has blessed me. Blessed us. What I hold is 1400 years old. This, *mon amour*, is the codex of Jaguar Blood Moon.”

“Alons enfont de la patrie,” Frank sings, drops what he’s doing, and approaches me. Before the gravesite, he carefully sets the codex back in the case and hugs me. “We did it, Little Sparrow.” He holds me at arm’s length to view my face. “At this moment,” he continues, “we’ve come together.”

Soiled, exhausted, and elated, we tightly embrace. I want to hold him forever but the sun’s position in the sky indicates it’s time to leave and the shaman is growing impatient. We have disturbed the grave of Grandfather Thunder long enough.

Later that night, back at Antonio’s homestead, I lie on my uncomfortable bed unable to sleep because the excitement of discovery consumes my every thought. I didn’t fail in my quest after all. I’ve found the codex.

Beside my pillow, against the adobe brick wall, is the copper case polished and cleaned. I’ve assured myself over and over again that the codex is safe and secure, as good as handcuffed to my head. No one knows about it, except me, Frank, and my hosts.

While trying to sleep, I contemplate how I'm going to proceed. Monte quit, as far as I'm concerned. So, he's out of the picture. It's only Frank and me. But I consider my own wishes first, then maybe Fulbright's and Frank's. My find, Bradley's discovery, is important to science and I must preserve its historic significance. Have experts authenticate it. I must make sure I completely understand its meaning before holding a press release. I will report my findings to Morales and the government of Guatemala. Then I'll prove to the world that there actually was a treasure. My parents, wherever they might be, must be looking over me right now and feeling very proud.

At gallo's first call the next morning, I jolt awake, fearing someone has stolen the codex. Perhaps it was a dream, I reassure myself as I reach for the copper case beside my head. It appears intact and unmolested. I quickly open it and find only the diary among the corn leaves. The Brownie pictures are gone and so is the ancient codex!

In the chill and mist of early morning, I rush to the neighboring house calling for Frank.

The only one around is the old grandmother who's chopping wood on the sod veranda. I ask her about Frank and she says, "He left during the night."

In an instant, I understand that Frank, my one and only lover, my spiritual guide, my family, has duped me. He took the codex and pictures of the burial treasures, the evidence of my heritage from Jaguar Blood Moon. After all my trials and failures, the Kodak pictures of the glyphs and Bradley's diaries are all I now possess. I have no treasure. No glory and fame. But why did Frank leave the second diary? I ask myself. Was it to give me at least some shred of heritage? Perhaps I'll never know because I'm quite certain that my French guapo man is not sitting around his apartment in Antigua waiting for me to come find him.

Defeated once again, I take the bus to Guatemala City and catch a flight to DF. I call Monte, but he doesn't want me back at the museum. He offers to send me my personal things. It seems he doesn't want to meet with me or ever see my face again.