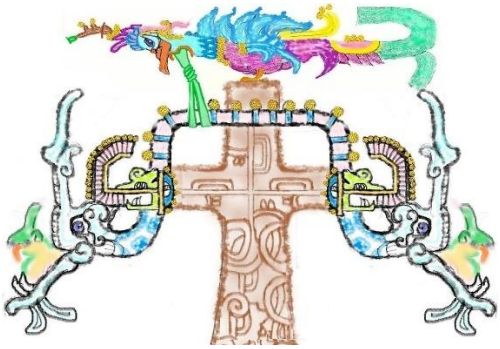
Guardian of the Maya Tree
a novel by Teri Ekland



Chapter 1: *A Yellow Victorian in Chestnut Hill*

Hillary Jacobs, 2003

On my birthday Daddy loved telling me how I entered this world under a solar eclipse. “I arranged a visiting professorship at Portland State University specifically for the eclipse,” he would say. “I never saw it. Mom went into labor that morning and I rushed her to Bess Kaiser where our blue-eyed baby girl was born.”

Daddy was thirty-eight at the time. Mom was only nineteen. Six months earlier, they had married at Temple Beth Zion in Philadelphia. I always wondered why their wedding was rushed. Until my bat mitzva twelve years ago. 1991 was one of the worst years of my life. And one of the best.

Mom was an exceptional mother and wife. She never complained about quitting college to marry Daddy, at least not to me. She always looked on the bright side of everything. Why not? Daddy treated her royally and she relished being the wife of a distinguished professor of astrophysics. She adored me and loved imagining the spectacular wedding she’d throw me one day. Mom regretted that her own wedding didn’t include her mother. Grandma Ruth died when Mom was only sixteen. I don’t think Mom ever recovered from grandmom’s sudden death. My mom was a brilliant and beautiful woman but she became overly emotional at times.

Sheldon Jacobs was an outstanding daddy. He was only two inches taller than Mom and had green eyes and balding red hair turning grey.

I was a curious child and Daddy eagerly explained anything and everything to me. He was my personal professor, I like to think. “Your intellect is your ticket to the world,” he loved saying. Before I even started school, he took me to his lectures at Temple University where I drew pictures at the back of the auditorium. Over the years, Daddy and I watched meteor showers and NASA events on TV beginning with the 1981 Columbia launch that initiated the Space Shuttle program. When Daddy told me about Nobel Prize winners, I believed he’d win one someday. I loved Mom with all my heart and withstood her constant primping, but I idolized Daddy and wanted to please him more than anyone else. Really, I wanted to be just like him—brilliant, thoughtful and always kind. He was my shining Stelar Pollaris. I was his blue-eyed baby girl.

My only living grandparent, Granddad Ephraim, lived with us until his passing on New Year’s Day, 1991. He loved telling me about our family history. “Your great-great-grandparents left Ukraine to work in the Pennsylvania coal mines,” he’d say to me or to anyone willing to listen. “Their son was my granddad Isaiah Waldman. At the turn of the century, Isaiah bought this big old Victorian and established Waldman Pawn Brokers on Philly’s Jewelry Row.”

I grew up in the old Victorian in Chestnut Hill. I had a peaceful and stimulating childhood. As an only child, Mom, Daddy and Granddad when he was around gave me their full attention. The fact that I never had to argue or compete with a brother or sister suited me nicely.

Granddad’s passing devastated us all, especially Mom. After Grandmom Ruth passed, Granddad became Mom’s Rock of Gibraltar. But she graciously arranged the funeral with the help of Uncle Bert, her only sibling and my only uncle.

Following the required time for mourning, according to Mom's religious tradition, she needed something big to plan for so she wouldn't sink into depression. She decided to throw me a large bat mitzvah reception for my twelfth birthday. I wasn't keen on the idea. No, not at all. For one thing, Mom tended to go overboard when she made plans. She wanted to invite my entire eighth grade class, everyone from Beth Zion, our neighbors and everyone Daddy knew at the university.

"Mom," I pleaded. "I don't want such a big deal."

"Why not?" she asked in her typical mom response.

"Because I don't want to be the center of so much attention."

When this angle didn't work I argued, "Mom, certain Jewish sects forbid girls from touching the Torah. Why should I go through such a celebration when I'm banned from doing what boys can do?"

"I assure you, Hill," she told me. "You can hold the Torah and read the scriptures cover to cover. Just like the boys."

"But mitzvah rites for girls didn't start until the 1920s," I resorted to arguing.

"Why would that matter, Hill?"

"Because boys have had bar mitzvahs since the beginning of time. Why should I celebrate a bat mitzvah when it's so unfair to girls?"

My arguments got me nowhere and Mom fell back on words she often used during this time, "It's what Granddad would have wanted."

In the end I agreed to the splash reception because Mom needed the distraction from her grief. She wasn't doing it for me. I was doing it for her. It was my mitzvah to honor Mom.

Daddy went along with whatever his “two best girls” decided. That’s how everything went during my childhood in Chestnut Hill.

The evening after my bat mitzvah reception at the Marriott, I recall every word both Mom and Daddy said. My parents and I were relaxing in the front room of the Victorian. I sat on the floor at the marble coffee table placing my gifts and cards in a large wooden keepsake box with butterflies flying around the Tree of Life on its top. It originally belonged to my grandmother Ruth and Mom passed it down to me for the occasion.

Mom was sitting on the plastic-covered sofa, sipping a glass of Manischewitz. Daddy was reclining in his armchair enjoying a Bailey’s nightcap. They rarely drank alcohol but for my big party, they’d been drinking since mid-afternoon and were acting slightly off. I didn’t mind. They were proud of me and Mom had escaped her sorrow, at least for the day.

“I’ll help you with the thank-you cards,” she said to me.

Then Daddy began retelling the story of my birth under a solar eclipse.

“Daddy, it’s not even my birthday,” I teased.

When Daddy finished his favorite story, he cleared his throat and said, “I have a wonderful surprise for my two best girls.”

“What Daddy?” I asked with anticipation. “A star party? Another trip to New York? To Stonehenge and London?”

“Something even better. This summer we’re going to see the July 11th solar eclipse in Mexico. Then we’ll tour the Maya ruins. I’ve already cleared my schedule for the trip.”

“Daddy!” I got up and hugged him, spilling some of his Baileys in the process. I didn’t care. I was overjoyed with the news. It was yet another wonderful surprise from my brilliant

Daddy. He enjoyed surprising me with anything that made me happy. He was a perfect father. A mensch.

When I sat back down to continue sorting through my gifts and cards, I noticed Mom growing agitated. She was fidgeting. Setting her wineglass down, immediately picking it up then setting it down again. “Sheldon,” she finally said in a tone that made me worry. “Why didn’t you warn me about this lofty little plan of yours?” From her voice, I knew Mom was in one of her moods. And she was inebriated, to boot.

“Why. To surprise you and Hill. Dear.”

“No, you don’t,” Mom practically screamed. “I won’t travel on the year of Daddy’s passing. It’s not proper. It’s a sin against the Almighty.” Mom slammed down her glass and wine splashed onto me and the congratulatory cards sprawled out on the coffee table. The room began to reek of alcohol. I thought Mom had broken Grandmom Ruth’s Waterford crystal, another heirloom meant for me.

Daddy looked at Mom with concern. We both knew she was losing it. But Daddy tried to be stern. “Aud. Dear. You must go. For our daughter’s sake!”

My mother’s face turned almost as red as her wine. “I’m not going to Mexico, Professor Jacobs!

“Sure, you are. You’re just feeling a bit exhausted now. And maybe you’ve had too much to drink.”

“How dare you, Sheldon. You can’t make me go on your little trip.”

“Audry,” Daddy pleaded. “You must.”

“I mean it. And you can’t take my daughter. She’s not even yours!”

Daddy set his tumbler aside and glared at Mom, his wife of twelve years. His silence squeezed the oxygen from my very lungs.

Daddy suddenly stood from his armchair. “You drunken whore,” he yelled and stormed from the room.

I had never heard Daddy talk like that. In fact, I had never seen my parents drunk and yelling at each other. What had happened left me so stunned that I rearranged my gold jewelry and cards, cash and checks in the keepsake box. While doing this I kept thinking about my parents’ rushed wedding and the fact that I didn’t resemble Daddy at all.

I glanced at Mom. She was quietly nibbling a piece of mandelbread. She had no tears. No expression. She probably didn’t even remember what she just said to Daddy or what he said to her.

After a moment or two, I stared into Mom’s pretty blue eyes and asked, “Is Daddy my father?”

Mom snapped to attention and seemed to find a moment of clarity. “Yes, of course, Hill. Sheldon’s your father. Why would you ask such a stupid question? Bat mitzvah.”

“No, he’s not. You said so yourself! You said *she’s not even your daughter.* And why did you have a rushed wedding six months before I was born?”

Mom sighed, sipped her grape wine and told me something that shook me even more than the passing of Granddad Ephram.

“I was eighteen. In college. My mother had died. I slept around. It’s what girls did back in the seventies. When I found myself pregnant, I consulted my rabbi about getting an abortion.”

“An abortion? Mom! I don’t think I can hear anything more.”

"I was scared, Hill. I didn't want your granddad to know about my condition. Rabbi Goldman introduced me to Professor Sheldon Jacobs. He arranged our marriage. Granddad was happy. I was happy because I wanted to be your mother. And your father was over the moon. He needed a wife to light the Shabbat candles. We married and your loving father took me to Portland where you were born under a solar eclipse."

Mom reached over and brushed back my hair to show her love for me. I pushed her hand away and asked, "Who is my daddy?"

Mom took my hand and kept me from pulling away. "I don't know," she admitted. "He was either a rabbi, someone I met at the Jewish Union, or, well . . . maybe a married man. I'm afraid all these men are long gone. I don't know them."

"Mom. I can't believe this. I'm going to be sick."

Mom looked at me and sternly said, "Hillary JoAnne! Sheldon Jacobs is your father! That's all you ever need to know."

I said nothing more and continued organizing my keepsake box.

"Hill. Promise you won't tell Sheldon you know this secret. It would break his heart. I love your daddy. He's my Rock of Gibraltar. Just like my daddy was."

Through my own tears, I looked at Mom and saw a broken woman redeemed by a good man. I hugged her. It was my mitzvah. Then I thought to say, "Mom. Daddy heard you say I wasn't his daughter. He already knows you told me your secret."

"Don't worry about that," Mom replied. "I'll say I told you I was just being mean and manic. He'll believe me." She took another sip of wine, reclined on the crackling sofa and instantly fell asleep. I set her wineglass aside and covered her with the Afghan throw Grandmom Ruth had crocheted.

After learning this devastating secret, I refused to light the Shabbat candles despite my new status as bat mitzvah. I didn't know how to feel about god because I couldn't believe that such a powerful force would so cruelly take from me the person I admired and loved most in the world.

I didn't say anything more about this to Mom; the matter too easily distressed her like a lot of things did that year. And I couldn't speak to Daddy about what troubled me because he was involved. Fortunately, Daddy seemed oblivious to what Mom had said and my parents never said anything about my rejecting religion. Mom knew the reason and Daddy wasn't concerned. He was happy with Mom performing the Friday night ritual while he said the Shabat prayers after Granddad was gone.

It didn't take me long to decide that Sheldon was and always would be my father. The fact we weren't biologically related never again even entered my mind. Or if it did, the matter seemed trivial and unimportant. Sheldon gave me my name, loved me as his own and shared the universe with me.

That summer he took me to Mexico while Mom stayed home and kept busy volunteering at Beth Zion. This trip became the highlight of my childhood, one that had been filled with adventures and insightful advice and counsel from both Mom and Daddy and even Granddad Ephram when he was around.

In Teotihuacan, Daddy and I watched the solar eclipse from the Sun Pyramid then traveled to the Maya ruins in a rented VW bug. I was enthralled with the astronomy of the Maya, with the celestial alignments of their pyramids and monoliths. Not long into the trip, while we were exploring the Palenque ruins, Daddy launched me on the course of my life. "Hill," he said

on the steps of the Palenque palace. “You’ll be heading to college in a few short years. And you need to plan for a major.”

“I want to be an astrophysicist like you, Daddy. You know that.”

“Yes, I know. Why don’t you combine your interests in archaeology and astronomy and earn a degree in archeoastronomy?”

“Archaeoastronomy? Is there really such a field of study?”

“There sure is, sweetheart. And it’s made just for you.”

I hugged Daddy and said, “You’re the best Daddy anyone could ever have. I know you’ll win a Nobel prize one day.”

“And don’t forget, I’m the most handsome daddy as well,” he teased. Daddy loved to joke with me and Mom, his two best girls. My relationship with Sheldon may not have been genetic but it was deeply spiritual and unbreakable. Eternal. This was the true gift of my bat mitzvah.

Soon after we returned home from Mexico, I began classes at William Penn Charter. This brought another drastic change to my life during that devastating and wonderful year. For my elementary school education, my parents had enrolled me in a private girls’ academy. I excelled in every subject except maybe PE. As a child, science, mathematics and reading to learn fulfilled my curiosity, not athletics. Daddy and Mom didn’t care about sports either. We were a tightknit family of homebodies focused on science and astronomy, at least Daddy and I were. Mom was more into me, Daddy and her volunteer work.

At Penn Charter, I was intermingling with boys for the first time. My small stature and plain looks made me feel awkward around them. I was always smarter than them and, as I

quickly learned, boys don't like this quality in a girl. But I buckled down, mostly ignored the other students, boys and girls, and focused on my goal of attending college in three years and earning a Ph.D. in archeoastronomy.

I did, however, go on a date sophomore year. The boy's named was Darrin but students at Penn called him Derwood because on the TV show *Bewitched*, Endora called her son-in-law Derwood instead of Darrin. I thought the name was rather cute. And so was Darrin. I met him in physics and we enjoyed discussing our science projects. He had a good sense of humor, like Daddy, and seemed to like me as much as I liked him. I invited him to study at my house. He came over a few times and met my parents. They liked him too and agreed he could take me to *Braveheart* as long as he brought me directly home by ten.

I was happy with my first date and assumed Darrin was too because he invited me to go skiing on Shawnee Mountain. I asked my parents for permission. Daddy said it was up to Mom, like he generally did.

At first Mom discouraged me with one of her typical remarks. "You'll get hurt and you don't even know how to ski."

"Darrin will teach me," I argued.

Mom then started talking about how her mother had taken up skiing just after WWII. "Your grandmom Ruth was an excellent skier," Mom said. It seems she persuaded herself to let me go on this ski trip if I used my grandmother's old skis. "Her spirit will watch over you on the slopes."

"Darrin says I can rent skis at the lodge," I tried to insist but Mom had already sent Daddy to fetch the skis from the attic under the mansard roof.

I really had no choice in the matter. It was my mitzvah to honor my delicate mother. Besides, once Mom made up her mind about something, Daddy and I both knew we had to go along with her plan.

My second date with Durwood was a complete fiasco. First, he whipped up Shawnee Hill on the T-bar and left me to figure out the contraption for myself. This was partly my fault, I admit. To explain why I was using the old skis, I told him I had skied before like my grandmother Ruth. It was a stupid entanglement of illogic but I felt trapped. If I mentioned Mom's manic-depressive condition, one thing would lead to the next and I didn't want to explain anything about my mother.

When I attempted to use the T-bar, I fell and blocked everyone behind me until a kind gentleman showed me how to use the pully device. Then, after I made it to the top of the slope, one of my antique skis came loose and slid down the hill. Another kind man fetched it for me and suggested I be more careful. All the while, Darrin was busy enjoying himself on the slopes. By the time we left Shawnee Mountain, I was angrier with Durwood than embarrassed for myself.

When I told my parents about the date, Mom tried to call Darrin's parents to discuss their son's rude behavior. I stopped her from dialing the phone. Then she and Daddy encouraged me not to worry about boys until I became a doctor of ancient astronomy. "I promise you, Hill," Mom said. "One day you'll meet a nice man who'll appreciate your intelligence and never make you look foolish."

During my third and last year at Penn Charter, I applied to MIT, Harvard, Stanford and Temple. Each university accepted me. I was prepared to work on a joint major in astrophysics and anthropology at MIT until Daddy and I attended a lecture at the Franklin Institute called

Songs of the Cosmos: Archeoastronomy in the Desert SW. The pictures of SW archaeological sites and Arizona's night skies enthralled me like the Maya ruins had. I wanted to study in Arizona. Just prior to the deadline, I applied to the University of Arizona. They immediately accepted me.

My parents gave me a titanium Taurus and together we drove to my dormitory on the UA campus in Tucson. Then Mom and Daddy flew back to Philly. Without pause, I immersed myself in both archaeology and astronomy intending to complete my BS and MS in five years. This was my first time away from home and I missed my parents enormously even though Mom called me every evening and always put Daddy on the phone.

The year I began my master's degree my parents bought me a Santa Fe condo in Tucson. I then pursued a combined doctoral degree from the School of Anthropology and the Department of Astronomy and Stewart Observatory. I titled my dissertation *A Path from Ancient Astronomers in the Desert SW to their Modern Descendants.*

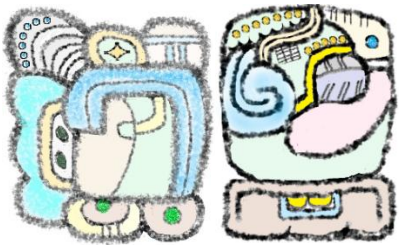
For two years I met with people from the Zuni, Hopi and Navajo nations to learn their lore and traditions. Several times I traveled to Chaco Canyon, Mesa Verde, Montezuma's Castle and the Casa Grande Ruins. I was as happy as when Daddy showed me the night sky and took me to Mexico. "You fell into the right niche," he often said with pride when he and Mom joined me on my trips to the SW sites.

When I completed my Ph.D. at age twenty-four, I planned a big graduation party at the Marriott in Tucson. I invited my classmates, students, professors and advisors. I had reached a pinnacle in my life and now wanted to be the center of attention.

One month before my reception, however, the Space Shuttle Columbia exploded over Texas. My gut instinct was to postpone my big party but Daddy's commitments at Temple keep

me from changing the date. I couldn't possibly celebrate the greatest achievement of my life without my parents.

I had been right to feel uneasy. The year 2003 turned out to be even more devastating than 1991. On the morning of my big event, my parents' charter flight from Philadelphia crashed landed at Sky Harbor Airport. A massive inferno killed everyone on board. I couldn't even give Mom and Daddy an open casket funeral and honor their religious tradition.



Chapter 2: Hillary, *Bradly Nolan's Trunk*

March 2003, At Present

Isaiah Waldman left the house and business to his son Joseph and Joseph left everything to his son, my Grandad Ephraim. After Granddad's passing, Mom inherited the Victorian and my uncle Burt took over the pawn shop. Now the house and all its contents are mine to keep or sell. With the help of my uncle, cousins and my parents' dearest friends, Mr. and Mrs. Bomrock, I arrange the memorial service at Beth Zion.

The Bomrocks console me to a fault. I'm grateful, but eventually I avoid them to be alone in my grief and find my own strength. The tragedy shatters me to the core. I've lost my footing. I'm on shipwreck flotsam in the middle of the Atlantic during a perfect storm. I fear I won't survive without Mom's primping and Daddy's sage advice.

But my parents taught me well. I endure and declare my life a tribute to their memory. One day, I vow, I'll win some kind of Nobel Prize in their honor.

To take my mind off my grief, I place my parents' brass urns on the fireplace mantle and begin sorting through the old Victorian. I box up Daddy's awards, give my parents' clothes to the Goodwill and put most of Mom's gold jewelry in my keepsake box.

The last place I attack is the attic under the mansard roof. My parents never allowed me "up there" and I never disobeyed them. They had closely guided me in nearly everything I did and I trusted them and believed what they said to be true. That is, until Mom revealed her explosive secret on the night of my bat mitzvah.

In the poorly insulated attic, early morning sunlight enters the east gable window and strikes cobwebs, scattered boxes and furniture no one wanted to toss away. After an hour of digging around I spot a stack of dusty *Life* and *Look* magazines on top of an old black trunk. I restack the magazines and locate a brass nameplate on the front rim of the trunk. It reads "Bradly M. Nolan." I know the name but only learned about this distant relative two years ago when I flew home during a cold February spring break.

I was sitting with my parents in our cozy breakfast nook eating Mom's waffles and drinking Kona coffee. The morning light streamed through the bay windows onto the polished oak table. We were talking about the riots at the Mardi Gras celebrations on South Street when I brought up my '91 trip to Mexico with Daddy.

"Hill. Why talk about the year your granddad passed? You know it troubles me," Mom said.

"I know and I'm sorry but I need to tell you my thoughts about a postdoctoral fellowship in ancient Maya astronomy."

“Maya astronomy?” Daddy sipped his coffee. “That’s a great field for you. As good as ancient Egyptian astronomy.”

“Like the Zodiac of Dendera,” I suggested.

“Or the sun dial at Chaco Canyon,” Daddy said.

“Don’t forget Stonehenge.” Mom referred to when Daddy had taken us to England during his sabbatical when I was eight. We shared memories of that trip. It was a much better topic for Mom that the ’91 trip to Mexico which she refused to go on.

“Remember that old Beefeater at Westminster Abby?” Mom asked. “I can still see little Hill waving at him almost in front of his face because of a dare from Daddy.”

“I was supposed to make him blink.”

“You know, Hill,” Mom said when our laughter died down. “You have a distant relative who explored the Maya ruins.”

“Who?” I remember asking. Her remark came out of nowhere but Mom was sometimes that way. “I thought granddad’s parents came from Ukraine and the Waldmans never left Philly.”

“It’s true. His name was Bradly Nolan. He was brother to your great-great-grandmom Myriam, Isaiah’s wife.”

“How come I’ve never heard of him?”

“You are now. He was a dentist from Philly like your friend Doc Holliday in Tucson.”

“Tombstone, you mean. And why do you wait until now to tell me this?” I asked although I was more elated by the connection than disappointed in learning about this intriguing relative so late in my life. “Mom. Bradly Nolan seems like a gift of heritage. Don’t you see. I must be on the right track to study ancient Maya astronomy.”

“There you go. It always works out in the end.”

"Perhaps I'll resume his trail," I remember saying. "Did he leave any records of his explorations?"

"Such a long time ago. . ."

As I recall the words that were so typical of Mom, I touch the brass nameplate on the old trunk and wonder if she was hiding yet another big secret. Why hadn't she told me about Bradly Nolan when I was a little child curious about everything? Or when Daddy and I were off to see the Maya ruins? Did she even know about this trunk? Maybe not. She never went up to the attic.

My heart palpitates as I yank the rusty lock under the nameplate. It appears no one has opened the trunk since Bradly locked it one hundred years ago. Was no one curious? What about Granddad Ephraim? Didn't Myriam tell her grandson about her brother's adventures in Mesoamerica? I have such confusing ancestry.

I search through surrounding boxes for a key to the lock and find a deed to the Victorian. It states that in 1905 Bradly Nolan bought the house and deeded it to his sister Myriam. The house then went to Joseph and continued down the line. This is interesting because Granddad always told me Isaiah bought the house. Had Bradly established the pawn business as well? Is this why his trunk remains untouched in the attic?

I resort to using a hacksaw and crowbar to pry open the lock. Inside rests a safari helmet, a machete in a leather sheath, a compass and a Brownie camera that Bradly probably bought just after Eastman Kodak placed it on the market. I'm sure he used his own chemicals to develop the film.

Deeper inside I uncover two first-edition books by John Lloyd Stephens. Wearing latex gloves, I page through the story of the early Maya chronicler who, in the 1840s, surveyed Copan, Palenque, Uxmal, Chichen Itza and Tulum, most of the places on my trip to Mexico with Daddy.

Only Alexander von Humboldt from Prussia and Colonel Juan Galindo from Britain had explored the Maya region before Stephens, except for the indigenous people, of course.

Stephens and his side-kick Catherwood, who sketched the ruins, brought Mesoamerica to the world's attention sixty years before Bradly Nolan's journey. I have the feeling their books inspired my great-great-great-uncle to explore the sites for himself. Bradly was probably a lot like me and Daddy, curious and eager to discover new things. I'm honored to have such a distinctive relative.

At the bottom of the trunk lies a thick leather-bound diary. On the cover page are the cursive words *1894-1904, Notes on Travels in Mexico and Mayaland. Property of Bradly M. Nolan.* Throughout the diary are drawings of Maya glyphs that Bradly probably copied from the ruins. I don't know their meaning. I haven't studied the ancient script, as of yet, and I doubt Bradly understood the glyphs he drew. During his time, archaeologists had deciphered only Maya numbers and a few astronomical symbols. These days Mayanists understand about ninety percent of the glyphs thanks to researchers like Linda Schele and David Stewart.

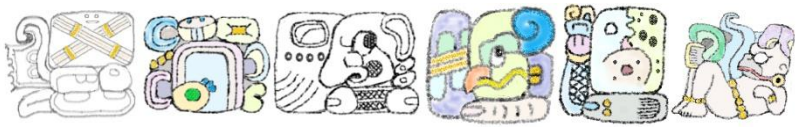
Under a few crumpled tan shirts, I find a black leather dentistry kit. Mom had mentioned Bradly was a dentist. *Like my pal Doc Holiday*, I chuckle to myself and almost start crying; the memory makes me miss her all over again.

I collect my wits, dig into the leather kit and find surgical plyers, cutters and some unusual tools I surmise are for bloodletting. Back in the 1800s, people still used this method of healing. Maybe it went along with the job of dentistry. *Shoot 'em up and Make 'em bleed!* my old pal Doc Holiday might have said, I chuckle to myself. I bet he also used bloodletting in his trade and had these same sorts of tools. I wish Daddy were with me now to give his opinion and hear mine.

At the very bottom of the trunk, I find an item more unusual than the bloodletting tools. It's a beat-up tin box once used for tobacco snuff or Cuban cigars. I imagine Bradly was a smoker of cigars like Teddy Roosevelt who was president during Bradly's time in Mexico. Inside the tin box I find sepia pictures of Maya glyphs, the same glyphs, it seems at first sight, that Bradly drew in his diary. I can't judge how old the glyphs in the sepia pictures are but my mind bursts with possibilities. The glyphs look like part of an ancient Maya codex, like those in Dresden, Madrid, and Paris.

Have I discovered evidence of an ancient Maya codex rescued from Conquistador priests who had burned every "heathen" Maya book they encountered? If so, this would be the greatest treasure of my life. I would be like Howard Carter finding Tut's tomb. Or Hiram Bingham locating Machu Picchu or Alberto Ruz Lhuillier reaching the bottom of a hidden stairway and open the sarcophagus of Lord Pakal—the greatest king of the Maya civilization.

Every disappointment I've had suddenly disintegrates into a black hole. Even the deaths of my parents seem less severe. Perhaps their deaths were necessary for the trunk to become mine at this moment in my life. As I sort through the sepia pictures again and again, I can't help but think *in my hands I hold the very purpose of my life*.



Chapter 3: Hillary *Bradly Nolan's Diary*

I decide to keep Bradly's yellow Victorian, as I now call my childhood home. I fly back to Tucson and hide away in my condo reading and rereading the diary and scanning the Kodak pictures onto my laptop. I closely compare and align them to Bradly's drawings and start

learning the meaning behind each picture word. I create the beginnings of a book I have in mind after I retrace Bradly's journey into the Maya region and locate this missing codex.

Two things stand out as peculiar. Why are there no pictures of Bradly or the sites he explored? I imagine him as a rugged, virile and daring individualist during the era of Victoria, Empress of India and queen of an Empire. When she died 1-22-1901, Bradly must have paid homage to her and mourned along with the entire world.

In the process of reading the diary and researching my ancestry, I uncover several earthshattering revelations. First and foremost, Bradly M. Nolan is not my great-great-great-uncle as Mom had claimed. He's not a distant twig on my family tree. He's my great-great-granddad, father of Joseph and granddad of Ephraim. Joseph is not Myriam's son with husband Isaiah Waldman. I'm not a Waldman. Mom wasn't even a Waldman! Bradly is my direct ancestor and Joseph is Bradly's son.

Perhaps the greatest revelation is that Bradly's wife, the mother of Joseph, was the daughter of a Guatemalan shaman. In other words, my great-great-grandmother was a Maya woman and therefore, I have Maya blood!

This isn't even the half of it. As I surmise from the diary, I'm also the direct descendant of an ancient Maya queen. From the glyphs in the Brownie pictures, the queen's name is Jaguar Blood Moon. She was born in 643 AD in the era of Tang China and the development of the Islamic Empire. I don't believe Bradly or the shaman and his daughter knew the queen's name because they couldn't decipher the glyphs and Bradly never mentions this ancient queen by name.

I piece together the beginnings of my book with Bradly's story. He was born in Philadelphia in 1859 to Mary and John Nolan. At age thirty-five, he must have read the

chronicles of John Lloyd Stephens and caught the Mayaland fever, as they called it in those days. I believe Bradly became a certified dentist and surgeon of bloodletting as a strategy for living in Mexico City and exploring the ruins Stephens writes about.

I imagine he boarded a steamer from New York to Havana then took a freighter to Veracruz. Between 1894 and 1900, according to his diary, Bradly lived in Mexico City. He must have been a famous rarity in the city, a Norte American doctor of sorts. I'm sure he prospered and *El Presidente* Porfirio Diaz invited Bradly to his residence to celebrate the beginning of the twentieth century.

From 1900 to 1904 my great-great-granddad finally left Mexico City and ventured to the sites Stephens and Catherwood explored. While residing near the famous Palenque ruins, Bradly writes, "Lacandon Indians speak of an ancient queen's tomb in Guatemala."

I wager Bradly was driven by the promise of treasure when he journeyed "by mule and Indian guide" to the village of Todos Santos high in the Cuchumatan Mountains of Guatemala. The Lacandon claimed that the people of Todo Santos were lineage guardians of this ancient queen's tomb. The tomb of Jaguar Blood Moon.

In Todos Santos, my Bradly, as I now like to call him, established his practice while asking villagers about the queen's tomb. A shaman named Grandfather Thunder – who turns out to be my great-great-great-granddad—told Bradly, as he writes, "What you seek lies **at the bottom of these mountains in a cavern at Lake Turtle Macaw**."

Grandfather Thunder was a direct descendant of Jaguar Blood Moon. His only child was a daughter named Ix Chel, my great-great-grandmom. At the time of my Bradly's arrival in the mountain village, Ix Chel was the last initiated shaman of the ancient queen's sacred bloodline. She was a lineage shaman for Jaguar Blood Moon.

Bradly writes “I offered Grandfather Thunder silver coins and Guatemalan pesos to take me to the tomb.”

Grandfather Thunder warned Bradly that only the initiated of Jaguar Blood Moon’s lineage could enter the tomb and only on the day of the tropical solar zenith when the noon sun casts no shadows. According to Bradly’s own words and the sepia pictures of the codex, the ancients entombed the queen during this astronomical event.

Bradly writes, “Grandfather Thunder agrees to escort me to the tomb on three conditions. I must become his apprentice for a year, marry his daughter, and produce an heir to carry on the sacred lineage. The old shaman believes his gods have led me to his village for this very purpose. Because of my profession, he views me as a kind of shaman myself.”

Bradly married Ix Chel and from June 1901 to April 1902, Grandfather Thunder taught him healing methods and ways to cast and deflect curses according to Maya traditions. During his apprenticeship, Ix Chel gave birth to a son. Bradly writes, “I named my son Joseph Corazón because of a heart-shaped birthmark on his shoulder.”

I also have a heart shaped birthmark on my shoulder. I never thought much about it but now I’m beginning to think it’s the mark of Jaguar Blood Moon’s bloodline.

When Joseph was two months old, Bradly left him with the shaman’s wife and Grandfather Thunder and Ix Chel took him down the mountain to Lake Turtle Macaw. They arrived at the lake in time for the zenith passage.

On the evening of May 17, 1901, my Bradly writes “At daybreak we stood before a cave’s entrance. The old shaman performed a rite at his lineage shrine called a waybil. He summoned on his ancestors, burned candles, spat alcohol and killed a rooster on the waybil, Ix Chel then escorted me into the cavern by torchlight. On the western wall, beyond stalactites and

stalagmites, colorful frescos of ancient figures appeared. The dancers seemed to perform rituals rather like those of Grandfather Thunder at his waybil shrine. I wonder if the fresco dancers were noblemen, wisemen, or kings. I saw no war scenes and conclude that these ancient people were peaceful like the villagers of Todos Santos.**"**

"My wife led me deep into the dark and dank cavern. Bats hanging from the ceiling stirred from our torchlight. We cleared debris and crawled through a tunnel to reach the queen's tomb in a small chamber."

"Scattered on the chamber floor were fragments of pottery, jade figurines, and bags of Spanish gold and silver coins. I suspect pirates from the Dulce River stashed these looted coins. But before they returned for their treasures, I imagine the ancient curse led them to their demise. I doubt they knew when to enter the cave and Ix Chel assures me they weren't shamans of the sacred bloodline. MY WIFE POINTED TO ENGRAVINGS ON THE EAST WALL OF THE CAVERN, WHICH I HAVE COPIED IN MY JOURNAL AS THE CAVE WAS TOO DARK TO USE MY BROWNIE CAMERA. IX CHEL TOLD ME THE PICTURES WERE THE QUEEN'S curse against those who enter on any other day or aren't a lineage shaman OF HER DYNASTIC TREE."

"The eastern wall of the chamber contains a niche with a reddened skeleton wearing a mask of jade pieces. Its arms crossed at the chest over a folded jaguar pelt covering an ancient book of hieroglyphs. **Grandfather Thunder gives me permission to photograph this ancient text if I return it under the queen's arms on this day of the zenith passage to avoid the ancient queen's curse."**

After thoroughly reading my great-great-granddad's diary and writing out his story, I'm left with more questions than answers. For one thing, it seems Grandfather Thunder either gave

his son-in-law the Spanish coins or Bradly took them. I wonder if he shipped the relics back to his sister's house and if so, when and how? Did the laws at the time allow him to transport artifacts through British Honduras? Did Isaiah sell the Spanish coins to collectors? Bradly doesn't specify this in his diary. And what puzzles me most is why Bradly brought his son to Philly and left his Maya wife behind.

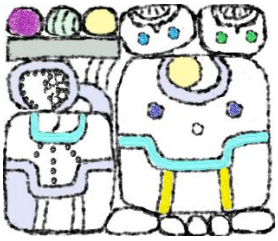
An unsettling truth occurs to me. My great-great-grandfather Bradly Nolan was an early looter of Maya heritage. He must have amassed a fortune from the burial cave, returned to Philly and bought the Victorian for his sister and son and the pawn business for his sister's husband Isaiah Waldman. Bradly, not Isaiah, established the Waldman legacy. And he wasn't even a Waldman. Perhaps Bradly took only what he needed to provide a life for his son and for the descendants of the ancient queen. Or am I just trying to put a positive spin on my ancestry?

On Google Earth, I pinpoint the most likely lake for the tomb according to Bradly's coordinates and directions. I believe Lake Turtle Macaw is a small cenote near Najab, Quiche.

I decide not to publicize the existence of the Brownie pictures of the codex until after I relocate this lake and find the tomb and announce my amazing discovery. Then I'll publish my book about the expedition, Jaguar Blood Moon and Bradly Nolan. For now, my biggest concern is revealing too much too soon and enticing the wrong people to hunt for the ancient codex and tomb before I even arrive in Guatemala.

Instead of funding my own expedition with my inheritance, I decide that a postdoc fellowship would best honor Mom and Daddy. It was Mom, after all, who put me on Bradly's trail. Besides, I need to enhance my curriculum vitae for a future professorship in archaeoastronomy at Harvard, Berkeley, MIT, or some other prestigious university.

By the end of 2003, Fulbright **awards me a fellowship based on my proposal, publications and the two academic sponsors who agree to help me with the project—Dr.** Vasquez **is head curator of the Maya exhibit at the Anthropology Museum in Mexico City and Dr. Carlos Morales is professor of Maya studies at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City. I think the clincher for Fulbright is the fact that in 1963 Daddy was a Fulbright Scholar at the National Center of Scientific Research in Paris. It makes me feel all the more connected to my wonderful father.**



Chapter 4: Frank Guillemont, *Pitzl Player*

Afternoon rains splash on the city's heavy traffic. Pedestrians under awnings wait for the quick summer storm to pass. Some chilangos brave the downpour with umbrellas. They challenge the onrush of traffic to hail yellow Volkswagen taxis.

From my balcony off Paseo de la Reforma, I gaze at the streets below and the Monument to Poncho Villa and Zapata, revolutionary heroes after my heart. On a cushioned wrought-iron chair, I smoke a Gauloises. A laptop, two cellphones, a notepad, and pens are on the table beside me. It's wrought-iron as well.

For thirty years I've lived in Mexico City, these days with a beautiful twenty-year-old mestiza. Anita just left to buy tacos al paster, my favorite afternoon snack. Lately, my woman agitates me. If I'm not busy reading, making phone calls, or typing, she complains. My long absences make her lonely. *Ay Papi. Estoy caliente* she says. Anita wants a baby and I can't give her one. My childhood left me sterile, for one thing. She doesn't know this because I never tell

anyone what I don't wish to tell. It's that simple. Besides, I'm not a family man and have no intention of committing myself to one person, man or woman.

I never take Anita seriously, anyway. If she complains too much, she knows I'll send her away. She is, after all, nothing but a prostitute from a poor Oaxacan village. Sometimes I even pimp her out to associates. Why not? My mother worked the streets of Paris during WWII. ***Pauvre Maman, she was but a castaway whore of the Germans, Americans, and French. Mais alors,*** Pimping and being pimped out is the name of the game in the great ballcourt of life. Of Xibalba.

Anita may irritate me at times, but she's my *petite amie pour le present*. I've had many before and hope to have many more to come. And I prefer a woman to a man. Women are easier to maneuver and manage. I understand how they operate, what they want, and why they annoy me. Anita is no exception.

The Distrito Federal is my second favorite city in the world. Paris owns my heart, *la ville est mon coeur*. I have apartments in Paris, DF, and Antigua, Guatemala. Each contains a closet of clothes and cabinets of liquor, Versace colognes, and cartons of Gauloises. When traveling the globe, as I often do, I stay at five-star or one-star hotels, depending on the state of my finances. I travel with nothing but my worn leather attaché and buy whatever I need wherever I happen to be.

It's been a long time since my last significant haul. I'm ready to resume my trade. My situation isn't dire, however. I have money in different offshore accounts. But I'm a big spender with refined tastes. My investments support me during my down-time when I take pleasure trips to the Riviera of France, Acapulco, Cancun, or Cozumel. Wherever I go I take my phones, laptop, and a lady friend, or I find a local whore.

Of my many ventures I prefer the lucrative antiquities market in Europe, Dubai, Asia, and the US. Even El Chapo's Sinaloa Cartel swap their drugs for my antiquities. In turn, I sell their drugs to local distributers in my network. It's all a very profitable tit for tat enterprise.

These days, the antiquities business is stable. That's all. The heyday of smuggling happened before the Internet, cell phones, and laptop computers. Those were remarkable times. Talk about lucrative. During the Civil War I often helped myself to loot at archaeological sites arm in arm with the Guatemalan Army.

I really don't consider myself a *huechero*, that is, a crook who takes advantage of poor villagers. In fact, to **better interact with the local population** I've learned different Maya tongues. In Oaxaca, I even apprenticed under **a village shaman. This is how I met Anita. She's the shaman's granddaughter.**

Over the years I've developed a fascination with Aztec and Maya spirituality, both ancient and modern. The antiquities have crept into my bloodstream. Sur mon Coeur. The ancient gods and spirits lead me to the treasures. One day soon, they will take me to my ultimate destiny. I'll **become the god of duality and transform into a man who is also a woman. And on that glorious day, I'll** hurl **retribution on a world that took Maman from me and stole my childhood.**

The downpour continues to ease the city's smog but nothing subdues the sound of traffic and blaring horns. I page through an article in *Arquelogia Mexicana* by Fulbright scholar Dr. Hillary Jacobs. *I'm currently interning at the Anthropology Museum* she writes *to research my Maya heritage.* I jot down "heritage" with a question mark. *My great-great-**grandfather was an early Mayanist*** **the doctor writes.** ***He left a diary filled with Maya glyphs I suspect he copied***

from an ancient queen's tomb and codex. Her name was Jaguar Blood Moon. I believe I'm her direct lineage descendant. *Next spring I'm planning an expedition to her tomb. We'll start in Todos Santos de Cuchumatan, Guatemala where, I suspect, her descendants live. I'm looking* ***for a shaman to help with a lineage ceremony at the entrance of the tomb because I believe it's vital to respect the traditions of the Maya people.***

I stand and shout, "Mon dieu. C'est incroyable." My mind dances quicksteps. This ancient book is what I've been praying for. I must have it. It certainly contains revelations about transforming into the god who is man and woman. The gods have led Dr. Jacobs to me. Me to her. I feel it in my bones.

"To be and to become," I sing aloud and look up the museum's website. A post announces that tomorrow night Dr. Jacobs gives a public lecture titled *Highlights of Mesoamerica*. I must attend. Doctor Hillary, tout à fait, *is* my nagual guide to transformation. If I'm wrong, at least she'll lead me to my next fortune. A Maya codex is worth millions to the right buyer.

In my office, I shuffle through my bureau for business cards and curriculum vitaes of my several personas. Should I be Mr. Art Dealer, or a linguist, an archaeologist, or perhaps a professor, or a diplomat?

I unlock the top drawer, remove my lacquer folk-art box and pull out my one picture of Maman, her prayer beads, and my treasured stone figurine of Ometeol. The little stone statue has a broad nose, slanted eyes and a Milky Way star dragon headdress above his flattened forehead. Ten years earlier I procured this idol near Teotihuacan. He's the god of duality in the form of Lord Fate and the god I aspire to become.

I set the idol on my desk and hold the prayer beads and my mother's picture against my heart. "Our Lady of the Rosary," I pray. "In the name of *pauvre* Maman, bring me the bounty that's rightfully mine. Lead me to this codex, and give me back what the devil took away."

I carefully replace my treasures in the lacquer box and lock the drawer. I feel revived. **The gods have reinstated me on the road to my destiny.**



Chapter 5: Hillary, *at the Anthropology Museum*

Before I begin my work in Mexico City, I fly to Paris for the Venus transit on June 8, 2004. With a solar filter on my binoculars, I stand on Pont Neuf and watched the black dot of Venus travel across the sun as a dwindling crescent at inferior conjunction. My father loved Paris and wanted to return here for this Venus transit with Mom and me. His two best girls.

When the planet reaches its maximum transit**, I empty my parents' ashes into the Seine. "I want to feel as close to you as I can, Mom and Daddy," I say as the river consumes their ashes under the bridge. "I miss you beyond reason and am tying us together in the City of Light and Eternal Love. I know you loved me as much as I love you--beyond the stars. And you found each other when Daddy needed a wife and Mom needed a husband because I was in her womb."**

From Paris I fly directly to Mexico City. Dr. Vasquez **has invited me to study Maya glyphs at the museum before my expedition, which he's agreed to join and help me organize. He's also** arranged for my ninth-floor studio with a balcony overlooking the Palace de Belas Arts.

At the Anthropology Museum, I immediately tackle my work in the back laboratory for Maya exhibits. When I'm not deciphering the glyphs in the Brownie pictures and Bradly's diary, I'm helping Monte catalog artifacts.

I enjoy working for Monte. He's forty-five, about 5'7", has a wife and children, and a Harvard Ph.D. along with a number of scholarships and awards. Monte raises intriguing questions like Daddy did. I haven't told him about my pictures of the ancient codex but I gave him a copy of Bradly's diary and told him I'm translating the glyphs Bradly drew. Monte's a brilliant man and I thought he could help me decipher the glyphs and provide insights.

One late afternoon, my sponsor shows me around the sprawling, high-altitude metropolis in his red Honda Civic.

"You must be very proud of your heritage and this city," I say when Monte parks and we walk to the Zocalo, the city's main plaza.

"Thank you. I am," he says with a deep flowing accent like *El Presidente* Vicente Fox. "My city, like Mexico itself, has evolved through conquest and colonization under the viceroyalty of New Spain, through the 1821 War of Independence, and a war with the US."

"I love your city although the high elevation takes some getting used to. I came here with my father in '91."

"For the eclipse?"

“Yes. I remember loving the city back then when I was only twelve. It seems every turn offers a taste of history, culture, and delicious food.”

“Well put. Did you know the Zocalo was the central plaza of the Aztec city Tenochtitlan?”

“I learned that in ’91. My father told me. He was an astrophysics professor and knew just about everything there is to know. In history and science, at least.”

“Did he also know that last century, during subway construction near this bustling square, workers uncovered the Templo of the Quetzalcoatl pyramid where Aztecs sacrificed humans to the equinox sun. The Spaniards demolished the temple and the Metropolitan Cathedral on top. It’s the largest cathedral in the Americas.”

“He told me that as well. And that in the 1700s, workers uncovered the museum’s statue of Coatlique near the Aztec Sun Stone here in the Zocalo.”

“The people of the time found her so repulsive workers reburied her but later dug her up. These days the Aztec Mother Goddess is one of the museum’s most treasured features. **Personally, I find her a beautiful piece of ancient art.**”

“When I first saw her twelve years ago, she imprinted herself on my mind. I was so amazed by her two-serpent head, skirt of dangling snakes and necklace of hands, hearts, and skulls. She’s like the goddess Kali of India.”

“What do you know about our Mexican Revolution?”

“I know that five years after Bradly died, Zapata and Pancho Villa forced Porfirio Diaz from his dictatorship. I believe my Bradly met Porfirio Diaz and celebrated the turn of the century at his palace.”

“How marvelous. I’m enjoying his diary. You’re already are an expert on our history. Please, let me arrange for you to hold a public lecture in the museum’s library.”

“I’d love to. On what topic? Poncho Villa or Coatlique?”

Monte chuckles as I snap a picture of him before the Cathedral. “Why. On the highlights of ancient Mesoamerica, of course.”

“I’d love to give a slide show of pictures from my trip to the ruins with Daddy.”

“Consider it arranged.”

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In the museum’s auditorium, a crowd of chilangos and tourists are sitting before me. I’ve pinned a microphone to the lapel of my floral blouse.

“Welcome to the world of Mesoamerica,” I say at the podium. “Step back in time while climbing up and down stone mountain pyramids.”

I click through my PowerPoint presentation to the solar eclipse from the Pyramid of the Sun from thirteen years before.

“Between 6500 and 1500 BC,” I say to the audience. “Early Mesoamericans developed settlements near rivers and cenotes. They cultivated maize, beans, squash, cotton, chilis, and avocados, and domesticated turkeys, dogs, and bees. Their trade networks transformed villages into city-state kingdoms. Over the span of 3,000 years, Mesoamericans built stone plazas, terraced pyramids, and enormous ballcourts. The ball game was part of their religious and social life. The winners became great epic heroes called pitzl in Mayan and the losers were sacrificed to gods who demanded human blood.”

After thirty minutes of showing my slides, I end my PowerPoint presentation and say, “Today we know the sun rises because of Earth’s orbit and the force of gravity. We know the

Earth isn't flat. We know about the atom and DNA. Because of the internet, vast information is at our disposal instantaneously. We live in a world my great-great-granddad could never have imagined. So why do people still perpetuate the existence of the supernatural? The unreal? Is it the mystique of magic? The allure of setting things right, putting some kind of justification to our existence? The ancient Mesoamericans answered these questions in their collective mind."

I turn on the auditorium lights, stand beside the projected image of the Aztec calendar in the eclipsed sun and adjust my eyes. "Are there any questions?"

"We are citizens of the Fifth Sun." I hear the deep voice of a man. He has a French accent. I scan the crowd but don't see him. The voice returns. "Today's sun first appeared on the morning of August 13, 3114 BC."

"I was hoping my audience would ask scientific questions. Although I'm not surprised to hear New Age opinions from tourists confusing astrology with astronomy. But yes," I add, matter-of-factly. "That's the Day of Creation on the Maya Long Count calendar."

"Mademoiselle Professor," the Frenchman's voice declares. "In less than ten years, the present cycle will end. Ometeotl will destroy this world with an earthquake ten billion times mightier than the Hiroshima bomb."

I squint to see who's speaking and spot a fairly tall man in a green pullover standing at an aisle seat among Mexicans and gringos. He looks fifty and is ruggedly attractive with broad, full lips and a dark, slightly graying ponytail.

He looks like Bradly Nolan must have looked, I imagine and remain silent a second too long. Then I remind myself *this man's a New Ager. He's not Bradly Nolan and he's not interested in my scientific facts.* "Yes," I finally say. "Winter solstice 2012 is nine years away. I'm more interested in June 6, 2012 when Venus makes its last solar transit this century."

The crowd chuckle. Some clap. I've brought them back to science, the archaeology and astronomy of Mesoamerica.

"Professor," the man continues his banter. "Ometeotl's spiritual transformation will unfold at the center of the Milky Way. In a blackhole called Ek' way-nal, the portal to the next world."

I stare at the man thinking *he's toying with me*. But his stunning looks strike me more than his folly. "Very poetic, Señor," I find myself saying. "The date you recite is an end to a recorded cycle. No more. No less. The Maya had many calendar cycles just as the universe has more than one orbiting planet." The audience chuckles and I see the man smile. He gives me a two-finger salute and exits the hall.

People asks a few more questions. I do my best to answer but am eager to call it a night.



Chapter 6: Frank, *Adonis*

The morning after the lecture, I find my little Fulbright scholar in a research laboratory at the back of the Maya exhibit. She wears a white lab coat and jeans and ties back her shoulder length hair with a Guatemalan scrunchy. At a desktop computer, amid piles of folders, books and floppy disks, she appears to be transcribing glyphs. They must be from the codex she mentioned in her article.

Her work is consuming her and she fails to notice me at the door. For this encounter, I wore jeans, a long-sleeved shirt, and a colorful, diagonally striped serape tie. My old leather attaché resembles the one beside her desk.

Last night, I noticed that her only jewelry was a set of amethyst ear studs. She has no need for adornment. Her plainness gives her scholarly acceptance in a man's world. And from what I sensed last night, she's highly disposed to me. She has a controlled warmth hidden from ordinary view. She's *une fleur delicate*.

I inhale her essence. "Le bonjour," I say. "Usted es Dr. Jacobs?"

She turns and holds the rim of her tortoiseshell glasses. "Si, soy Dr. Jacobs, pero yo no hablo mucho español." She quickly closes the file of glyphs on the screen, to keep me from seeing her work. She's a private woman. A guarded little flower.

"Bien. Do you have a moment, Mademoiselle Professor? The head guard directed me here." This isn't completely true. I work closely with one of the guards at the museum and have easy access to the offices, as a small tit for tat exchange. Jorge is one of my smalltime dealers. He also uses.

Hillary smiles. An invite. Women can't resist my dimples and amber brown eyes. I'm sure she smells my Versace cologne. Yellow Diamonds. "May I sit?" I know my accent captivates her. It's another feature of mine American women can't resist.

I pull a chair beside her desk, hold out my hand, and introduce myself. She offers her hand and knocks a stack of floppies on the floor.

"I'm sorry." She reaches for the disks.

I pick them up and place them on her desk.

“Merci. Or is it gracias?” she asks. “But I . . . what can I do for you? I’m rather busy, Mr. Guillemont. Why didn’t the guard send you to the front office? People don’t usually drop by unannounced.”

“I’m here on my own reconnaissance, I admit. You see, I’ve been closely following your career. I read your articles on archeoastronomie and saw your presentation last night.”

“Por supuesto,” she stammers. “I remember you. A bit passionate, aren’t we? About doomsday.”

“Si. I like to, how do you say, ruffle feathers. *Je m’amuse.*” I open my briefcase, pull out a folder, and hand her a curriculum vitae.

She glances over my impressive papers which include graduate work in archaeology at Mexico City University. All the while, I’m sensing my presence in her peripheral vision.

“Dr. Jacobs,” I say authoritatively. “I’m fluent in English, French, Spanish, and five indigenous tongues, Yucatec-Lacandon and Quiché-Mam among them. I know the Maya region like the tips of my fingers. I’ve studied the glyphs as well. I’m a man who appreciates art especially the art of antiquity. Maya glyphs are the spiritual expression, world view, of the ancients.”

“That’s well said, Monsieur. And an interesting perspective.”

“You see, Dr. Jacobs. I’m the perfect man to guide you on your expedition next spring.”

I pause to assess her reaction. She looks interested, but cautious. If I’m careful with my words and how I say them, I’ll fully possess her one day. It’s all a matter of timing and footwork.

“I see,” she utters, hesitating to hand back the CV. “You’re originally from France?”

“Paris,” I say.

“Paris? I was just there to see the Venus transit from Pont Neuf.”

“C’est merveilleux, Mademoiselle Professor.”

She looks at my CV again. “It’s impressive but the museum provides me with translators and guides. I’m sorry Mr. Guillemont. I’ve no choice in the matter. Nor any means to pay you.” She hands back my papers.

“Mais non.” I gently touch her hand, refusing the documents. “You keep them. Maybe you’ll reconsider, if circumstances change.” I coyly wink.

My little Fulbright scholar sighs, as if she forgets to breathe. “Well, okay, Monsieur.” She places my CV on her desk. “But there’s little I can do at this time.”

I don’t get up to leave and for a moment hold gaze. Then she looks to her desktop screensaver of butterflies and the Tree of Life. She avoids my eyes when she says, “Please excuse me, Mr. Guillemont. I’ve much work to do.”

I remain seated. She seems flustered. I’m enticed. She’s overwhelmed by my presence. A woman as preoccupied as this little sparrow doesn’t have much of a social life. *Bien sur*. And every woman I’ve ever known has a side aching to blossom. *Meme, avec mes amis de la rue*. “Ah, but you must be quite lonely in this big city, Professor.”

“What?” She’s blushing.

“*Vraiment*. I can see you’re very involved with your work. Have you had time to visit the Frida Kahlo Museum and the Murals of Diego Rivera. Their art brings peace of mind. Or have you seen Tenochtitlan? Teocalli, the Aztec twin temples of Quetzalcoatl and his brother Tezcatlipoca? Sons of Ometeotl?”

“I’ve been to the Zocalo, of course. I’m impressed with your knowledge of the city and the Aztec gods.”

“It’s my passion.” I lean forward. My cologne possesses her. I glance at my watch. “I tell you what, Dr. Jacobs. It’s 11:30. You must break for lunch. Be my guest at Adonis.”

“Adonis?”

“Mais oui. The lover of Aphrodite and the title of a ballad Percy Bysshe Shelly wrote to honor John Keats. He died at only 25.”

“I’ve heard the story.”

“Come. Adonis is my favorite restaurant in DF. It’s isn’t far from here, on Avenido Homero in Polanco, a neighborhood I know well. I frequent its expensive shops and often find myself at the embassies of France, India, Canada, and Spain in Polanco.”

“How impressive. You must travel a lot.”

“I do. And the food at Adonis is excellent. Do you like Lebanese cuisine?”

“Actually.” She leans back and her chair slightly scoots out. “I’m having a tuna sandwich and orange juice for lunch.”

“*Viens*, the walk will stimulate your thoughts. We’ll talk about the city and its ruins. About the Aztec and the Maya gods. Maybe even about Adonis.”

“Or Keats and Shelly?” She chuckles.

“What do you say, Professor?”

She hesitates; her mind seems to wander. Suddenly, she taps her tiny fingers on the desk and says, “*Bien, ca marche*, Monsieur Guillemont. A Lebanese lunch might be nice.”

“Por favor, call me Frank.”

“Okay, Frank. Give me a moment to back up my files. Can I meet you in the front lobby? By the Coatlique statue.”

"No problem." I stand and firmly shake her cold little hand while knowing she intends to check my references. It's a slight risk but she won't discover anything doubtful in such a short time. I have no criminal record. I'm too crafty for that. And in my business network I do have many contacts to support my academic claims. Many quid pro quo clients, if you will. "It's entirely my pleasure to meet such an esteemed scholar as yourself. A Fulbright archaeoastronomer."

Pulling her hand from my grip, she nods. "In ten minutes, *entonces*?"

As I head out the door, I sense her eyes on my gait.

When Hillary and I arrive at the popular restaurant, chilangos are dining at nearly every table clothed in white linen. The enticing aroma of cardamom, cumin, and roasted lamb permeates the air.

A formally attired waiter seats us at a corner table on the raised section of the room. Over Turkish iced coffee, I tell Hillary about the many years I've studied Mesoamerican cultures while enjoying the tropical beaches of Mexico.

"Tell me about the Aztec gods you seem to know so well. I find ancient cosmology fascinating especially the way people envisioned gods in natural phenomenon."

"Moi aussi," I say. "But I find the divine more fantastic than scientific theories. For example. Ometeotl created himself and the universe. He's the god of duality."

"Duality?"

"Ometeotl is both male and female. His four sons are the Teczalipocas."

"What about the Feathered Serpent?"

“White Teczalipoca is Quetzalcoal, God of Light. His nagual is a coyote.” I sip my coffee.

“Nagual?”

“Spirit guide. Often in the form of an animal. Do you know your dream nagual?”

“No. I’m not too familiar with matters of the spirit. I’m not really a religious person.”

I merely nod for her to continue. To answer my question. She can surmise what I mean.

“I doubt I have a nagual, Monsieur. But I was born under a solar eclipse.”

“*Alors*! Then I suggest you have many nagual guides into the spirit world. I believe you are a chosen daughter of the present creation.”

Hillary smiles, obviously flattered by my comment. “Maybe you’re my nagual.” She chuckles as if toying with me.

“And you’re mine.” I wink. I couldn’t be happier with her response.

She nibbles on a spicy carrot from a condiment bowl of olives and hot pickled chilies, onions, zucchini, and garlic. She’s thinking about what I said.

I interrupt the quiet moment between us. “When I read that your expedition will start in Todos Santos, I knew you could use me on your team. During the civil war in Guatemala, I spent a year in Todos Santos learning Mam while apprenticing under a Mam shaman. He taught me to guide others into the spirit world.”

What I tell her is only half true. I did go to Todos Santos to learn Mam but I apprenticed under a shaman in Oaxaca. Anita’s grandfather, in fact. I changed my CV to reflect what I’m telling her now.

“You’re a shaman?”

“C’est vrai.”

"What a coincidence." Hillary gazes at me. She's wondering whether to hire me. "Todos Santos is where my ancestor started his trek to the cenote cave. More than one hundred years ago."

"Professor, I've read you have Maya ancestry. Tell me more about yourself. The truth is, I too have Maya blood. My paternal grandmother was a Lacandon Mixtec. That's where I get my complexion."

"I thought you were French!"

"My grandfather was a French explorer. He went on expeditions with the famous photographer Desire Charnay."

"I know about Desire Charnay. He lived at the time of my ancestor Bradly Nolan. He wrote *Cities et Ruines Americanes* and he documented Palenque, Chichen Itza, and Uxmal. My ancestor probably met him during his travels in Mayaland, as the early explorers called the Maya World in their day."

"I find this *extraordinaire*." I smile as brightly as I can. "Here we are, two Mesoamerican archaeologists with Maya blood. *M'excuse*. You are an astro-astronomer."

"Archeoastronomer." She corrects me then asks about my childhood in Paris which is not something I'll share. I never discuss my difficult life on the streets of Paris**.** But I'm a good fabricator of tales to match what fits my needs. I want this delicate flower to view me as the son of a prominent family, like the family she comes from. I was intrigued to read about her distinguished father, Astrophysicist Sheldon Jacobs, and her family's business and fortune in Philadelphia. And to learn that she's vulnerable now because her parents recently died. I see many possibilities with this young American princess.

“I grew up in Paris but have lived in Mexico for thirty years,” I say as the waiter places before Hillary a plate of falafel, tabouli, and baba ghanoush. His timing is impeccable.

“Do you travel to Paris often?” She takes a bite of falafel.

“All the time. Rome and Amsterdam as well. India sometimes. But my home is in La Ciudad.”

“*Un homme du monde!* And you’ve never settled down?”

Ah, I think to myself, she’s summoned the courage to ask this question. My CV doesn’t indicate a family and my only jewelry is a single gold hoop earring with a dangling Aztec eagle. “I’ve always been too busy for a family,” I say. “My business consumes me.”

“I know what you mean. Other than my coffee breaks with Monte and my private Spanish lessons, I’m mostly alone making phone calls, sending emails, updating my website, and of course studying the glyphs and preparing for my expedition.”

“Somehow, Mademoiselle Professor, I can’t picture you always alone. You’re much to charming for that.”

She smiles and I watch her pretty delicate little hand dip a falafel into the ghanoush. “I’ve been alone most of my life, preoccupied with studies and work, that is. Except for my parents. Daddy was an astrophysicist. When he first took me stargazing, he probably held me in one arm as he pointed out the brightest stars. Sadly, my parents died last year. Did you hear about the plane crash at Sky Harbor Airport?”

“*Mon Dieu. Je suis vraiment desole*.” I put down my fork, take her hand, and gently squeeze it. “You must be devastated, *ma petite fleur*.”

“I am. But my work means a lot to me and with the diary and all . . .” She suddenly stops speaking as if she’s disclosing too much. She’s a careful and calculating woman but very sensitive.

I sit back to eat some of my broiled lamb. It’s succulent. Carnal. “I know what it’s like to be alone in the world,” I say. “You see, both my parents died by the time I was ten.”

“Really?” she dips a pickled zucchini into her baba ghanoush.

“I don’t like to admit this. It’s so unpleasant and we’re having such a lovely conversation. *Mais*, upon learning about your tragedy, I feel compelled to share mine. But let’s talk about you. You’re so petite and intelligent. I’m surprised you’re not married.”

She ponders my remark. She’s measured in her step. Indeed, an intelligent woman. “I’m still young and I have passions, too. Like you, Monsieur. My work means more to me than anything else, including a husband and kids.”

“*Naturellement*. And this is why you’re successful. Madame Fulbright.” She grins, encouraging me to continue. “*Ma chere enchanteresse*, do you know about the Aztec concept of *yolteotl*, the mysterious sacredness of everything? It’s like the ancient Maya concept *itz k’uh* which means the breath of life, the music of the wind, the divine force that makes everything exist. You must balance all sides of your nature. You must allow spiritual winds to blow through your essence. When one attribute overrules, you lose your balance and Ometeotl will destroy you.”

Hillary looks at me, as if digesting my words. “Why bother beings so fastidious?” she asks. “According to you last night, the world ends in nine years.” She sits back probably wondering if I will banter with her like I did at her lecture.

I merely smile and allow her to judge my answer.

“My mother and granddad tried to drill religion into my head,” she continues. “But when I turned twelve, I rejected God.”

I chuckle at her precious little remark.

“What’s so funny? I’m perfectly serious.”

“Why you, Professor. I find you refreshing and wise.” I take her hand again and feel her body tremble as if I’m filling her with concern. Or maybe she’s thinking about itz k’uh. Or maybe even Adonis. I run my fingers over her palm. “Such soft little hands. Especially compared to mine. I’m searching your lifeline for a sign that you will find your center.”

“My what? Oh, come on, Monsieur.” She tries to pull away.

I firmly keep hold of her hand. “Indulge me. I’m quite serious. Your fate line is shallow but strong. You have a giant, uncommon destiny.” I release her hand.

“What kind of destiny?”

“You see. If you allow me to be your aide-de-camp, your shaman for your expedition, I can teach the spiritual side of the ancient maya. Maya glyphs have meaning beyond mere word translations. A spiritual meaning. I can help you interpret your codex.”

“Codex? I said nothing about a codex,” she says with a certain amount of defensiveness. Interesting.

“Alors, you mentioned it in your article.”

“Oh yes. I guess I did.”

“You can’t appreciate the meaning behind the glyphs if you don’t feel the spirit of the Maya. Absorb the it’z kuh. I can be of great service as your shaman and translator. I urge you to reconsider adding me to your team.”

“I’ll see what I can do. I have to consult Dr. Vasquez, my Fulbright advisor. But I find you fascinating and knowledgeable about things I never thought about and things I don’t know.”

“Now you flatter me.”

She takes my hand and looks at my palm. I’m touched. “What does your lifeline say?” She sips her water.

“Something I can’t reveal at this time and place. But I feel very good about today, having met you. You’re a very attractive woman with charming blue eyes. Like the eyes of Isabella of Castile.”

She flushes, struggling to accept my compliment. I make her feel pretty and she’s happy to be with me, an attractive middle-aged Frenchman. A dashing Adonis, in fact. But she questions herself and her mood shifts. “I really must go,” she says and waves for the check. I insist on paying for lunch and escorting her back to the museum.

When we arrive at the museum entrance before Chapultepec Park, I promise to call on Hillary. “I want to show you more of La Ciudad. My favorite city in the world. Next to Paris, of course. Paris, c’est mon coeur.”

She appears relieved I don’t mention her expedition. I’m a perfect fit. She’d be thrilled to work with me but she’s not ready to decide. We’ve only just met. First, she’ll check my credentials and references. This little sparrow is quite unlike most women I’ve ever known. It’s obvious no man has penetrated her shell of femininity. That will change now. I sense her unraveling. She doesn’t know if I’m a friend, a stranger, a prospective colleague, or if I will become her first lover. Her Adonis.





Chapter 7: Hillary, *Coatlique and Coyolxauhqui*

Nearly a week passes before a museum guard stops by my office door. “A Frenchman awaits you in the front lobby,” he says.

My heart pounds as I shuffle through papers on my desk. I’ve already checked out two of Frank’s references, verifying his degree from the University of Mexico. I was going to talk to ask Dr. Vasquez about hiring Frank for the expedition but after Frank failed to immediately contact me, I let the notion slide. I hesitated calling him because he said he’d call me. I felt like he should take the initiative or I’d come across too eager. And I don’t want to make a fool of myself because of my strong attraction to him. He truly is Adonis.

Now, as I walk down the corridor to the front lobby, my interest in the Frenchman sky rockets like an Apollo launch at Cape Canaveral. In fact, jet fueled emotions consume me.

Then I see him standing beside the 2.7-meter stone statue of Coatlique wearing a suit and tie with his hair is in a pony tail.

As I approach, my mind hears Coatlique say *My daughter Coyolxauhqui speaks to spiders, centipedes, and snakes. With her 400 brothers, she plots to kill me.* ***But Huitzilopochtli***

is born from my head, like Athena from the head of Zeus. The sun is born to avenge me. To toss his brothers to the circumpolar stars and *dismembered his sister and toss her* ***to the moon.***

"Frank, I thought you'd forgotten me," I halfheartedly tease. "Tossed me to the moon."

"Like Coyolxauhqui? Never." He chuckles and firmly grips my hand with both of his. A warm breeze from Chapultepec Park seems to blow through the museum and enshroud me with Frank's cologne, a sharp woody scent. Or is it the aura of Coatlique? Or her daughter the Moon? Why am I so confounded? Has Coatlique cast a spell over me? Am I losing my head over this Frenchman?

"Mademoiselle Professor." Frank stirs me from my misty thoughts. "I could never forget our most stimulating conversation at Adonis. Alors. This past week, I've been extremely busy with my new job."

"New job?" I ask, feeling deflated, as if Frank had considered me for a job then hired someone else.

"Oui. Avec the National Institute of Anthropology and History. We leave for Chiapas in a week."

"Really?" I'm at a loss for words and have the urge to hire him for my expedition, on the spot, using my own money if necessary. He's a shaman who speaks Mam and he's so utterly charismatic. But it seems I'm too late. Why didn't I call him? "Well." I pull my thoughts together. "I'm glad you stopped by, Monsieur."

He releases his grip. I see the statue in his amber brown eyes glistening in the museum's bright overhead light. "Cher Professor. I had every intention of seeing you before leaving. If nothing else, I knew you'd be interested in our work. Perhaps you can coordinate research with

our team leader. Dr. Martinez is comparing inscriptions at Palenque's Temple of the Cross with the glyphs on the Copan stairwell. But for now, I've come to invite you to join me on my daily walk in Chapultepec Park. Are you free?"

I pause in thought, searching for the right words. I don't want to seem too disappointed that he's no longer available to work for me, even though I am. "Yes, I'd love to go for a walk," I finally say. "I'm sorry I didn't catch you sooner. I wanted to hire you for my expedition, after all. I talked it over with my mentor, Dr. Vasquez. He thinks your background and language skills are excellent qualifications." I feel awkward, out of step; I've never really lied before. Never had to and I don't know what compels me to lie now. Other than the spell Coatlique has cast.

"*Comme c'est gentil a toi. Quelle chance je serais.* Give me some time to talk with Dr. Martinez." Frank kisses my hand and leads me into the park.

During our stroll Frank offers to tutor me in the Mayan languages. Whether or not he eventually joins my team, I want to keep seeing him during my stay in Mexico City and quickly agree to his offer.

Later in the day, back at the museum, I tell Monte I'd like to hire Frank as my aide-de-camp. As expected, Monte is reluctant. "Dr. Morales has already arranged for two graduate students to join our team," Monte says about my academic advisor in Guatemala. "We can't dismiss them, *no es possible*."

"I know, but Mr. Guillemont has excellent credentials. He'd make a great addition to our current team. He knows the area, speaks Lacandon, Mam, Quiche, and Yucatec, and he spent a year in Todos Santos studying to be a shaman."

“Shaman? A Frenchman? Dr. Jacobs, I think it’s better if we find a real Maya shaman in Todos Santos.”

“He has Maya lineage and I’ll pay his salary.” I hand Monte Frank’s CV.

“I’ll check it out, mañana,” Monte says as he sets the papers aside.

“But he’s about to leave on an expedition to Palenque.”

“Haste is not a good thing, Dr. Jacobs. I’ll see what I can do. Meanwhile, I suggest you carefully confirm all his credentials. My country, *desgraciadamente*, has a reputation for scandal and corruption.”

“I’ll be careful,” I assure him in parting, hoping Frank’s background completely checks out.

On **our third day together in the park. Frank and I sit on a bench under the rustling ahuehuete leaves along the main path. Joggers are rushing past us, chickadees** are twittering nearby, and Inca doves are cooing along the berm. The air smells of grilled pollo and cob corn elotes from the nearby food cart.

“I’ve quit my job with INAH and am now available to join your team as a shaman and aide-de-camp, if you’re still interested,” Frank tells me before we begin my language lesson.

“That’s wonderful,” I declare. “You can help me come up with words for the ceremony at the waybil shrine. Before we enter the queen’s tomb at Lake Turtle Macaw.”

“What kind of ceremony?”

“To honor Jaguar Blood Moon. It’s what her descendants have done each year for fourteen-hundred years.”

“Fourteen hundred years? That’s a long time.”

“I know. I think the tradition stopped when Bradly brought his son to Philly. It’s part of what I’m eager to unfold in Todo Santos.”

Frank leans back and takes a bite of his hot cheese tlacoyo. “Hillary, he says. If you don’t mind my asking, why the delay.”

“Delay?”

“For your expedition. I’m curious. Aren’t you eager to find your ancestor’s tomb. I know you want to decipher the glyphs first. But really, if I were you I’d try to locate that codex. It’s invaluable. If you don’t someone might beat you to it.”

“The thing is, Bradly’s diary specifies two conditions for entering the tomb. It must be during zenith passage, which doesn’t occur until next spring and only members of the ancient queen’s lineage can enter or lead the entry into her tomb.”

“Do you think Bradly’s son was the last lineage shaman?”

“Yes. And I’m a direct descendant of Grandfather Thunder and Bradly and Ix Chel’s son Joseph, my great-granddad. That makes me lineage heir, I believe. In fact, I’m probably the last one.”

I watch Frank quietly sit back as if absorbing my enthusiasm. He inhales the pleasant atmosphere and seems satisfied that I’ve agreed to take him on my expedition.

“Frank.”

“Yes.” He **looks at me as if absorbed with what I have to say.**

“Grandfather Thunder, Ix Chel and even Bradly were initiated shamans. Can you apprentice me as a shaman before next spring. Then I’ll truly be qualified to enter the queen’s tomb with respect and honor. Can you do this for me in this short amount of time? Make me your apprentice?”

“Naturalment petit oiseau. There’s nothing I’d love more than teaching you to be a lineage shaman.”

“Thank you. Otherwise, the queen might curse me and my team for entering her tomb uninitiated.”

“Are you superstitious? I thought you were strictly science minded.”

“I’m not superstitious or religious. Really. I want to respect the traditions of my heritage.”

“Do you even know the location of the tomb?”

“I have a pretty good idea. I’ve zeroed in on the most likely cenote, according to GPS and Bradly’s directions in his diary. He used a compass, of course.”

“I see. And will you share with me Bradly’s diary. I can offer insights. Help you discover a new way to interpret your glyphs, apart from all your scientific and literal facts. They say, two minds are better than one.”

“After we reach the tomb and find the codex, then I’ll reveal everything in a book I’m already drafting.”

“I’m always here if you change your mind, now that I’m part of your team and your shaman guide.” He takes another bite of his tlacoyo and a drink of his soda to wash it down. Then he tosses what remains of his lunch to the birds. “Alors, Cherie,” he says and again gives me his full attention. “What does the night sky offer next month? In August?”

“The Perseid meteor shower,” I say enthusiastically. “This year it’s during a waning crescent. It’ll be a perfect night sky for counting up to ninety shooting stars each hour.”

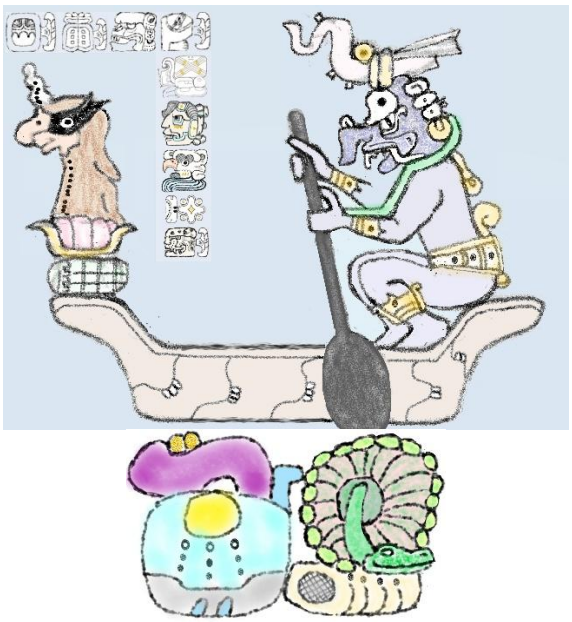
“Magnifique.”

“My father taught me that the Perseid meteorites are particles from the comet Swift-Tuttle. I remember spending entire nights with Daddy counting estrellas fugaces, burning meteors with long tails. I really loved my father. He showed me the world of outer space.” I tell Frank about my trip to the Yucatan and say with emotion. “Seeing the solar eclipse at the Pyramid of the Sun was the pinnacle of my youth. Both 1991 and 2003 were horribly tragic years for me and yet each offered me great gifts of discovery. In ’91 I discovered my passion for the Maya ruins and for archeoastronomy and in ’03 I discovered Bradly’s trunk and diary.” I set aside my juice. “Wouldn’t it be fantastique to watch the Perseids from the Pyramid of Kulkulkan in Chichen Itza?”

“I have a suggestion, dear Professor. Next month, we tour the Yucatan for the meteor shower. I’m free now to initiate you as a lineage shaman.” Frank touches my hand. “I’ll teach you to let go of your restrictive mind and experience teotl itz k’uh, the essence of life. You’ll dance with your spirit companions like an estrellas fugaces shooting across the night. And the glyphs will dance with you, in your mind and spirit.”

“Sounds like a spiritual star party.”

“Oui. The ruins are the perfect place for your initiation. By next spring, you’ll be your ancestor’s lineage shaman. No one will curse you when you and your team enter the tomb of Jaguar Blood Moon.”



Chapter 8: Frank, *La Route Maya*

I offer to drive Hillary to Palenque then around the Peninsula in a logical order but she insists on retracing her '91 trip with her father. This means we fly from DF one-way to Cancun where we plan to rent a VW bug for our tour of la routa Maya. In Cancun, we stay at the Sheridan in Hotel Zona.

In my room adjoining hers, I lie awake all night and think about Hillary. She's not the type to invite me into her bed. Not yet, anyway. Our relationship is only beginning. Right now, we have a professional friendship. She's my team leader for her upcoming expedition and I'm her aid-de-camp and shaman guide. We are, en vérité, each other's naguals embarking on a journey of transformation. I will take her into the spiritual world of the ancient Mesoamericans; she will lead me to my becoming. To the treasures of her lineage. To the codex, my ultimate aim.

I've never met anyone like this little sparrow. She puzzles me. I hope she doesn't throw *me* off guard. For one thing, she brings too many bags on our tour of the Maya ruins. She has a bag for her laptop, a knapsack for personal things, a bag for her camera equipment, a large duffle bag of books, notepads, clothes and a pharmacy of first aid supplies. The strong-willed woman

exudes rationality and I worry her façade may be difficult to break, although possible. It's not that I find her unattractive. I love all manner of women and men. But I've no interest in rushing the inevitable with a virgin unaccustomed to *l'art de l'amore*. She's so unlike *les amis de rue* in Paris, so unlike Anita in La Ciudad waiting for my return. Anita's a wild cat in bed. If I move with control, I'll know when to pluck the flower and pin her on my lapel.

I was actually happy to begin our travels in Cancun. I've watched this town grow from a fishing village to an enormous beachfront strip of resort hotels. I know the backstreet alleys and the humid ambiance of Cancun's prostitution. In hotel lobbies, I've cut many deals for drugs, antiquities, and to launder money. In fact, I intend to conduct a little business and pleasure during this trip. Call my contacts. Meet with a few. All out of sight and mind of Dr. Jacobs, of course. This on-the-side maneuvering is easy enough as long as I keep her off guard and measure my time and footwork.

After a breakfast buffet, Hillary and I walk barefoot along the white sandy beach where terns chase hermit crabs along the shoreline. Only a few people are around. I sport my ray-bans and St. Christopher pendant. He's always with me even when I'm not traveling. Like my prayer beads from Maman. Hillary is wearing a floppy hat, shorts, a T-shirt, and her transgressive tortoise shell glasses. The cooling sea breeze ruffles her hair.

We sit on a driftwood log and listen to laughing seagulls. I tell Hillary about my travels to India, Africa, and China and she talks about seeing Stonehenge on a trip to Europe with her parents.

"Look overhead," I say. "See the frigate birds riding the updrafts."

"Their wingspan must be two-meters."

"Vraiment. For the ancient Mayas frigates signaled approaching storms."

"People were much more in tune with nature way back when," Hillary says. She becomes quiet for a moment, as if contemplating "us." I can tell she's uncertain and uneasy. I'm a new prospect in her life, a dazzling exotic man. She wants to be with me but feels shy and inexperienced. She doesn't know how to approach me and needs a little prodding. But I can't be the one who initiates a relationship. It must come from her or I'll overwhelm her delicate spirit. "What are you thinking about, my apprentice?"

She's quiet a moment longer, watching the circling frigates. "Frank," she finally says.

"Yes Hillary."

"I've had only one relationship before, one that didn't last, one without sex. It was a boy during high school. Durwood the Jerk, I call him. He made me not want to date. Not for a long while."

"What happened to this imbecile, Cherie?"

"It's such an awkward old story I don't feel like telling. Not now anyway. It's trivial compared to my life now. Durwood the Jerk was just a useless pair of antique skis."

I chuckle and stir the sand with a stick. "You're funny, Hillary. Do you realize this?"

"It *is* kind of funny now that I think back on it."

"You know. A woman once broke my heart. I let my love for her take control and she took advantage. I really like you, Dr. Hillary Jacobs. Little Sparrow. But I'm afraid of growing too close, too quickly."

"I find that hard to believe," she says. "I mean, you're so thoughtful." She kicks the sand with her tiny toes and dares to say, "I like you very much, Monsieur. These past few weeks have been some of the best days in my life. Like the star parties Daddy took me to. They were magical

nights of gazing at planets, searching for Messier objects or counting the number of meteorites burning in the sky each hour. I miss my father but you're filling the emptiness in my heart. I'm grateful you appeared in my life."

"I hope I don't embarrass you," I say. "You're the first woman I've met who's so intelligent, so inquisitive. I admire you and your work." I gently touch her shoulder while thinking *she's falling into my grasp*. I mustn't lose sight of my steps. One foot at a time. "We've much to do, Cher Hillary. Let's focus on your initiation into the magic of the ancient Maya spirit. We'll know when the time is right to think more deeply about us. For now, let me offer you your first initiation lesson. Listen to the music of the wind and sea. Feel itz k'uh surrounding us. Breathe the aroma. When you commune with your ancestors, the ancient Maya, you'll understand the true meaning behind the glyphs."

Hillary deeply inhales, trying to absorb the itz k'uh. I myself do the same when suddenly she stands. "Frank. I feel like a frigate. I'm energized and eager to soar on with our travels. Let's go to Tulum." She takes my hand to help me from the log. "I went there with Daddy. Bradly also traveled there and so did Stephens and Catherwood. Perhaps in Tulum you can really start my initiation. I'm ready to discover what you have in store for me."

In our rented yellow Volkswagen bug, like the one Hillary's father drove thirteen years before, she tells me, we drive ninety miles south along the coastal highway to Tulum. We stay at a beach front villa one mile from the ruins.

As soon as the park opens in the morning, Hillary and I walk among the toppled ruins overlooking the turquoise Caribbean Sea. By eleven o'clock, busloads of tourists arrive from cruise ships docked in Cancun.

“Tulum is a revived population center,” Hillary jokes.

“Vraiment. Mais these people are loud obnoxious tourists with no regard for the spirit of the City of Dawn as the ancients called Tulum.”

“I know. Tourists take pictures of themselves before the ruins where the ancients once bartered jadeite, obsidian, cacao beans, copper bells, salt, shells, and idols.”

“The antiquities of today. Did you know the Aztecs controlled **Tulum?”**

“I’ve heard this hypothesis,” she says at the Temple of Frescoes. I hold Hillary’s equipment while she takes digital photos of the Ix Chel frescoes.

“This was one of my favorite structures when I was here with Daddy. I remember him telling me that Maya priests used it as a solar observatory in the 1400s. He encouraged me to become an archaeoastronomer, you know?”

“Très précieux.”

“I feel kinship to the goddess of fertility.” She pauses from taking photos. “**Not because I want to ask her for a good husband and many sons, like the ancient women did, but because my great-great-grandmother’s name was Ix Chel. And Jaguar Blood Moon probably prayed to this goddess. Although she lived centuries before Tulum was built in 1200 AD.”**

“Open your womb-jar Ix Chel. I know you desire the Sun,” I say to be funny.

“You’re hilarious.”

“You mean, Hillaryous?”

“Frank. Daddy used to say that. All the time, in fact.” Hillary continues to snap picture after picture. Like she needs a distraction. Maybe it’s difficult for her to remember her father.

“You take a lot of pictures.” I deeply inhale the itz k’uh, the essence of those who sailed the sea and traded in the markets of Tulum. I must be patient with this little sparrow. A pitzl player can never feel rushed. He must know his ploy and target at all times.

“I’m hoping to use one of the pictures on the cover of the book I intend to write,” Hillary says as she snaps away.

“I have no camera but am equally enthralled with the site though I’ve been here many times before.”

“How many times?”

“I can’t count them. They blur together.”

“Lucky you. I was here only once before but it was with Daddy, may he forever rest in peace with Mom. By the way, why were you here so many times? Was it for business? Certainly, you weren’t here just to see the crowd. Have you initiated others here in Tulum?”

“No, you’re right. The site is too busy and crowded. This isn’t the place to begin your induction.”

“Then why else were you here all those times?”

“In due time, I’ll tell you. For now, enjoy snapping pictures of Ix Chel. Open your shutter Ix Chel. I know you desire the Sun.”

“Hilarious. Hillaryous!”

We walk toward the House of Columns. On the stone ruins iguanas are basking under the hot sun. Hillary sits on a rough and mossy stone wall. I stand beside her holding her camera bag and enjoying the warm breeze drifting ashore from the sea. I look to the offshore cirrus clouds floating in the blue sky. “I can hear the ancients speaking,” I declare, breaking the silence between us.

“You hear the tourists. That’s all,” Hillary suggests.

“No. Listen, Little Sparrow. The voices I hear aren’t tourists. It’s market day. Close your eyes. Hear their calls. **Smell the cacao, the vanilla, the copal from the sacred fires burning in the plazas.”** I take her warm and moist hands in mine and concentrate on hearing the ancient voices. “Do you feel our ancestors?”

“I’m sorry,” she says. “I only feel hot and sweaty and the sun smells of my clothes. I hear laughing gulls and tourists but not the voices of my ancestors. I can only imagine what this site was like six-hundred years ago.” She pauses and looks at me with her pretty inquisitive blue eyes. “Spirituality must come naturally to you. It really doesn’t for me. I hope I won’t be a difficult apprentice. Don’t get frustrated with me, Frank.”

“Never, little dove. I’m a patient man if nothing else. Let your spirit awaken the itz k’uh within you and call to the four corners of space.” I see the puzzled look in her eyes**. I can almost touch her Maya codex with my mind.**

“What are you thinking, monsieur?”

“Only that Red Chaac of the east brings rain. White Chaac of the North sends in the shivering cold. From the south Yellow Chaac blows the wind our way. But beware.” I take her hands and gaze in her eyes. “Chaac of the west brings darkness, sickness, and death. Feel with your essence, Little Swallow. The ancients exist in the present if you open your mind to them.”

Her hair is blowing in a breeze scented with my L’homme Yves Saint Laurent. I know my spirit beguiles her with my knowledge of the ancient Maya. Maybe tonight she’ll ask me to become her first lover.

“I rejected religion when I was twelve. At my bat mitzvah,” she says interrupting my thoughts.

“Your bat mitzvah?” I ask. “I have trouble picturing you reciting holy scriptures, even as a child.”

“That’s just it, Frank.” Hillary stands to take pictures of the distant Castillo before the sea. “I couldn’t touch the Torah because of my gender.”

“Why did you go through with the rite? Because of your parents?”

“Yes. Especially Mom.”

“You were a determined little girl, as you are now. A rare quality in the fairer sex.”

“Fairer sex? Come on. Are we talking about women libbers? That’s ancient history. A woman has as much right to do what she’s driven to do as any man.”

“Of course. And I didn’t mean to diminish your gender. I love the essence of the female body and mind.”

“And spirit, I hope.” She smiles. “I *was* a determined child with loving parents who guided me in all ways. I resented the discrepancies between boys and girls based on religious traditions.” She stops talking and aims her camera at the Great Palace.

I sense she’s revealed too much about herself and feels susceptible to my mystical whims and perhaps biased viewpoint. She doesn’t know my ultimate aim to become both man and woman so she can’t understand my love for the gentle female side of being. No. She doesn’t understand who I am. “What are you thinking now?” I ask to bring her back to me. To help her evolve in our relationship.

“I was imagining the ancient priests over the centuries tracking the sun from the Temple of Frescos. They were making calculations.”

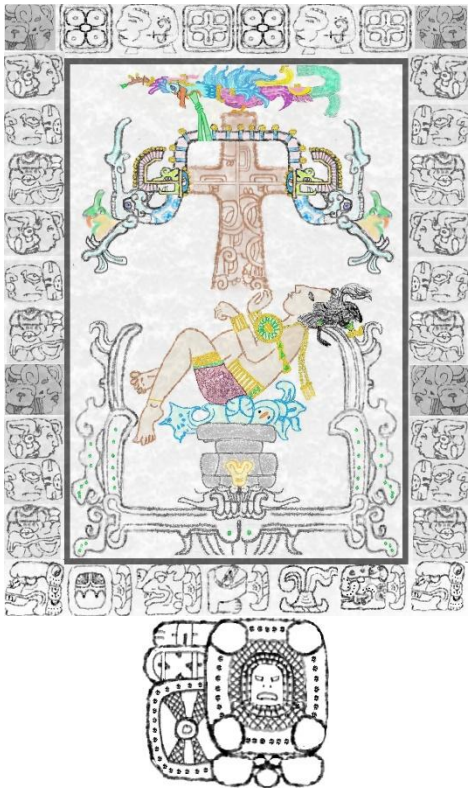
“And measuring their steps like the great Maya pitzl players. Little sparrow. Think about spirituality. Not religion. Formal religion lies at the heart of a woman’s turmoil. Is this what you want to hear?”

“Yes. That’s exactly it.”

“Over the centuries the world lost the feminine side of god. Not the Mesoamericans. They keep the power of duality. That’s why Ometeotl the Aztec god lives in the highest level of heaven.”

“Of the cosmos, you mean.”

“Bien sûr. Ometeotl was man and woman. Whole. Complete. Never lopsided.” I stand behind Hillary and gently massages her shoulders. “Before we head to Coba and start your initiation, I want you to relax. Allow the spirit of the sea, the itz k’uh, to take you back to the place of abundant and endless waters. Eternal waters of the universe of the underworld Xibalba. Of your spirit. Imagine, little sparrow, you are a princess in the court of the greatest Maya king of all time. You are your ancestor as a little girl destined to become the warrior queen you imagine yourself to be.”



Chapter 9: Yol Tan, *Princess of Abundant Waters*

9.10.10.2.14

I've always been close to my elder brother Lord Pakal, Holy King of the Jaguar dynasty. He's the divine sapling of Maize God Reborn and Red Chac Xib Chaac. His allies are Yax Mutul in the northern rainforest and Ux Witik in the southeast corner of the world. His enemies are the Snake Kings of Three Stone City in the far north.

One moon cycle after our father Precious Jaguar Macaw entered the waters of no return, my brother marked the seating of the half katun. At the Red Palace, he dedicated new steps to honor his parents. Three solar cycles had passed since his mother Lady Sak K'uk entered the rainbow road of no return. Nine solar cycles had passed since the tenth katun in the ninth baktun of the Fourth Creation.

The day of the seating was like any other, my brother loves recalling. Sacred mist rose from the surrounding forests. Fires burned in the central plaza as Lord Sun peered upon

the gathered citizens. Yellow Chaac exhaled winds on the crowd. **Dogs barked and turkeys gobbled in nearby yards where thatched houses stood before terraced milpas growing maize, squash, beans, tobacco, chilis, and avocado trees.**

On a wood platform beside the new steps, my brother sat on a double-headed jaguar throne of mahogany. High nobles flanked him. His priests tossed copal into the sacred fire that's been burning since our founding father Quetzal Jaguar seated the ninth baktun.

My brother wore a jade bead skirt, a woven hemp belt with glyphs of his patron gods, and a headdress of amante bark and quetzal feathers. He held the double-headed serpent wand handed down through the patriline of Quetzal Jaguar.

Queen Tz'akbu sat beside my brother holding the heir apparent, the b'aah ch'ok. He was eight stones at the time. Seventeen stones had passed since Pakal took Tz'akbu as his queen. The citizens revered her because she produced the b'aah ch'ok tough it took her many years. They depend on the queen mother during important ceremonies when she sacrifices her own blood on their behalf and calls on the power of her two elite bloodlines. The citizens were unaware that a rift existed between my brother and his queen. But I knew the truth.

Pakal had waited half a katun for his queen to produce an heir apparent son. During that time, she brought forth three daughters with spirits of illness and death. Although my brother respects Tz'akbu as his kingdom's Queen Mother, he has confessed to me that he's never **felt passion for her**. He rarely listened to her counsel concerning the training of his son. In truth, I am quite certain, my brother has always resented Tz'akbu for not giving him a viable daughter. I fear I may be part of this chasm between them.

On the ceremonial platform beside the Queen Mother was Pakal's step-mother, my mother Lady Rigel, second wife to our father Precious Jaguar Macaw. On this ceremonial day,

my brother tells me, Lady Rigel wore a cotton blouse and skirt woven with shells and feathers and embroidered with four-petal sunflower glyphs. I was a six-month fetus in her womb.

My mother's father had named her for the third hearth star of creation. She entered the world when the three creation stars appeared above the evening horizon. She was born the year my brother married Queen Tz'abku.

Six lunar cycles before our father entered the waters, my brother traveled to Bone Dog to make war. The king of Bone Dog surrendered, swore allegiance to the Jaguar Dynasty, and gifted a princess bride to Pakal's father. Lady Rigel brought the power of her bloodline to Precious Jaguar Macaw because she was great-great-granddaughter of Bone Dog's first king.

My brother's heart mended when our father accepted my mother, the princess bride. Pakal tells me the spirit of Precious Jaguar Macaw revived when she quickly conceived. But before I arrived, a day spirit took my father from Earth.

As my brother danced before the stone steps to the Red Palace, priests chanted and musicians beat turtle shell drums and shook calabash rattles. The sun made the king's face shine, people say, as he entered the dark road of underground waters. He fell into a trance because priests had given him a brew of water lily, morning glory seeds, Ololiuqui, mushrooms, and honey.

"I conjure **the bolt lightning snake of the living K'awiil**," my brother declared. "I turn the stone at the seating of the New Lord of Time. Lady Sak K'uk was wife of Precious Jaguar Macaw. I am their son, the eleventh king of the Jaguar Dynasty. I touched Earth when snake king Scroll Serpent sacked our city a stone before Lady Yohl entered the rainbow road of no return. When I took the scepter of K'awiil at twelve stones, I resurrected the Jaguar bloodline through my mother Lady Sak K'uk. I restored my kingdom to power and glory. I established cities and

installed vassal kings. Now I call upon K'awiil, keeper of the scepter, guardian of the royal bloodline. Awaken revelations to me!"

The king opened his netted skirt and inserted a stingray needle into his manhood. His blood dripped onto sacred bark paper inscribed with the names of his patron gods. The clay vessel that burned the paper had black and red glyphs that read *King Pakal--chok-wa ch'aji. His blood releases the flower spirit.*

Into the sky, the burning paper emitted smoke with the king's holy itz k'uh. The god Ahkan roared like a jaguar and from the maw of a snake-vision came the face of Quetzal Jaguar in his shell helmet of Tlaloc Chaac Ek, Thunder God who hurls Obsidian Flints to Earth.

The vision voice told my brother *Before the seating of the ninth baktun, the king of Yax Mutul, grandson of Spearthrower Owl, installed me as King. The sixth king of my dynasty, Lake Turtle Macaw, established Stone Mountain City Where All Gods Unite in the highlands and Bone Dog City beside the Usumacinta River. The queens of Lake Turtle Macaw failed to produce a patriline heir. His sister took the scepter and the regnal name Lady Yohl. During the seating of the ninth katun, the snake kings threw down the gods of Lady Yohl and eclipsed her sacred fire. She failed to dress and feed the gods of the ninth katun because the snakes had defiled my dynasty*.

The snake-vision closed its maw and the image of Quetzal Jaguar disappeared. When the maw opened again the face of Pakal's mother appeared in her Tlalac-Chaac Ek warrior helmet. *Lady Rigel brings forth a girl* Lady Sak K'uk told my brother. Her words caused my brother to stop his dance because the priests predicted Lady Rigel would produce a son who would become a great pitzl player and a warrior of the Jaguar Dynastic Tree.

My brother looked to the burning paper in the bowl and implored the gods for another prophecy. He didn't reveal my mother's revelation to the gathered citizens. He feared they would lose faith in their priests. My brother tells me, "I decided to wait until your birth. If Lady Rigel produced a son, I would rejoice for our father's flowery spirit. If the child was a girl, as my mother's apparition foretold, I would hold a festival for my citizens. In my heart of hearts, I wanted Lady Rigel to bear me a viable daughter."

When I was born on the day 14 Ocelot, the humid rains of Yellow Chaac trampled the Earth. Ten katuns had passed since the ninth baktun after the day of creation. Six winals had passed since Pakal's dedication of the new steps. Priests declared the meeting of day spirits auspicious. They all anticipated a boy.

The priests were wrong. In the birthing room of the Red Palace, my mother Lady Rigel produced a baby girl. The palace healer, Lady Ja' Naj, took hold of me. With her flint knife she severed my umbilical cord and placed it in a pot with the placenta. Priests took the pot to bury in a sacred cave to protect me from harmful spirits.

Lady Ja' Naj handed me to my brother the Holy King. He carried me to the front palace steps dedicated to his parents. The citizens had gathered to learn about my royal birth.

In the muddy plaza before Pakal, men, women, and children cheered for their Holy King and the new child of the Jaguar Dynasty. The citizens were undaunted by Chaac's unleashing of itz k'uh.

With palm fronds, attendants shielded my brother from the downpour as he held me out at arms' length before his citizens. He allowed my naked body to absorb the rains of Chaac.

Pakal knew his citizens would fear my gender. They might believe I cursed the festive day, so he declared, "The portal of heaven brings my father a daughter. Do not misconstrue what

the gods have told our priests. My father didn't die because of a false prophecy. The high priests are correct. My father's child will become a great queen. She'll produce many designated heirs for the Jaguar dynasty. I name her Yol Tan for she comes from the essence of heaven and touches Earth in the Primordial Sea of Fire. This day proclaims strength and power of spirit and mind. She is born of the bloodline under the lightning bolt of Chaac and possesses the power of Baby Jaguar. This child is a gift from the Fourth Sun. She makes the rains before the harvest."

By late afternoon on the day of my birth, the rains subsided. Nursemaids bathed and clothed me and gave me milk and vital herbs to sustain me. They bound two cedar boards at my forehead to shape my skull in a tradition as ancient as the people of the northeastern coast. A long, slanted forehead is a mark of beauty and nobility. Nursemaids also placed a jade bead on the bridge of my nose to train my eyes to look inwardly when I matured.

As a princess of the Jaguar Kingdom, I am as resplendent as Pakal's mother Queen **Sak K'uk and as my own mother Lady Rigel.**

That evening, attendants dressed my mother in a finely woven huipil and skirt. They adorned her with jade bangles and necklaces, intertwined her hair with iridescent quetzal feathers, and anointed her with the essence of purple orchids found in mahogany trees. To help her recover from my birth, Lady Ja' Naj gave her a brew of dried mushrooms with cacao and cayenne.

All the while, they say my mother sang in quiet whispers to the gods of Bone Dog. She sang praises to Maize God Reborn for my birth and for her re-birth on the rainbow road of no return. In my heart of hearts, I know my mother wanted to hold me. She wanted to live and not die.

At the darkest hour of that night, King Pakal led a small procession of priests, lords, and warriors to the tomb of our father Precious Jaguar Macaw. Lady Ja' Naj walked beside the litter of my weak and lightheaded mother. Priests were beating turtle shell drums, rattling gourds, and carrying vessels burning fragrant copal.

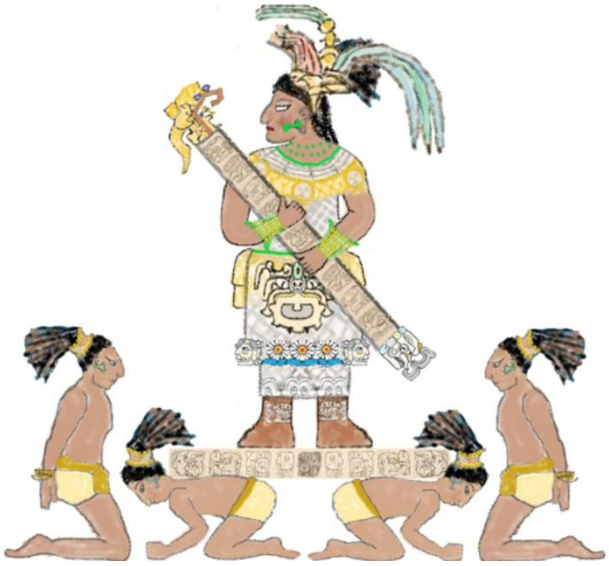
Under a stone estate on a hillside near the Red Palace, my father rested in his tomb, his muknul. Priests had purposely left it unsealed, waiting for my mother to bring forth my father's child. My mother belonged to her husband in death as she had in life. The gods required her to lie at his side and serve him in the world beyond.

Mortar and stone lined the vaulted muknul. Obsidian blades, chert flints, and ceramic vessels filled all the niches. Glyphs on the walls proclaimed the date of my father's birth and his marriage to Lady Sak K'uk but didn't record my mother's name or birth. Lady Rigel wasn't to replace my father's great wife Sak K'uk.

The body of Precious Jaguar Macaw lay swathed in cotton reddened from cinnabar powder. His jade mask represented Maize God Reborn. On his forehead was his name glyph. In his mouth was a jade bead. He wore a beaded necklace with a cayman pendant.

In the dark muknul, priests helped my mother onto the stone floor beside my father's wooden platform. My brother knelt beside her and marked her face with red cinnabar and gave her a brew of maize powder and cinnabar. "You will serve your lord husband my father," he told my mother. "The gods bless those who give their lives in sacrifice."

Pakal watched my mother deeply inhale and finish the blood-colored brew. He then departed with his nobles. Lady Rigel faced the Death Lords alone. I know she feared that priests would return and cut out her heart. That they would cast her blood on the stone floor of her husband's tomb before she **entered the rainbow road of no return.**



Chapter 10: Hillary, *Club Med Coba*

In the thick musty heat, we check into Club Med Coba. When morning arrives, Frank and I head to the archaeological park.

"John Lloyd Stephens never made it here," I say as we as we enter the gates**.**

"Ah oui?"

"He heard rumblings about Coba but didn't think he had time to see the ruins."

"What about your great-great-grandfather?"

"Bradly didn't visit Coba either, but Daddy brought me here. The site had very few tourists back and not many more these days, apparently."

"Did you know Coba means *water stirred by the south winds of Yellow Chaac*?" Frank asks as we walk among the stone monuments and stelae.

"I did. What interests me most are Coba's reigning queens who allied with both Tikal and Calakmul. I guess they played political chess like any ruling king and went where the wind blew. Chaac's wind."

We continue to the stelae that portrays a queen named Kaloomte K'awiil. I take endless pictures while thinking about my ancestor Jaguar Blood Moon. "Kaloomte K'awill reigned about the time of Jaguar Blood Moon," I tell Frank as he takes my picture before her stela.

"The kaloomte title means she was a ruling queen like your ancestor?"

"Yes. Notice how Kaloomte K'awill stands on captives. This is unusual for a female ruler."

"She must have been a powerful warrior queen."

"I hope to find something like this at the tomb of my ancestor."

"No doubt we will," Frank says. "When we find the codex."

I look at Frank. He has one hand on a stela and a cigarette in the other. He seems deep in thought. "I wonder if she ever came here," I say.

"Who?"

"Jaguar Blood Moon."

"Hillary. Let me read the diary and I'll help answer your questions. I've studied the glyphs myself, at least as artwork. Glyphs are spirit pictures of the ancient Maya and I know the Maya spirit."

"I appreciate that, Frank. I'm just not ready to share Bradly's diary, with anyone."

Franks says nothing as he drags on his cigarette. He has that look again. Like he's frustrated with me but patient at the same time.

"It's not that I don't trust you Frank. It's just that I want to decipher the glyphs for myself. I want to be the one to uncover my ancestor's life bit by bit word by word. In the meantime, I'm relying on you to guide me into the spirit world of the Maya as your apprentice."

"And I will. You'll see what you never dreamed possible."

“I know. You’re my nagual.”

“And you’re mine.”

Frank and I climb the tall awkward steps to the top of Coba’s main pyramid Nohoch Mul.

“Nohoch Mul means *Great Mound in Rippling Waters,”* Frank says once we reach the top stone platform and take a breath. “At its base if you can see or imagine fifty white roads called scabes.”

“Yes, scabes. Maya roads like the Inca roads.”

“Or the Roman or Persian roads,”

“Or the Great Silk Road, for that matter.” Frank laughs.

I sit, deeply inhale the hot and humid air, view the surrounding jungle dotted with cenotes. “Frank. I look forward to being initiated into the Maya spirit world but wonder if you really can shake up my rational mind. I’m my father’s daughter and grew up learning to question whatever hasn’t been scientifically proven. Sure, my mother and granddad tried to fill my head with religious notions but I never took them as seriously as **Daddy’s** lessons in astronomy. And when my parents died, any concept I ever had about a god died with them.”

“I assure you, sparrow. You’ll feel differently after I take you through the Ek’ way-nal portal of transformation.”

“We’ll see.”

“Always the sceptic.”

“It’s what I learned from Daddy.”

“Cher Hillary. You may not rediscover the god of you mother but you’ll know the deity of your mind and spirit.”

“I like that, Frank.”

We share a bottle of water. I sense Frank is letting my thoughts percolate in my mind. Like it's his shaman method of initiating me. I inhale his fragrance, feeling wonderful. "This is where Maya priests tracked Venus across the sky. I *can* feel their spirit."

Frank chuckles as if catching his breath. He wipes his brow with his handkerchief.

"Maybe you shouldn't smoke so much," I suggest.

"I'm fine. It's part of my constitution. I've been smoking since I was but a small boy."

"Wow. I won't ask you how long that is. It's not polite."

"Fifty years." We both laugh. "You know, Hillary, your astronomer priests sacrificed virgin girls dressed in jade beaded huipils."

"Except the cenote at Chichen Itza included the remains of both genders of all ages."

"Maybe they were all virgins. Male female young and old. It was a great honor to die as a sacrifice to the gods."

"And, as a virgin?"

"That too."

I don't respond. I'm wondering if Frank thinks I'm a virgin. Sometimes I'm uncertain of how to relate to him. "Frank. Sometimes you're just like my daddy."

"How sweet."

"Then other times you're so unlike him. Almost at the same time."

"How so?"

"Oh, I don't know. My father was a man of science. He prayed at shabbat, for Mom's sake, but I don't think he cared about religion. I don't even know if he believed in the almighty. Although he made lots of dad jokes, he was never flippant like you are

sometimes with your whimsical notions about being and becoming. But Daddy loved me and Mom to the end of the world, to the quasars and beyond."

Frank lights another Gauloises. "Tell me about Venus, Professor Jacobs. I love listening to your astronomy stories. It helps me understand your spirit so I can better guide you into the spiritual world of the ancient Maya."

"I love when you appreciates my intellect, like Daddy used to do. The Mayas observed that Venus follows the setting sun for 250 days, disappears for eight days, reemerges ahead of the sun for 236 days, then disappears another ninety days before returning as the Morning Star."

"That sounds like a spiritual cleansing. Are you ready for yours? Madam astronomer. Madam morning star."

"Yes. The ancient Maya were avid stargazers, like most ancient people. They somehow even detected Venus crossing the sun."

"Good eyesight."

"Maybe because they trained their eyes to cross. But they didn't know basic facts like Venus has phases like the moon, that it's the same size as Earth and that a day on Venus lasts longer than its year. All these discoveries came after Galileo's telescope."

Frank takes my hand like my father used to do and makes me feel appreciated and respected. We simple sit a while and take in the view. Then Frank gets up to smoke away from me.

I remain seated on the cold stone thinking about falling in love. And we haven't even broached the topic of sleeping together. I'm patient about this. It'll be such a big step for me, a complete change in my life. I only hope Frank's hesitation is because he respects me and not

because I don't appeal to him. And all his talk about entering the portal of becoming makes me nervous about what's in store for me, as his initiate. As his lover. I feel like I'm Venus transiting the sun."

Frank returns and takes my hand to help me up. "Now we descend Nohoch Mul. I want to show you the stela of the phallus."

Shortly, we are strolling along a path through the hot tropical jungle. Huge moths flutter past us like birds. In the dark green canopy, monkeys perform acrobatics and green parrots and toucans chatter at one another. Frank walks beside me carrying my bags. He seems to enjoy the tranquility of the setting. Maybe he's thinking of the phallus. Maybe of me.

"Was she pretty," I ask, interrupting the quiet mood between us.

"Who?'

"The woman who hurt you."

"Oh. You mean . . . Stella?"

I continue walking, waiting for him to explain. "I want to know everything about you."

"I see. I suppose Stella was *tres jolie* although she was a coquette and you're a thoughtful lady scientist."

"A coquette? Because she hurt you?"

"Peut-etre. I vowed not to let anyone else steal my heart. With you, Cherie, I feel somewhat cautious. I hope you understand." He gently squeezes my shoulder.

"Do you think I'm pretty?" I ask, hoping he finds something about me physically appealing, perhaps my petite size. My blue eyes.

"Ah," he laughs. "I've heard this question many times before. A woman's insecure vanity." He stops and carefully sets my bags on the ground. In the sweaty heat, he hugs me,

kisses my forehead and says, “Be still, Little Sparrow. Take life by the moment. Don’t burden yourself with future possibilities. Listen to the jungle sounds. Do you hear a thousand voices from all directions? Mosquitoes buzz. Crickets chirp. Frogs ribbit and croak. The whistles, barks, screeches, and howls grow louder, they crescendo, wane, and trill. When the voices peak in unison, Water Lily Jaguar calls you from the forest swamps.”

I listen to the jungle and smell its musky scent. “I feel the sun’s intense heat but can’t see the sky above the creeping foliage.”

“You will. Soon. We haven’t even started your initiation.” Frank picks up my bags and we continue along the dirt trail without saying anything more. He seems deep in thought. I assume he’s thinking about his personal business matters or thinking of how he’ll take me into his spirit world.

“Frank.”

“Oui Cherie.”

“My thoughts are filled with possibilities about what lies ahead. This dreaminess isn’t something I ever do. I’m used to studying researching and basing all my plans on terra firma. On well-grounded principles and facts. I’ve never really strayed from my rational mind. I am my daddy’s daughter.”

“That you are, cher Hillary. Que vous etre.”

Later in the day we drive from Club Med to the fresh water cenote Choo-Ha. No one else is in the parking lot when we arrive at three o’clock in the afternoon. Jungle foliage surrounds the cave opening where wooden steps lead to the underground cenote.

When we're halfway down the stairs, Frank remarks, "We enter Xibalba and die. When we reemerge, we are the maize god reborn." His voice resonates with the sound of our footsteps trailing down the stairs.

"Your voice sounds as ominous as your words Frank. For you, everything's about transforming."

"You'll get there too, little sparrow. One step at a time."

At the stairwell bottom, artificial lights cast a translucent sheen across the aqua pool that fills much of the cavern. Sunlight streaming inside through the opening illuminates stalactites and stalagmites.

Before the pool, Frank sets my bag on the rocky ground and puts his arm around me. We quietly absorb the serenity until Frank's voice echoes, "We're in the womb of Ix Chel, the dwelling place of her father Chaac. Here is the source of rain and corn." He holds me closer. "Ix chel. Open your womb jar. For the sun." Frank chuckles.

"Seriously," I say. "How could the Maya not worship gods in such a place? It's beautiful down here. Eerily mystifying." I reach down and touch the cool water, awed by the setting and the man beside me. Little fish are swimming at the sandy bottom. "I wonder how they got inside the cavern." I hear my words echo.

"Must be some kind of underground channel." Frank strips and wades into the shallow pool. "Viens," he says. 'No one's around."

I stare at him feeling dumbfounded by his physique. His skin is completely bare of hair and he has no tattoos. I'm awed by the sight of him. I've never seen a man fully undressed and this man, well he looks like a god to me. Maybe Adonis or Corn God Reborn.

Although I'm usually self-conscious about my boyish figure, I suddenly feel seduced by Frank's bravado. I want to wholly bear myself to the gods of this cenote cavern, to Ix Chel, Chaac, and to the man who captivates my heart. I strip to my underwear, dive into the cool water, and swim toward Frank while thinking about something my mother once said *being petite is an asset, a style in vogue.* When she said this years ago I thought she was just trying to bolster my esteem. I was often self-conscious about my size, when a child. But now I think she was being truthful. I feel like all of me is an asset to myself. To Frank. I am in vogue.

On boulders at the far edge of the pool, I sit beside Frank. "Sixty-five million years ago," he says. "A comet ten miles across slammed into the Yucatan and killed the dinosaurs on Earth. The impact created cenote pools across the Yucatan and Guatemala."

"Maybe," I say. "It's more likely that Chaac's rain caused the limestone to collapse and form these sinkholes that the fresh underground water fills."

"And the little fishies swim from Ix Chel's womb."

I teasingly hit Frank on the shoulder. "You're right about the comet. The impact center is called the Chicxulub Crater. Earth has craters everywhere, like the moon. It's just that our planets so plush with plant life and oceans that most craters are hidden."

"Like a lot of the worlds ancient ruins."

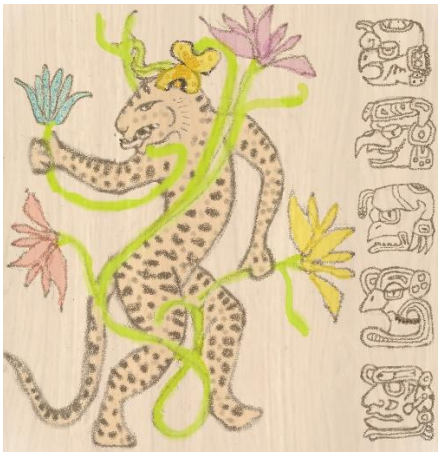
"You know. I think a sea passage exists under this region. That's how the little fishies swim here. We're landlocked but connected to the oceans."

"Landlocked and connected. I like that." Frank smiles. His dimples make my heart flutter. I think he may kiss me but instead he plunges back into the water. I follow him and we frolic in the center of the pool splashing each other.

All at once, Frank stops playing around and embraces me. “It’s time, *mon petite oiseau*,” he whispers in my ear. *“*You will open your womb-jar to me, tonight in your room. I know you desire the Sun. After we fait l’amore, you’ll **dream of your Maya ancestor. You’ll become the young princess of Abundant Waters. Live in a great red palace. The palace is your training arena to become a warrior Kaloomte like the queens of Coba. You’ll stands upon many captives. For now, you’re but a young elite princess training to enter the Ek’ way-nal portal and become the great warrior queen of your destiny.”**

Frank kisses me in the pool. I feel the little fish surround us.

“Kaloomte queen,” Franks says after he takes a breath from the kiss. “You capture my heart and trample me with your spirit.”



Chapter 11: Yol Tan, *Star Flower*

In the Red Palace, I passed my early childhood without a penetrating spirit of illness. I resided in my own chamber. Lady Ja’ Naj was my personal healer. Every morning and night, she gave me hot cacao **to help me grow strong and to stop the pain** of emerging teeth.

One stone past my birth date, Queen Mother produced a second son. My brother Pakal named him Kan Xul. Two years later the queen produced a third son that the king named Eight Reed but a frail spirit possessed him; he lacked the strength and wit of his brothers.

Pakal often told me that I was a gift from the gods. I was his only sister and he treated me like the daughter he would never have because Queen Mother never produced viable girls. The king personally saw to my upbringing. **Sometimes Queen Mother protested that Pakal spent more time with me than with his sons. After my brother told Queen Mother his heart ached for the three daughters she lost, his queen fell silent on the matter.**

In the white painted reception hall of the Red Palace, my brother received emissaries, traveling merchants, and his vassal lords. During tribute ceremonies, toucans and scarlet macaws were always clattering from their perches. My brother sat atop a northern platform on jaguar pelts. Queen Mother sat beside him with the b'aah ch'ok at her side. He was almost always holding his yellow boa that he named Chaac Snake. Poets, dwarfs, musicians, and dancers entertained my brother and his attendants, guards and vassal lords.

In one corner of the White Hall, artist-scribes taught the royal sons and elite boys mathematics, astronomy and how to draw picture words. After each lesson, the boys waged pretend battles against snake kings or imagined they were Hunahpu and Xbalanque playing a ball game against the Lords of Death. Chaac Snake was always part of the game.

While the young lords played, I quietly sat below the platform petting my baby monkey and listening to them talk about great battles and great pitzl players. Their stories intrigued me.

One day, after the seating of my fourth stone, I approached the b'aah ch'ok and asked if I could join in their play. He politely dismissed me. It seems that Queen Mother overheard my

request. She admonished me with sharp words. “Although you’re a royal princess,” she said. “Girls don’t participate in matters that interest boys.”

When Pakal came to my private chamber for a visit, I complained to him. “I want to be a pitzl player,” I said. “I want to battle the Kaan kings and defend the Jaguar dynasty.”

“What you ask for goes against the nature of your birth,” my brother told me. “But I’ll see what I can provide to satisfy your inquisitive mind and powerful spirit.”

The very next day a lanky girl of six stones entered my chamber unannounced. “Who are you?” I asked while seated on my bed platform drawing number glyphs on bark paper.

“The king, you brother, gives me to you as a lifelong servant and playmate.”

“Who are you?” I asked again. I didn’t appreciate her intrusion. No one had announced her before she entered my quiet chamber.

“I’m Star Flower, my lady. I’m your loyal servant, *a win a ke na.”*

“Where did you come from? You’re a homely girl. Your forehead lacks a proper slope and your eyes peer straight ahead as if you’re in a daze and can’t think your own thoughts.”

“Yes, my lady. No one can be as lovely as you. My **father is Flint Paw. He was named for the jaguar paws and flints he wears around his neck.”**

“Flint paw? I don’t know him.”

“My father travels the trade routes throughout the world.”

“What does he trade?”

“Cacao beans, jungle feathers, and jade. He trades for obsidian blades and shells from eastern coastal cities.”

“Why aren’t you helping him? Or your mother?”

“My mother is Peccary Star. I’m the youngest of six daughters. My father gives me to our king and the king gives me to you. In exchange, the palace provides my mother with maize and woven fabric to clothe and feed her remaining five daughters. My sisters.”

“If I allow you to stay in my private chamber, Star Flower, you’ll slept on the floor next to my bed platform.”

“I don’t require much. My father had seven females to feed and as his youngest, I always got the scraps.”

“How amusing.”

“I’ve already sworn my allegiance to you.”

“To me?”

“To the king. As your life-servant, I can never marry, become a mother, or stop serving you. I’m your loyal servant, *a win a ke na.”*

From the beginning, I made sure Star Flower understood our relationship as mistress and attendant. On occasion, while many moons cycled and phased, my attendant’s mother Peccary Star came to my private chamber to bring corn cakes and newly woven cloth for her daughter. During these times, a spirit of jealousy possessed me. I regretted not having a mother of my own to show me affection. I never spoke of such matters to Star Flower. She didn’t need to know my deepest thoughts.

When the weather was fair, Star Flower and I played and ate elaborate meals on the back terrace. It overlooked the forest and the estate where Pakal entombed my mother with my father Precious Jaguar Macaw. On days Yellow Chaac cast heavy rains, we quietly played in my private chamber or in the White Hall beside the northern platform. Together we danced and imagined being whatever I wished us to be. Most often, we were jaguar or harpy wayob spirit

dancers. We would sing about kings, queens, and the story of creation and we'd play games with cedar sticks and rubber balls. I always won our games because Star Flower couldn't allow me to lose.

During my fifth stone, my brother arranged for my proper education. Queen Mother taught me how to behave as an elite princess. She scolded me if I addressed her as anything other than Queen Mother. The king's artist-scribes taught me the history of my royal lineage and how to draw astronomy glyphs on sacred bark paper.

By the time I was six stones, I was creating booklets about gods and ancestors. In one folded booklet I wrote numbers as far as I could, beginning at the zero date of this creation and counting thousands of numbers and dates behind and ahead. My efforts greatly pleased my brother the king.

After we had been together through two cycles of Venus, I complained to Star Flower. It was the first time I took her into my confidence. We were with each other continuously and sometimes I tired of our imaginary games. I wanted to learn her opinion about matters important to me. I had no one else to talk to in such a way except for my holy brother and he wasn't so readily available to me.

"I don't like being a princess of court," I said. "I don't even like being a girl."

"You're so beautiful and lovely, my lady. Why would you say such a thing? I'm your loyal servant, *a win a ke na,*

"Queen Mother tells me girls must behave demurely and not make demands of brothers, uncles or men of rank and authority. She says girls cannot learn the arts of men. That I will never become a hunter, warrior, or pitzl ballplayer--a hero in the eyes of our citizens. The queen tells me that since the time of Quetzal Jaguar, kings take the power of K'awiil through the male

bloodline and gods allow a queen only to produce an heir. Even ruling queen Lady Yohl wasn't directly from the patriline of Quetzal Jaguar."

"And what of this?" Star Flower asked.

"I don't like it, that's what," I replied, frustrated with my servant's lack of understanding. "I instruct you to give me your honest opinion."

"I have no opinion except what is yours."

"Well, be trueful. Tell me what you really think. I want to do great things. I want to be a pitzl player in the city's ballcourt."

"Alas, my poor little mistress," Star Flower said. "Your fate is to obey the king as you are. Female. You can't be everything you wish to be except when we pretend. You'll grow up and become a bearer of kings. And I'll forever be at your side, *a win a ke na*."

I didn't like what my attendant said and I stopped sharing my deepest thoughts with her. I kept them to myself or confided in my brother the king. He was the one person in my life that I trusted and loved and I knew he treasured me.

On the seating of my half-katun, when Lord Sun was nearing the northern point and the days were at their driest, Star Flower and I were sitting on the back terrace, leaning against the stone wall and weaving **cotton cloth with bird designs** on our handheld looms. **I liked working quietly while listening to the forest sounds but I couldn't do this when Star Flower was at my side. She wanted to tell me every thread of gossip she had heard. Sometimes she chattered so much I wasn't certain if she herself had started the rumors.**

"Our Holy King Pakal has you in mind to marry the king of Bone Dog," Star Flower said at one point.

I paid her no mind and continued to weave.

"I have also learned that your mother was a distant cousin to the current king of Bone Dog," Star Flower persisted. She never liked being ignored.

I paused from my weaving and said, "I don't need my servant telling me what I already know about my mother's lineage. My brother the king has told me everything about my mother."

"*A win a ke na*," she said. "People claim that when the king's mother Sak K'uk took the watery road, your father became plagued with a demon of sorrow until King Pakal returned with the princess bride from Bone Dog. You entered the world the same solar cycle your mother arrived in Pakal's City. The same stone she entered the rainbow road. People say your birth caused your mother's and father's deaths because you were not born a boy as the priests foretold. This is what I've heard, my Lady Yol Tan."

I made no reply and resumed weaving. Although I tried not to let her gossip disturb me, sometimes what my attendant told me felt like a scorpion sting.

When my brother arrived on the back terrace later that day, I happily sent Star Flower away so I could speak privately with the Holy King. He gave me a birthday gift, a belt of jade beads and shells with glyphs of my birth date spirits.

"I thank you dearest brother, holy king." I dared to kiss his hand.

"I admire your woven cloth, sister," he said. "Tell me, what are you learning from your tutors."

"Only that my life is unfair because court decorum forbids me the privileges of royal boys. I want to learn what b'aah ch'ok and second son learn," I said. "I want to train my eyes on

the night flowers in the dark sky. I want to be a warrior queen like the founding queen of Coba, Lady K'awiil and our own Lady Yohl. And like your mother Lady Sak K'uk."

"Even great queens don't partake in hand-to-hand combat like warrior men," the king said. "Like my scar dog soldiers."

"If I can never partake in the games, or wars, then at least I want to hear about the famous battles. Can you tell me about your triumphs over the snake kings? About your siege of Broken Sky City during the Venus Star War."

The king kissed my forehead and said, "Hush young sister, your curiosity is more than I can accommodate. A man with a woman's spirit can weave like a woman, nurture young children, even make tortillas and balche. Yet, he may still be a pitzl player, a hunter, and a warrior. But a woman possessing a male spirit, like yourself, cannot become a hunter or a ballplayer. You cannot fight battles of war. You have no choice, concerning your life. You are born female and female you must live."

"But I want to be a pitzl player, Lord Brother. I want to hunt white tail deer and peccary. I want to be a warrior queen and dance with the harpy spirits of the forest."

Within the week, my brother returned to my chamber the hour before my sleep and sent my attendant away. We sat together on the platform and he said to me, "I've decided that the only way I can accommodate your unusual interests is to place you under the royal beekeepers, the Cab priests. As you know, only elite boys and royal sons can enter the tree and **apprentice at the Cloud Center Royal Apiaries, but I will make an exception for you.**"

"Bee keeping?" I asked. "This is something I never considered."

“Keeping bees will consume your burgeoning mind with busy work,” he said. “The Cab priests will teach you discipline and fortitude. Beekeeping will give you the ability to confront your enemies without fear. Like a warrior. Like a man. I require all my young lords to apprentice at the hives to learn the traits of good leadership.”

“But I want to hear stories about famous battles,” I reminded my brother.

“I will appoint my young lord Yax K’uh to enter the tree along with you under the Cab priests. At the bee hives, he can describe my many battles with the snake kings and their Kaan warriors.”

My brother’s appointment elated me. I already knew Yax K’uh from the White Hall where he played with his best friend Second Son Kan Xul. The young lord always smiled at me although we had never spoken to each other. Of course, I never played with him or any of the other royal boys. And I knew Yax K’uh was the great-great-grandson of Lake Turtle Macaw, the king who established Bone Dog, the city of my mother Lady Rigel who was named for the creation star in the Giant Hunter’s belt.



Chapter 12: Frank, *Perseid Meteor Shower at Chichen Itza*

On our way to Chichen Itza, we stop in Valladolid to relax in the city’s central park. I buy popsicles from a vendor at a rusty ice-box cart. We sit on a wrought iron bench under flamboyant trees. Before us is a concrete fountain of a Maya woman pouring water from a

vessel. At the rim, frogs are squirting water from their mouths. Nearby, a little girl is peddling knockoff Barbie dolls and a shoeshine boy is selling packs of Chicklets.

I toss my popsicle stick in the flowerbed, listen to the gurgling fountain, and strategize my next step. I sense Hillary's thinking about our night together at Club Med Coba. Making love to my fragile little sparrow was a mechanical act. *Fait pour la form*. I prefer someone who knows what he or she wants, sexually. Hillary isn't *une amie du rue*. She wears no makeup. No jewelry. No perfumes. *Perfumes make me sneeze,* she tells me, then, at the same time, she claims to like my cologne. Her only scent in the humid jungle is Secret spray-on deodorant. And she wears flat, practical shoes. Of course, we're on safari but even in DF she never wears heels. While keeping my sight on the fountain and the towering church beyond it, I think to myself *no, this little sparrow is not a woman seasoned in the art of love.*

We check into Hotel Mayaland outside the ruins and spend the next day exploring the best-known site on la route Maya.

"How many times have you been here?" Hillary asks as we walk through the park.

"Ah. Mais oui. I've been here many times before. I've even found clay artifacts in the nearby jungle."

"Really? That's incredible. It must've been a more recent artifact. Maybe some clumsy tourist dropped it. Chichen Itza wasn't part of the classic period when Tikal, Palenque, Copan, and Calakmul were overlords to vassal cities of the Maya World. Instead of the traditional god king, Chichen Itza had a Council of Lords. They grew mightier in power than the Coba queens and became the center of the Maya civilization."

“That’s right, little sparrow. After the classic Maya collapsed, the Itza Maya arrived from the sea. Like itz k’uh, the essence of sea breeze. That’s why I love this site. Except it’s overcrowded with tourists.”

“Essence of Sea Breeze? Is that your cologne, Frank? If so, I like it. If not, patent it and call it *itz from the sea*.”

“Yes, madam professor. I’ll do that for you.”

“I’ve read that archaeologists found gold from Oaxaca and jade from as far away as Chaco Canyon in the cenote lake. This intrigues me. I went to Chaco many times during my graduate work.”

“Moi aussi. I’m intrigued by you.”

Hillary smiles and blushes. It’s precious. “Did you know the Itza Maya worshipped the Sun phallus like the queens did in Coba?” I say to make her blush even more.

“Not really. I know they worshipped the Feathered Serpent Kukulkan.”

“Do you know the Kukulkan pyramid is a stone calendar with nine terraces and ninety-one steps on each of its four sides.”

“Of course. Daddy told me this when we visited this site. Bradly had no clue. Nor did Stephens and Catherwwod.”

“What else did your daddy say about the pyramid? He was a good professor. Like father like daughter.”

“Thanks. That’s probably the most flattering thing you could say to me.”

“Avec pleasure. C'est vrai.”

“El Castile, as the Spaniards named the Kulkulkan pyramid and as Bradly calls it in his diary, has fifty-two panels that represent the number of years it takes for the Maya ceremonial and solar calendars to reconcile.”

“Mais oui. Hillary, I wish to read your great-great-granddad’s description for myself.”

“I know. And you will. I promise.”

“Too bad you missed the equinoxes when you and your daddy toured the Maya sites.”

“I’m lucky we saw the eclipse from Teotihuacan. And even more lucky we’ll count the Perseids tonight. Were you here during the equinox?”

“I saw the spectacle at least four times. In the late afternoon the sun strikes the NW corner of El Castillo and casts shadows that wiggle like snakes down the balustrade. Like magic, the equinox marks the return of the feathered serpent. Maybe we can come back before the expedition.”

Hillary looks at her watch. “We’d better head back to the hotel to get ready for tonight’s spectacle. I wish Daddy were with me. But I’m happy to share it with you Frank.”

I take Hillary’s hand and we stroll through the park toward the exit. I’m pleased with what she just said. It means I’m charming her as much as her daddy had. It’s a positive step. I haven’t far to go.

After the evening’s sound and light show, tourists vacate the national park. I bribe the night guard, a man I’ve known him for years. I call him Little Chapo because he’s even shorter than the short man himself. He’s not a user. He’s a man who likes to subsidize his meager wages as a national park employee. He’s a procurer, rather like me though on a much smaller scale. He has given me a few artifacts in exchange for a small amounts of Chapo’s commodities.

And tonight, Little Chapo's arranged our exclusive use of the pyramid. I tell Hillary that the man owes me a favor. I don't want her to know the depths of my dealings.

"What kind of favor?" she asks like a woman always wanting to know a man's private affairs

"I'll tell you one day," I say. "Maybe on the day you let me read the diary."

"Fair enough. If nothing else, you know how to tit for tat."

"Hillaryous," I say to make her chuckle.

By the glow of artificial lights, Hillary and I climb the calendar El Castille. It's still warm and humid but on the pyramid top, Yellow Chaac cools us with a gentle breeze.

On the NE corner of the top platform, near the entrance to the High Temple, Hillary sets up her tripod and camera. I help her by holding her bags, as always, and handing her whatever she needs. "You're such a meticulous woman," I say while thinking *now if only she were more knowledgeable in the art of love.* "What do you intend to do with all this equipment?"

"I'm going to capture the meteorites radiating from the constellation of Perseus."

I watch Hillary attach a hood to her camera lens. "What's that for?" I ask while thinking about the night before. I'm hoping for something better tonight after we finish this project and return to our room at Club Med.

Hillary stops a moment to look at me as if reading my licentious thoughts. I see her smile in the dim pyramid's lights.

"It's to keep ambient light from washing-out my night-sky images. Daddy used CCD's and video attachments. Bradly used a Kodak Brownie camera. Now the world is a digital force of madness!"

I chuckle at her attempt to be funny. "I'd love to read that diary," I decide to say. Maybe her good mood will change her mind.

She stays focused on her task. I know her answer anyway. I've asked enough times. But when steady on the course, I'm bound to eventually wear her down. It's the maneuver of war. Of a pitzl player. Of a little boy on the streets of *Rue le Blanche.*

At midnight, Little Chapo turns off the pyramid's artificial lights as prearranged. Hillary and I lean against the two pillars at the High Temple's portico and adjust our eyes to the darkness.

"In ten minutes," she tells me. "We can see the faintest objects in the sky and won't be stumbling down the steps. To keep our night vision intact, I've covered our flashlights with red filters."

"Ah. I see. I was wondering."

She giggles thinking I'm so naive in her realm of science. Maybe so. But I'm her nagual to the spirit world she wishes to explore and she's my nagual to ancient treasure. The codex is never far from my mind. I want it more and more every moment I spend with my little sparrow. She's the key to my transformation soon to come. Like the stars about to shoot across tonight's darkness.

When the meteor shower peaks at two AM, Hillary is standing beside her tripod holding a shutter trigger remote, she tells me. I'm sitting at the edge of the platform on the top step. "What are you doing now?" I ask. "Specifically."

"Oh, you're such a good student, shaman of mine. I'm taking thirty-second exposures with the lens focus set to infinity."

"On nights such as this**." I light** a cigarette careful not to blow the smoke Hillary's way. But I need to smoke. It helps me stay focus like a lens. "Did you know the Maya saw meteorites as large fiery cigars. Smoking Stars, they called them."

"I like that." Hillary looks through her binoculars toward the radiant, as she calls it. "I'm hoping to catch a meteorite flashing past my sight."

"The gods like to smoke, like me. Tell me about the Maya constellations, mademoiselle professor. I know how much you love talking about the stars."

"I do. Let's see. The Celestial Bird is Cygnus in the Milky Way. Although some claim it's the Big Dipper or even the Summer Triangle perched in the branches of the Maya Tree. **The celestial bird is a feature of god's creation. He possess all knowledge of all time, like the torahs or maybe the library of Alexandria."**

"Or of Timbuktu in its heyday."

She chuckles and looks through the binoculars at the Perseus constellation. I think she's fallen in love with me. I would consider her drunk but my little sparrow doesn't drink. She doesn't smoke and she isn't versed in the art of love. She is pure science minded. But she's in love and this is greatly to my advantage.

I blow my smoke to the heavens and thank Ometeotl in the thirteenth realm for bringing me my naugal. For opening the door to my lifelong dream, to my fate. I'll be that which I aspire to be. The god who is both man and woman. And I'll have my retribution on a world that wronged me. That whored and killed Cher Mamam.

At three AM the crescent moon rises. We walk around the platform to stretch our legs and observe other features of the sky, as Hillary suggests. On the SE corner of the temple, she points to Scorpius and Sagittarius near the southern horizon. "One of the first things Daddy

taught me was that we live in the spiral arm of Orion, between the arms of Perseus and Sagittarius."

"Interesting. I didn't know this."

"But you know about the galaxy's center. I remember from the night of my PowerPoint lecture. You mentioned a black hole in the center."

"The Ek' way-nal portal."

"It's true. A black hole does exist. Astronomers have proof. And it lies there." She points at the scorpion. "This is my favorite part of the night sky. It was Daddy's too."

"And it's mine." I kiss her hand. "Ek' way-nal, the star portal into the world beyond."

"Take these binoculars and gaze at the bright star Antares. The Scorpion's heart. It's only 25,000 light years away."

"Seulement?" I hold up the binoculars feeling rewarded tonight. My little sparrow remembers what I said at her lecture before we even met. I've made a deep impact on her, like one of her moon craters. Perhaps she can offer me even more than her priceless codex.

I move beside her and place my arm around her shoulders, a warm friendly touch. I don't want to overwhelm the moment with sexual advances although making love to her on the stone ledge might send me through the portal to Ometeotl's highest heaven. Afterall, we're on top of a spiritual vortex, a place of Ek' way-nal transformation. But I won't make love to her tonight. Perhaps not for a long while. I can wait. I'm a patient man.

Besides, Hillary is a serious woman in the realm of her work and I'm a man of impeccable timing when it comes to lovers and matters of business. I can wait for my transformation. A pitzl's greatest asset is the precision of his move.

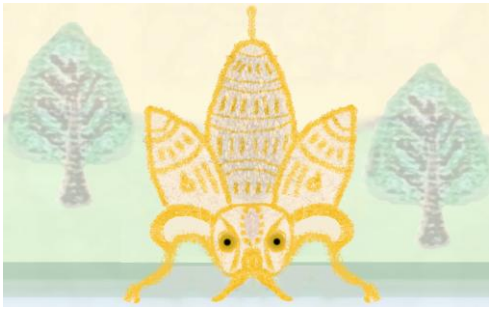
For a moment I listen to the quiet darkness then say, “Did you know, little sparrow, that the Mayas called Venus the Wasp Star.”

“Yes,” she says. “They believed the cycle of Venus was the magic cycle of the wasp.”

“Mi amore.” I feel her trembling **within my grasp**, as if she’s cold when the night is warm**. I hold her firmly and think about taking her into my realm of the mystical, of the uncertain, the unknown, of the place of transformation where I too will venture and change forever. When the time is right.**

Hillary leans her head on my shoulder with her eyes closed. I smell her Perel shampoo and see her small delicate face in the dim red light of our torches. She’s ready, I know, for me to take her back into the time of her ancestry.

“Now. Sparrow,” I whisper as if not to disturb the many gods of night. “Become your ancestor once again and listen to the jungle at night. Do you hear the humming of a wasp? The buzzing of a hive of bees? You are a young Jaguar Blood Moon, princess of ancient Palenque and a beekeeper at the king’s sacred hives. Open your honey hive Ix Chel. I know you desire the sun.”



Chapter 13: Yol Tan, *Cloud Center Royal Apiaries*

The Royal Apiaries rest in a forest clearing beyond the terraced hills of ancient Cloud Center**, the first city of the Jaguar Dynasty.** My brother Pakal escorted me to the hives and told

the Cab priests I was their latest initiate. “Train her to enter the tree,” my brother said before releasing my hand and leaving with his guardsmen and lords.

Under a wooden shelter aligned to the four Chaacs, the hives were buzzing with bees like the forest is always chattering with birds and monkeys. The head cab priest stood before me, dressed in a jaguar skirt and wearing jade beads with jaguar canine teeth. His face was painted orange like a honey bee hive. “Our cab priests stack these log beehives into pyramids and use ceramic plugs to block the end of each log,” he said to me. “Around the perimeter are statues of the beekeeper gods Mok Chi, the Great Bee Caretaker, Lady Royal Bee, and the four Ba Cabs who uphold the four corners of the world. These gods protect the bees from armadillos, racoons, and wasps. Your first lesson is to bow to Chac Xib Hobin and all the beekeeping gods before you enter or leave the hives.”

“Even Lady Royal Bee?”

“Especially her. And always remember, a single blue wasp will destroy an entire bee colony in less time than it takes to eat a maize cake.”

At this time, Yax K’uh, Precious Owl, arrived from the forest with three of the priests. They all bowed before Chac Xib Hobin. Precious Owl was as handsome as his cousins, the king’s sons and my nephews. His skin was smooth and honey brown, his forehead sloped with tattoos of his royal bloodline, and his **bright brown eyes peered inwardly**. He wore a white loincloth and apron of the finest cotton and a black jacket woven with beads, shells, and hummingbird feathers.

Yax K’uh handed me an incense torch and said, “You must wave this around the hives to pacify the bees as they work. Unlike wasps, royal bees don’t sting. But they bite when they sense a threat to their hive.”

“You seem already initiated to many things,” I told him. “Have you been here long. This is my first time even to see the royal hives.”

“No, Lady Yol Tan. I’ve been training only a day before you. We must learn quickly. Be quick on our feet, to enter the tree of royal beekeepers. Even lady keepers.”

“Like Lady Royal Bee?”

“And like you. Come. Let me show you the bees. Always keep the torch handy. It’s our best tool at the hives.”

“Why aren’t the king’s sons novice beekeepers as well, especially your best friend Second Son Kan Xul. In the White Hall of Red Palace, I always see you and Kan Xul together.”

“B’aah Ch’ok is a man of 15,” Yax K’uh told me. “He trains as the future king. Second Son will study beekeeping next season. Beekeeping prepares lords to become great generals.” Yax K’uh paused and smiled at me. “And ladies such as yourself, Mistress Yol Tan.”

For the rest of the dry season, I entered the tree of beekeeping as an initiate, a Ta Ochle, along with Lord Precious Owl. In addition to tending the hives, Cab priests taught us beekeeping songs and dances.

“Royal bees give us **pollen, beeswax, and honey, the itz of Lady Royal Bee and all the bee gods,” Cab priests told us. “We add pollen to maze cakes to make the body and mind strong, pollen lightens the face and beeswax keeps torches lit with flames that spit smoke. And we use honey to sweeten cacao, to heal wounds, and deflect spirits of disease and sickness.”**

Each day Cab priests wandered the forest seeking hollow logs with bee hives to add to the royal apiary. While they were away, Yax K’uh and I remained at the hives where we danced

and sang to the bees and Yax K'uh told me the war stories I longed to hear. I loved listening to him speak. His voice was like honey itself.

"Royal bees are like ball players and warriors," Yax K'uh told me. "In the center hole, a sentry bee keeps guard, just like the sentries and guardsmen at our city gates."

"Who are their enemies. Kaan snakes?" I ask.

"Yes. The enemies of the bees are like our enemies. That's why each hive has scouts to gather intelligence."

"What kind of intelligence?" I asked.

"The scouts determine distance and direction to a source of nectar. Like our king and his army, bees attack their invaders. They protect their sacred cache of honey, wax, and pupae. Like warriors, bees give their lives to their king so he may sustain the generations to come."

Over our days at the hives, Yax K'uh enchanted me more and more, especially with stories of Pakal's scar dog warriors. "Like injured dogs." he said. "Scar dogs fight without fear of pain or death. They bear battle scars with pride and endure suffering because fear destroys strength and intelligence. Scar dogs have stone fists and hearts chiseled with the glyph of our Holy King Pakal. They carry into battlefield the banner of White Bone Centipede, the wayob spirit of the Jaguar dynasty."

"What about the snake warriors of the Kaan? What banner do they carry?"

"The banner of Sun Belly Jaguar."

"Tell me about the Kaan snake kings. I hear tell the snakes defeated our Overlords in Yax Mutul."

"That's right," the young lord said. "And the Kaan want the Jaguar Kingdom under their fold again, like it was during the reign of Lady Yohl."

"But our Holy King my brother restored the buildings and altars that snake warriors destroyed."

"Yes, Mistress Yol Tan. Pakal is the greatest of kings. Sadly, it's true, the great city Yax Mutul now lives under the foot of Snake King Yuknoom."

"Who is this King Yuknoom?" I asked. "Surely my brother can defeat him."

"**Yuknoom is a slippery viper. He plays city against city by bribe or threat. He installed the brother of Nuun Ujol Chaac as king of Dragon Waters**."

"Who's Nuun Ujol Chaac? Is he my brother's vassal or that of this slippery snake king?"

"He is Yax Mutul's rightful king of the patriline. One day, when I become a great general for King Pakal, I'll lead an army to defeat Yuknoom and help the rightful king of Yax Mutul win back his kingdom."

As I intently listened to the young lord's stories, my spirit felt inseparable from his. I hoped he felt the same way about me. It seemed he did. Not long into our apprenticeship, Yax K'uh began calling me Ix Cab, Lady Beekeeper and I called him younger brother Mok Chi. Then we began holding hands like sister and brother when we stood among the hives and watched bees fly from the log portals to search for itz nectar in the forest and the doorkeeper bees pop in and out of their portal holes when worker bees return with pollen on their legs.

During the days of my apprenticeship, my attendant Star Flower remained at the palace weaving on her loom and preparing the evening meal for my return. She never joined me at the hives because the king allowed only his family members, Cab priests, and their Ta Ochle initiates at the Cloud Center Royal Apiaries.

During my first lunar cycle at the hives, I returned to my bed chamber and boasted to Star Flower about Yax K'uh. I told her about his stories and how we danced and sang among the buzzing bees. This was poor judgment on my part. I believed Star Flower loved me as her mistress, but my words and stories about my affection for the young lord filled her heart with a spirt of jealousy.

I now know, **Star Flower didn't like me venturing beyond what girls typically do or learn. Even royal girls. She told other courtiers that I shouldn't be apprenticing as a beekeeper. That I should study only courtly matters. In time, she even dared to inform Queen Mother that I was behaving in ways not fit for a high-level princess. That I was flirting with the young lord Yax K'uh.**

My brother told me this during a visit to my private chamber after he sent Star Flower away. "Queen Mother complains that you're associating too closely with young lord Yax K'uh. She says beekeeping isn't correct behavior for a princess of the Jaguar Kingdom, that your birthright isn't that of a royal boy."

His news upset me but I couldn't show anger in front of the king. I kept quiet as my eyes welled with tears.

My brother wiped my face with his jaguar robe and said. "Don't cry, little sister born of my heart. I became furious with Queen Mother. More so than ever before. *How dare you interfere with decisions concerning my sister* I told her. *My young sister is as brilliant as the morning star. Her essence dances and sings with harpy wayob spirits. The least I can do is assign her to beekeeping. And my young lord Yax K'uh is an excellent companion. He's a forthright, prudent boy filled with the makings of a powerful general. His influence on*

***my sister will give her what she needs. She wants to hear about battles and wars and ballcourt victories. I have no time to indulge her. Nor does the b'aah ch'ok or my second son Kan Xul.*"**

"You said all that to Queen Mother?" I asked feeling enormous love and pride for my brother the king.

"Word for word. My sister. You needn't worry. Queen Mother will hold her tongue when it comes to you. She knows her influence with me doesn't go far. What the Holy Lord decrees, happens."

On the day of harvesting wax and honey, after the sun's retrograde from its farthest southern point, the king held a ceremony at the Royal Apiaries. Cab priests, Yax K'uh and I danced the Bee Dance and sang songs to Colel Cab and Ah-Muzen Cab. The king, queen, and royal sons were all present for the festive occasion.

It was a sad ceremony for me. My joyous days with Yax K'uh were ending. Next season, he would seat his tenth stone and start training in the ballcourt with Pakal and his scar dog troops. He wasn't returning to the hives.



Chapter 14: Hillary, *la Route Puuc*

From Chichen Itza we drive to Montejo Hotel in Merida. The following morning, we head to the Puuc sites. The jungle road to the ruins is teeming with white and yellow butterflies fluttering like **windblown autumn leaves or winter snowflakes back in Chestnut Hill**. We

drive through villages with unmarked speed bumps and trishaws that could be straight from Bradly's era. Dogs, chickens, goats, and turkeys wander about the villages. Cats sit on window ledges of thatched houses. Through open doorways, I see hammocks strung across spartan rooms with sod floors.

After touring **Labna, Sayil, and Kabah** we arrive in Uxmal, the largest Puuc site**.** **B**usloads of tourists are already present although the crowds are nothing like those at Chichen Itza and Tulum.

"Three hundred years after the Conquistadors, John Lloyd Stephens explored these ruins using altazimuths, compasses, heliograph measuring tapes, and waywiser perambulat wheels," I say as we wander the park.

"Remarkable, isn't it?" Frank replies. "Desire Charnay took pictures of Uxmal in 1860."

"Bradly Nolan visited **Uxmal, Labna, Sayil, and Kabah forty years later**. And Daddy brought me here in '91. Uxmal was my favorite site, after Teotihuacan. Or maybe Chichen Itza. I don't know, really. It's hard to decide. Like the ancient sites in Arizona."

"Puuc means hill country," Frank tells me as we wander among the stone ruins.

"It also describes the unique architectural style. Long rows of half columns and building corners with stacked masks of Chaac, the Celestial bird, and the Witz Mountain Monster."

"That's right, Cher Hillary. The Witz Monster opens the door into a mountain. Like the sun opens the door to a new day. These are all portals of Ek' way-nal."

"I like that Frank. You're so poetic. Did you know that the Celestial bird Itzam-yeh marks buildings where priests taught astronomy?"

"No. You're the astronomer. Moi, I'm the shaman guide. I do know the Chaac masks have long curly noses, flat foreheads, and crossed-eyes."

"Chaac was the most venerated god of the Puuc Maya because this is a dry region without lakes and rivers and cenotes like Coba and Chichen Itza. People built cisterns here called *Chaac's Rainwater Stones*."

When we're about to climb the pyramid, I stop to catch my breath and ask, "Frank when will you start initiating me into Maya spirituality? This seems like a good enough place. I'm ready to get started. I've done all the research and studying I need to for now and am eager to learn from you all I can."

"In due time mademoiselle professor. I don't believe La Ruta Puuc is the right place to begin. Too many tourists. Let's have quiet time here so you can take your pictures of the impressive stonework. At our next stop on la route Puuc, Edzna, I'll lead you through the Witz Monster into the Maya spiritual world. You'll have a serpent vision in a cloud of fragrant smoke."

"And become a full-fledged shaman myself."

"In due time, Cher Hillary. Remember, patience is part of the initiation."

"I understand and will do my best. It's just that sometimes I want to learn and know everything as fast as I can. I've been this way since childhood. Maybe I got it from Mom. She was a wonderful mother but sometimes she got a little edgy. Manic I mean. Daddy was her rock after granddad died. I miss them Frank. Sometimes I think of you in this way. As my rock of Gibraltar."

Frank puts down my camera bag and gives me a luscious hug. "And you, Cher Hillary, are my little gem stone."

I say nothing more as we head out from the park hand in hand. I'm beginning to feel more emotional than I'm used to feeling. It's like the intense love I felt for Mom and Daddy when I dropped their ashes in the Seine under the Venus transit. Except, now I'm in love. With my parents it was familial love, the kind that comes with deep respect and honor and reassurance that I'm being loved as much as I'm loving and I'm loving as much as I've ever loved.

From the Montejo Hotel in Merida**, Frank drives us to the Ramada Inn near Campeche City. Our suite has a spectacular view of the Gulf of Mexico. Frank and I sit on the balcony and talk about Chaac coming from all directions.**

"Red Chaac of the east brings rain," Frank says. "White Chaac of the North sends in Ice Age blizzards."

"And Yellow Chaac blows the wind our way.

THAT'S RIGHT. YELLOW CHAAC BRINGS storms, hurricanes and pirating ships on tidal waves greedy for all they can pillage."

"But beware, Cherie, as I have warned." Frank takes my hands and gazes into my eyes almost like he's trying to be Chaac himself. A god, anyway "Chaac of the west brings darkness, sickness, and death.

FRANK. YOU'RE such a mystery LIKE CHAAC Maybe that's part of being a shaman. IS IT part of my initiation

HOW SO

to keep me guessing and make me learn for myself.

PLUS ETRE

I MEAN, YOU MAKE YOUR pseudoscientific views abundantly known to me, but keep parts of YOURSELF hidden. This makes me curious about YOU. TELL me about YOUR childhood in Paris, I want to know how your early life created the man you now are,"

"It is better to know your friends as they presently are,"

"Teddy Bear," I persist USING A NICKNAME I COINED BECAUSE IT'S what FRANK feels like when we cuddle together in bed before I fall asleep. "We're more than friends! Aren't we?"

"Por Supesto, Little Sparrow. We're more than friends. even lovers should keep their lives in the present and not dredge up past matters that are no longer important."

"But your childhood's important to me. Besides, I've told you about mine. How my father shaped my life. I'M SURE YOUR childhood IN FRANCE sharply contrastS from my structured one.

"There's simply nothing to reveal about my boyhood in France. It's better that way."

"Don't you trust me?" I ask, feeling frustrated. "YOU SEEM vulnerable beneath YOUR rough exterior, like a boy who lost his mother. I want YOU to confide in me so we better know each other.

"Yes, I trust you, Cherie. And in time I'll tell you everything. Besides, you keep secrets from me. Let me read Bradly Nolan's diary. Let me know everything about this codex he found."

I wonder what to say. Frank HAS caught me off guard, made me stumble in my thoughts. "I don't like Bradly's diary coming between us. It's my own piece of privacy, the

only mitzvah I keep. Besides, the topic IS ABOUT YOU AND YOUR refusal to discuss YOUR boyhood, no matter how painful it might have been. YOU talk about gods and "transforming" but not about YOUR childhood. why ARE YOU so secretive? It's not as if anything you've done could shock me. I've been around. I've had my share of upsets and tragedies."

Frank TAKES my hand and squeezed it for a moment. "Perhaps your Mama never knew about your ancestry. You don't know if anyone ever opened that trunk after Bradly locked it, do you? Perhaps they were afraid to learn the truth."

"That's so unlikely. Anyway, you keep turning the conversation on me. Why are you so secretive? I despise secrets. My mother kept secrets from me, about my true ancestry."

Frank said nothing I CATCH hold of my emotions and kept quiet I didn't want to reveal the bat mitzvah secret Mom told me. Fortunately, Frank DOESN'T ask what I mean. Instead, he cleared his throat and SAYS, "I've made you feel uncomfortable. Alors, Cherie. I hate to POSTPONE THIS DISCUSSION, but I want to head to the bar to have a drink. You can freshen up while I'm gone."

"I'll join you," I suggested.

"You don't drink alcohol."

"I'll have a Perrie and keep you company."

"No. Not this time. I have a few business calls to make."

"Always mysterious like Chaac of the sea."

“Like Black Beard himself.” He kisses my forehead TO PACIFY MY CURIOSITY, I’M SURE, “I’ll be right back.” HE SAYS AND I WATCH HIM LIGHT A GAULOISES AND LEAVE THE ROOM.

I continue to stare at the sea WORRIED WE’VE JUST HAD OUR FIRST ARGUMENT AND I CAUSED IT. THEN I BEGIN TO wonder why we haven’t made love since our first time at the Club Med Coba. I’m not too troubled that we aren’t having an active physical relationship and I’m leaving it to him to decide when our next time will be. I’m not one to initiate sex and besides, I assure myself, and Frank probably isn’t sexually active because of his age.

THE NEXT MORNING WHEN THE GATES OPEN, we enter the *Zona Arqueologica de Edzna*. NO one else is around. IT SEEMS WE HAVE THE SITE TO OURSELVES. EDZNA ISN’T a major tourist stop which is one reason Frank has chosen it to begin my spiritual induction.

Off the Grand Acropolis, five stone structures arise from a groomed lawn WHERE THE MORNING SUN LIGHTS THE DEWY BLADES OF GRASS that sweetly scent the PARK. The *Piramide de los Cinco Pisos* dominates the Grand Acropolis. IT LOOKS LIKE A WEDDING CAKE. IN THE SURROUNDING JUNGLE monkeys are howling and hundreds of birds are making clattering calls. A few butterflies are flittering about but nothing like those along La Ruta Puuc.

I climb the sixty-five steps OF THE WEDDING CAKE in a zig zag fashion and sit on the top tier near the small combed roof temple. Frank arrives, catches his breath and hands me my camera bag. “Are you all right, sparrow?”

“I’m not too short of breath. I’ve learned to pace myself on these strenuous stone mountain climbs.”

“Alors. You’re becoming a seasoned pyramid climber. I believe you’re ready to become what you’re fated to be.

“A full-fledged lineage shaman?”

“Exactement.”

“I’m ready to enter the tree,” I say but instead of replying, Frank begins wandering around the fifth tier as if searching for something he’s lost. Or maybe he’s looking for the perfect place for my induction ceremony. I gaze at the plaza below, at the Platform of Knives and the ballcourt, feeling awed by the peaceful setting and struck by my wanderlust love. IT TAKES ME BACK TO MY 91 TRIP WITH DADDY AND I WONDER WHY WE MISSED EDZNA. MAYBE WE DIDN’T HAVE THE TIME. DADDY WAS ON A LIMITED TIME SABATICAL AND I HAD TO GET READY FOR PENN CHARTER..

MY MIND REELS TO THE PRESENT, MY WANDERLUST LOVE. FRANK. HE MYSTIFIES ME IN WAYS I NEVER KNEW BEFORE. IT’S LOVE. GOT TO BE. I CAN’T SAY IT’S LIKE I’VE MET MY SOUL MATE. WE HAVE A LOT IN COMMON AND A LOT NOT SO MUCH IN COMMON. HE’S MUCH OLDER THAN ME. SO WHAT. DADDY WAS MUCH OLDER THAN MOM AND I BELIEVE THEIR MARRIAGE WAS REMARKABLE AND SOUND. THEY ADORED EACH OTHER. FOUND EACH OTHER. AND I CAME ALONG. AND MOM WASN’T A SCIENTIST LIKE DADDY. LIKE ME AND FRANK. SHE WAS RELIGIOUS, TRADITIONAL AND THAT DIDN’T MATTER TO DADDY WHO WAS RATIONAL AND SCIENCE MINDED. LIKE ME.

Since first meeting Frank, I've been trying to respect his spiritual point of view but I haven't always been able to take him seriously, especially when he discusses unrealistic theories. But now something inside me calls out and aches to unite in spirit with him and the ancient Maya. Frank will show me his vision of god, of Ometeotl. And I'll understand how the Maya saw the forces that propel everything. Jaguar Blood Moon, founder of my lineage tree, will reveal all the nuances of the message she left behind in the codex. And I'll be her lineage shaman, her guarding of her Maya tree.

A yellow butterfly lands on a nearby stone. "Why are you up here in the stratosphere?" I say aloud. "Are you a messenger from Jaguar Blood Moon? From the sacred divine? **From what Frank calls teotl itz k'uh, the conscious essence of all life that now exists, always has been, and will always be."**

I stand to look for Frank. I don't see him and call his name. He doesn't answer. I walk to the other side of the combed roof temple and peek inside rooms where ancient priests once timed the return of Venus as a morning war star. "Frank," I shout, suspecting he's off somewhere meditating, being distant and secretive like he often was during our 'quiet time' on la ruta Puuc. **A few times I found him meditating under an arch or on top of a stone structure. At these times, I left him alone and explored the area on my own. Mom TAUGHT ME not to disturb a man in his private domain, such as when Daddy was in his office or when my granddad was relaxing on his recliner and reading the Philly Inquirer or Daily News.**

At the back of the high stone temple overlooking the jungle, I spot Frank standing in a niche. his arms stretch out from his sides WITH HIS palms open to catch the morning rays. His eyes are closed and his expression is serious. I KNOW HE'S communicating with the *Great One Who is Whole*, I recall one of Frank's descriptions of Ometeotl.

For a moment, I quietly stand a few feet from Frank. I'm eager to begin my INITIATION but hesitate to disturb him.

"Hillary," Frank suddenly says. I wonder if he's been watching me the entire time. "Viens." He indicates before him. "Face Kukulkan rising to announce a war."

I stand before him, facing the sun on its climb above the jungle.

"Clear your mind," he says, massaging my shoulders, RELAXING ME. "Hold out your palms, close your eyes, listen to itz k'uh, NATURE'S CALL. Feel the winds of Chaac. Smell the jungle scent. Absorb the rays of Lord K'ininch against your heartbeat." Frank removes his hands from my shoulders.

At first, I wonder what he's doing as I sense his presence from behind. I listen to the distant birds and try to clear my thoughts BY IMAGINING CLOUDS separating IN THE VAST SKY. How long must I stand here? My mind asks AND DISRUPTS MY IMAGE. I sense the warm sun my brow and wonder how Frank knows me so completely, as if I've detailed everything about myself to him when I haven't. It's part of his mysterious side.

All at once, a cooling breeze sweeps into the niche and my senses strengthen. Tingles explode from the depths of my stomach and radiate from my feet to my head, electrifying me, OR SO IT SEEMS.

The breeze grows stronger, the energy more vivid. I feel alone, hollow, yet wonderfully alive and open to this mystery. *Consume me, set me on fire* my mind speaks. I hear conch shells announcing a battle, eerie music from stringed instruments, and whispering voices rustling through me. *What are their words? What's the message?*

"I only half comprehend your glyphs, Jaguar Blood Moon," I say aloud. "Teach me everything about your life and spirit. Tell me your story."

The jungle exhales its nectar. Chaac's lightning axe strikes the clouds with thunder. Bright stone faces, masks, awaken from centuries of frozen sleep. I see them in the clouds. Chaac, Itzamnaj and his Celestial bird, and the Witz Mountain Monster. I see Ix Chel the Rainbow Moon and Lord K'inich becoming a young man as the sun rises, an old man as the sun morphs into the jaguar of darkness.

I feel a hand on my shoulders AS wind caressES my face. "This is all a transcript," I whisper.

"God is dancing." I hear Frank'S QUIET VOICE from behind. "His symbols are in your head. The glyphs from your ancestors' codex are unlocking the universal itz k'uh."

I'm here, take me on your path my mind shouts.

The wind dwindles and stops. I hear the twitchy buzz of a hummingbird beating its wings. Then I hear nothing at all and feel no sensation. I begin to grow hot and musty in the tropical heat.

I open my eyes, look around, and rub my arms which have fallen asleep. "Frank," I call and notice him at the edge of the fifth-tier taking pictures of me with my camera. I'm suddenly annoyed because he's left me alone in a hypnotic trance. I want to share my mystical experience.

"I'm right here," he says from behind. "I haven't gone anywhere."

Stunned by his sudden presence, I shiver and watch the wispy clouds cross the bright blue sky. The sun stretches near mid-summer zenith.

"My god, Frank," I turn and take his hands. "I was a jaguar, a butterfly, and a hummingbird nagual. I heard ancient voices and saw flashing glyphs of Maya gods. All the while I forgot myself."

Frank hugs me affectionately. “Oui bien sur, petite ouiso. You released your restrictive nature and experienced teotl itz k’uh. You danced with your spirit companions. You danced with the wayob spirt Waterlily Jaguar.”

A family of Mexican tourists SUDDENLY appear at the fifth tier. “*Allons-y,”* Frank says and gathers my camera bag to carry down the Edzna wedding cake. “Your first step into the Maya spirit world is complete. You have begun your initiation as my apprentice.”

Halfway down the mountain rift, I stop for a moment, face the Acropolis, and look at the Council House across the lawn. The Nohochna. Frank stands a few steps below me because on the way down the pyramids, he’s quicker than me. His legs are longer. “Frank,” I say. “Will you continue my induction in Palenque? I believe that was my favorite site during my ‘91 tour with Daddy. I forgot.”

“Did you take a peyote button?” He teases. **“Yes, little sparrow. In Palenque, I’ll help you on your rite of passage into the next stage of your spiritual quest. There, I’ll open the powers of Heaven, Earth, and Xibalba. Ancient spirits will welcome you, embrace you, like a princess in the court of Lord Pakal.”**



Chapter 15: Yol Tan, *Menarche Rite of Passage*

Shortly after seating of my eleventh stone, I was standing on my bed platform painting glyphs on the wall when Star Flower suddenly exclaimed, “Your skirt is stained with blood, Mistress Yol Tan.” Although I had anticipated the day of my womanhood, I was still surprised.

For the next seven kins I remained secluded in my private chamber. To ease the cramping, Lady Ja’ Naj gave me a brew of wild tobacco mixed with the bark of cedar. Jewelers came to my room and drilled jade beads into my front teeth to commemorate my menarche rite of passage. An artist tattooed my face with a glyph of my royal bloodline.

I was thrilled about my change in life and shared my joy with my lifelong attendant. But I sensed Star Flower was jealous. And I knew why. She had passed into womanhood two years before but could never anticipate marriage or children because her father had gifted her life to my brother and he gifted her to serving me.

Most girls who reach this transition have mothers to guide them through the passage. They say the transformation buries the girl in the underworld waters. She’s then reborn a woman who nourishes the world with her harvest.

I had no mother to guide me and only knew about my mother and father through the stories my brother told. **He described** Lady Rigel as demure, polite, and a precious gem stone from the kingdom of Lake Turtle Macaw. At times, when I drifted to sleep at night**, I prayed to the spirit of my mother Lady Rigel. A powerful force within me proclaimed I would become more than what the world restricted me to be.** I knew my mother was speaking to me.

During my menarche seclusion, Queen Mother taught me the secrets of human reproduction by describing the cycle of corn. “The planting of seeds in soil is as the man plants

his itz in the woman," she said. "The baby turns in the womb like the turning of corn on the stalk. A baby is the new maize person of the Fourth Creation."

The secrets of reproduction astonished me. I couldn't imagine why a man would penetrate a woman in such a way. Yax K'uh never hinted at the matter although I suspected he knew the mysteries of sexual union. Boys learn many more secrets about life than girls do. They grow up confident and share with one another what they know. Not so with little girls, especially a princess. Decorum restricts her life. It restricted mine.

It saddened me that I couldn't share my thoughts with Yax K'uh. Since he left the apiaries, I rarely saw him. He was no longer playing in the White Hall because he was spending long hours with Second Son and B'aah Ch'ok in the ballcourt. Together, they were learning hand-to-hand combat and how to use a blowgun and **atlatl. Even if I could have spoken with Yax K'uh, as we did at the hives, I wouldn't share how enthralled I was to emerge from the underwaters as a grown woman, a vessel of renewal and rebirth. It just wasn't something a girl shared with a boy, even at the crux of maturity.**

One afternoon in the Red Palace, the young lord passed by me in a gallery. He slyly brushed his hand against mine. His touch made my body burst with tingles that seemed to shake the entire hall.

Queen Mother noticed this encounter and later confronted me for behaving inappropriately. "Now that you're a woman you must keep away from Yax K'uh and my sons," she warned me.

"Never," I argued in defiance. I didn't like Queen Mother because I knew she didn't like me. I also knew my brother didn't like her despite her being his wife. But it was really my love

for Yax K'uh that overpowered any sense of decorum I had with the queen. I told her directly, "I love Yax K'uh more than anyone except the Holy King himself, my elder brother Pakal."

The queen scolded me for my insolence and sternly remarked, "You must keep yourself uncorrupted."

"You aren't my mother," I dared tell her but then quickly turned away. I didn't want to look at the queen or even be near her. But I had no choice so I looked back in an effort to apologize.

"You didn't even know Lady Rigel. Your mother," the queen scowled. "She wasn't beautiful and she didn't serve her Lord with a son. I believe she caused the demise of the king's father by your very essence."

I made no reply to the queen's venomous words but later that day I pled with my brother to forbid the queen from participating in my menarche rite.

One month after my first bleeding, when the new moon appeared on Akbal 9, before the southern reach of the sun, the king arranged the rite at a hunting lodge beside the Usumacinta River. Lady Ja' Naj attended the rite to teach me about plant and animal spirits. My brother assigned his astronomer priest Ajaw Witz, Lord Mountain, to teach me the secrets of the moon and the night sky. **Pakal also gave me a necklace made of jaguar canine teeth to protect me during my rebirth into womanhood. I promised to never take it off.**

The rite began after I sighted Fang Moon, the new crescent burgeoning into a full and fertile woman. For the following 29 nights, Lord Mountain taught me about the gods and spirits of night flowers and the meaning behind the Moon giving its itz to women.

I learned about the morning and evening stars and the Moon phases. “The youthful moon is Lady Chup, lover of Lord Sun,” Lord Mountain told me as we sat by the sacred fire of night. “When she is full for three days, she is the Thirteenth Sky Moon poised with her rabbit.”

Each night, before his lessons, **Lord Mountain recited the creation story which even the youngest citizen of the Jaguar Kingdom knows by heart.**

Before the existence of anything, nothingness hovered above the primordial sea of fire. Heart of Sky parted this sea and caused Earth to rise from the waters on the back of a turtle. He planted a ceiba tree with roots that reach into the nine houses of Xibalba. The trunk sustains the middle world and the branches stretch beyond the Milky Way Road. Itzamnaj splashed white dew drops across the four rainbow roads that cross this tree. This was First Creation.

In Second Creation, Heart of Sky created Mud People. They were stupid people who didn’t possess itz k’uh, the spirit of divine life. Heart of Sky grew angry and create Wood People. They abused animals because they were stupid, too and didn’t possess itz k’uh. Heart of Sky ordered the animals to eat Wood People. A few survived and became forest monkeys.

In Third Creation, darkness covered Earth. First Mother gave birth to brothers 1 Hunahpu and 7 Hunahpu. The played in a ballcourt above Xibalba. The noise disturbed the Death Lords. They summoned the brothers to the House of Darkness and ordered them to keep cigars lit through the night. The brothers failed the trial and the Lords of Death beheaded 1 Hunahpu and planted his head in the ballcourt of Xibalba. It grew into a giant cacao tree.

One day Blood Moon, daughter of a Death Lord, approached the cacao tree. The head of 1 Hunahpu spat and fertilized her womb with his seed.

This angered the Death Lords. They sent owls to kill Blood Moon but the owls loved her helped her escape to the middle world. She gave harvest to Hunahpu and Xbalanque who became hunters, scribes, and pitzl players. Their ball game also disturbed the Death Lords who summoned the brothers to Xibalba and put them through trials in the Six Houses of Doom.

In the house of darkness, Hunahpu and Xbalanque tricked the Death Lords by using fireflies to keep their cigars lit through the night. They again defeated the Lords of Death in the Blade House, the House of Cold, House of Jaguars, and House of Fire.

In the House of Bats, the brothers hid inside their blowguns during the night. Just before dawn, Hunahpu peered from his blowgun and a bat bit off his head.

By the force of sky gods, the sons of Blood Moon were reborn five days later. After the 13th baktun of Third Creation, Hunahpu and Xbalanque resurrected their father 1 Hunahpu as the Maize God Reborn. Hunahpu and Xbalanque became the sun and moon of Fourth Creation which began in the year 0.0.0.0.1.

In this creation, Heart of Sky created people from white and yellow corn mixed with his divine itz k'uh. All sky gods were pleased. Maize people worship their creators, unlike animals, Mud People, and people made from wood who are now monkeys screeching in the forest.



On the day after the waxing Thirteenth Moon**,** Lord Mountain told me to choose my patron god.

Without hesitation I replied, “Lord Mountain. As my patron goddess, I choose the waning Blood Moon **of Third Creation.”**

“Very suitable,” were his only words. But I felt the moon’s blood rays fall upon me that night and knew she gave me her blessing.

Each morning after sunrise, Lady Ja’ Naj sat on a large stone beside the rushing river and taught me and Star Flower, who was always at my side, about plant spirits that heal and those that cause harm or death. She taught us songs to call upon Chaac Ix Chel, Lady of medicine and Lady Hun Ahau, Lady at the portal to Xibalba, to cast away sickness demons from the six houses of the Death Lords.

Lady Ja’ Naj also taught us how to curse those who cause harm, like the king curses his enemies before a battle. “Such magic is powerful,” the old healer explained. “Use this knowledge only for healing and extricating bad spirits, and setting right a wrong.” She repeatedly warned, “Don’t use magic for selfish reasons. A misspoken curse opens portals to the Watery Underworld and unleashes the froth of a rabid dog.”

During these sessions, I noticed Star Flower take special interest in the art of casting spells and curses. This was an unusual occurrence in our relationship. She was venturing beyond my wishes and aspirations but I failed to correct her. I was happy exploring the natural world and my emerging womanhood. The scent of orchids in the cedar trees and sound of the rushing river and the sight of resplendent quetzals flying from tree to tree enraptured my spirit. I felt my mother Lady Rigel tightly embracing me with love, along with my patron deity Blood Moon.

Each day, after the sun passed zenith, Lady Ja' Naj gave me a brew of cacao, honey and cayenne with white bitter herb and woody vine flower to bring about vivid dreams to reveal my wayob animal spirit.

During my first few days of deep sleep, I had fantastic dreams about people, places, and worlds I never imagined. But my mind never settled on one spirit. I couldn't tell Ja' Naj about the wayob dancers in my dreams. Whenever I awoke, they disappeared.

On the night the Moon waned to first quarter gibbous, the winds of Chaac swept through the trees and I awoke from a pleasant dream I remembered. Thousands of yellow butterflies fluttered over the white roads leading to and from the Jaguar Kingdom. They flew from place to place without regard to where they might go or from whence they came.

Lady Ja' Naj explained that butterflies are in a never-ending flower dance and are drunk from the balche of Grandmother Xmucane. I remember her saying, "In your dream, you become the dancing butterfly who cannot break free from Earth and enter the spiritual world."

Three days before the return of Fang Moon, I drank two cups of the cacao brew and Water Lily Jaguar entered my sleep. In the dream the rainy season was over, Lord Sun had passed zenith and jungle flowers were full. Water Lily Jaguar plunged into a lake of full white lilies and swam to a caiman basking at the far shore. The caiman bellowed with terror as the powerful jaws of Water Lily Jaguar clench down on its arm.

"Your dream reveals you are born from the heart of Heaven, Yol Tan, in the place of the Primordial Sea of Fire," Lady Ja' Naj explained. "When you touched Earth, Waterlily Jaguar became your wayob animal spirit. Together you dance on the lily pads and roar louder than Chaac's clashing thunder."

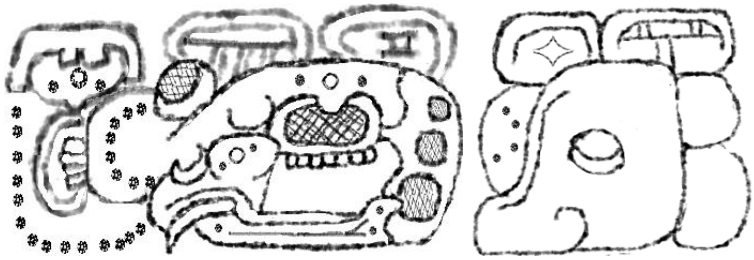
"But who is the caiman?" Star flower asked before I even could.

I hit her and said, "You know not to interfere with my dream story."

Lady Ja' Naj chuckled and explained, "The Jaguar's roar is Ahkan, a vision of itz k'uh and the rainbow road of no return. On the day they entomb you, Lady Yol Tan, the zenith sun will cast no shadow. Ix Chel will leave the caverns of Earth to have union with her brother Lord Sun."

"Who is the caiman?" I asked for myself.

"He is the son you will one day bear to this world," she told me. "But beware. The caiman is a devious creature, like the People of Wood. He will kill and betray even his own mother."



Chapter 16: Hillary, *Palenque and Bonampak*

After a four-and-a-half-hour drive from the Ramada in Campeche we reach Hotel Tulija in Chiapas. Here the Maya women wear navy blue woven wraps and red sashes, not the frumpy white embroidered Yucatan dresses with slips hanging out. Our room is spartan and "Mexican rustic," as I like to call it. The air-conditioner is plugged into an exposed socket, boards extend from the bed and lots of other potential lawsuits if this were in the US.

Eight miles from our hotel are the famous ruins of Palenque nestled in the lush hills near the Usumacinta River at the edge of the Lacandon rainforest.

"Palenque is Spanish for palisades," Frank says as he and I enter the park in the rain. We each carry an umbrella from our hotel. "What's the classic Maya word for their city-state?"

“Lakamha. It means Abundant Waters for the nearby Usumacinta River and all this rain, no doubt. This was the first site non-natives found.”

“Tell me about it professor. Dites-moi.”

“In 1740, a priest came across the ruins. Probably native Maya brought him here. Forty years later, King Charles III of Spain sent men to pillage and loot stone panels from the site.”

“Bad people,” Frank says. “No one likes a looter.”

I say nothing while thinking, at the back of my mind, that my esteemed great-great-grandfather may have been such a person. It’s not a notion I don’t intend to suggest. Not to Frank. Not to anyone. Still, it sometimes bothers me that my family Victorian in Chestnut Hill and my inheritance may have come from my ancestor’s pillaging. I choose to tell myself that I’m descended from the Maya queen and that my inheritance is really from her. I’m her lineage heir. She’s provided for me to honor her legacy. “Well,” I say to distract my confusing thoughts. “I’m pretty sure it was Alex von Humbolt’s publications that caught the attention of John Lloyd Stephens. This was the first site he visited in 1840. And, as I’ve said, Stephens inspired Bradly. Nearly twenty years after Bradly, Desire Charnay became the first person to photograph the ruins.”

“And here you are, Little Sparrow.” Frank takes my hand and helps me up the steps to the palace as I manage my umbrella while walking on the wet and slippery stones.

“Frank, Palenque is where Bradly Nolan learned about my ancestor’s tomb.”

“How so?”

“He heard rumors about her tomb from the Lacandon.”

“My people. And why don’t you let me read Bradly’s diary. Don’t you see the connection we have? It’s formidable.”

“I will teddy bear. One day soon. When we reach the tomb. Besides, it’s locked away in Tucson.”

“You have a copy of it on your computer, I’m sure. On one of your little floppy disks. What’s the harm in giving a floppy to me?” He squeezes my hand and won’t release it.

“I’ll think about it.” We continue toward the courtyard murals. “I’m eager to see the mural of Sak K’uk with her son Pakal at his seating. When he was twelve. I remember seeing it with Daddy and taking a dozen pictures. With a film SLA. No digital at the time. Yes. This is my favorite Maya site. ”

“How long do you need to think. I have Lacandon heritage, my people led you ancestor to the great queens tomb. It’s kismet.”

“I know. Maybe after you complete my induction. We’ll see.”

“Bien sur. We’ll see.” He takes my hand as he carries my camera bag and his own backpack and leads me to the murals he’s seen many times.

To change the subject, I say to Frank, “In 1991 my father and I spent two days exploring Pakal’s tomb at the bottom of the claustrophobic stone corridor. Did you know his jade mask and jewelry are displayed at the Anthropology Museum in Mexico City.

“The seven-ton stone lid to his sarcophagus is my favorite piece of Maya art.” Frank tells me.

“It’s called the Apotheosis of Pakal. Do you know what it means?”

“The great king is the Maize God Reborn. He sits in the World Tree at the center of Middle Earth and falls into a jaguar’s open jaws.”

“A symbol for Xibalba.”

“Like the Maize god, Pakal overcomes death and ascends to Heaven on the Maya Tree. It’s all about living the fullness of life. Past present and into the future of possibilities.”

“Now you’re speaking with the power of itz k’uh. You’re halfway through your initiation, little sparrow.”

“I can’t wait. When do we proceed?”

“When the rain to stops. I suggest we head to Bonampak for a few days. These tropical showers are short lived. By the time we return, lord sun will reign over Palenque palace and I’ll take you further into the Maya spirit.”

“I’ve been looking forward to seeing the Bonampak murals. Daddy and I missed out on them and Bradly never saw them, of course. They were unknown until the 1940s except to the Lacandon.”

We reach the Bonampak Jungle Lodge in less than three hours. From the visitor’s center at the Archaeological Park, we take a local taxi to the Temple of Frescos, a place of worship for the Lacandon.

“How many times have you been to Bonampak,” I ask as we walk along a jungle path to the site near a tributary of the Usumacinta River. Liana vines creep up enormous cedar, ceiba, and mahogany trees and bind the jungle canopy together.

“Many times. It’s a favorite.”

“During the time of Jaguar Blood Moon, Bonampak was a satellite city of Yaxchilan, and a vassal to the snake kings of Calakmul. In fact, did you know the kings of Bonampak waged war against Palenque?”

“I did. And when Yaxchilan fell in the 9th century, Bonampak also collapsed.”

Outside the **temple, barefoot Lacandon men and boys in white tunics are selling bows and arrows to tourists. Frank talks to one of the men in the Yucatec language then tells me, "I'm sorry, sparrow. Looks like you'll have to see the murals alone."**

"Why? I've been looking forward to your explanations."

" I'm meeting with friends."

"But I want to learn your spiritual interpretation."

"I really must meet with my friends."

"It seems that everywhere we go you have to meet friends," I say. "What are you hiding from me? Are you meeting with distant relatives or do you have business dealings with the Lacandon?"

Frank looks at me but says nothing in response. He's being secretive and mysterious, a side of him that bothers me. I hate when people keep secrets. I'm afraid that the secret might rip the rug out from under me. Like my mother did when she revealed her secret at my bat mitzva.

"You never tell me ahead of time about your mysterious plans," I continue. "I've been wondering if you're a CIA spy or even an arms dealer, a drug trafficker, or a man seeking a prostitute because I'm so inadequate in bed." I look around to see if an English-speaking tourist is within earshot. I'm not worried about the Lacandon standing nearby because they don't understand English, as far as I can tell. Frank and I seem to be alone outside the temple's entrance.

"Hillary." Frank takes my hand. "You're making too much out of nothing. I have a lot of business dealings with these people, have for many years. And remember, I told you

I'm related to them through my grandmother. Like you are through your distant relative. Be at peace and go see the murals for yourself. The images will play in your mind and you'll dance with many wayob spirits during your ceremony in Palenque."

"I was really hoping to see them with you."

"Alors Hillary. In truth, it's better you see the murals with a fresh mind uncorrupted by my interpretations. The spirit will come to you and tomorrow, if the rains subside, I'll guide you into the Maya world at the great red palace in Palenque."

"But teddy bear."

He squeezes my hand. "Little sparrow. I must go now. My friends are waiting. I'll be back by the time you're ready to return to our cabana. There you can tell me all about what you saw with your own mind and spirit."

As I watch Frank walk away with a few of the Lacandón men, I decide that maybe I really don't want to know everything about him. Maybe I'm afraid to learn the truth and upset our romantic, spiritual, and professional relationship. Sometimes I wish my mother had never told me the truth about my father Sheldon. What was the point? If I had never learned Mom's little secret, I wouldn't have suffered such terrible distress over what didn't even matter in the end.

Inside the temple are three rooms of murals that the Overlord of Yaxchilan had dedicated at the rising of Venus, December 14, 790 AD. Room One depicts the king of Bonampak paying tribute to his heir apparent son. The frescoes show nobility and lords celebrating and receiving the heir to the throne. They are dancing, playing music, and smoking cigars. Three of the dancers wearing an aura of feathers look like divas in a drag queen cabaret.

Room Two depicts violent battle scenes that offer proof that the ancient Maya weren't as peaceful as the early explorers presumed, including my great-great-granddad. As is well known these days, the classic Maya were constantly waging wars. Venus wars. The frescoes show priests blowing conch shells and trumpets and beating drums. They're calling the warriors into battle. In one mural, warriors are presenting the king with captives who lie bleeding and tortured on the steps. Like the wet steps to Palenque palace.

The frescoes in Room Three are the most striking to me. They show a celebration dance after a victorious battle. The scene of royal ladies is especially vivid. Four ladies are on or at a large bench, one holds a child. They're passing thorny ropes through their tongues to collect the blood splatter on sacred amate paper.

I remember Frank telling me that priests burn the paper and from the rising smoke they have what the Maya called a snake **vision or a butz chan. "Gods and ancestors appear in the vision," he said. "They make predictions about warfare or the birth of a royal heir to the patriline. You'll have a butz chan at the Palenque palace and see beyond anything you've ever seen with your eyes."**

While gazing at the mural, I wonder what I might see. No matter what Frank has in mind, I assure myself, it won't involve blood-letting even if Bradly Nolan himself performed the rite with his bloodletting tools. I start thinking about Frank and his persistence about reading Bradly's diary. Maybe he's right about one thing. He could offer me valuable spiritual insights into the meaning of the codex glyphs. I haven't shared the sepia Brownie pictures with anyone or even told anyone about them, including Monte. And since I did share the diary with Monte behind Frank's back, maybe the least I can do is let

him see the pictures. After all, he's going to make me a lineage shaman. I'll tell him I'm sharing one of my most guarded secrets and maybe he'll start sharing with me some of his.





Chapter 17: Frank, *Butz Chan at Palenque Palace*

Early the next morning I drive Hillary back to Palenque pleased to see clear skies. I'm especially delighted Hillary showed me the codex pictures on her laptop. Old Brownie Box camera black and white photos. And all this time I thought she was translating the codex from the pictures Bradly drew in his diary.

Naturellement, I stayed up last night in our jungle cabana studying them for any hint about transforming myself. Hillary slept the entire time so I couldn't ask her the meaning of particular glyphs. She's already told me most of what she's translated about the queen. I kept looking over each glyph to let the words reach me. I found nothing and assume that when I possess the authentic codex, the colors will shout at me like Ixchel's rainbow moon. The codex itself has the power to make me what I aspire to be no matter what the written text says about the life of a warrior queen.

By noon we're walking among the palace ruins and my little sparrow is anticipating her butz chan rite. She's wearing Tevas, shorts, a white Haines v-neck, and a tapestry shawl I bought her at the Merida market. It shields her from the sun and will serve as a mat during the rite.

In the humid heat, Hillary takes pictures of the Palace Tower. "This is where classic Maya priests once marked sunrise on winter solstice," she tells me like she's one of those priests discovering a supernova, ou quelque chose. "I took dozens of pictures here when I was with Daddy. One's of him before the tower. It's my favorite picture."

"Bien sûr. Lucky sparrow. You are your daddy's princess."

"You mean his prodigy. It sounds better and more accurate."

I smile, take her hand and lead her to a quiet courtyard in the palace complex.

We sit on the steps off a stone corridor chiseled with figures and glyphs. **I inhale the scent of the green grass** in the middle of the galleries. "This is the perfect place for your initiation," I say and rest my hand on her leg. Her soft little hand touches mine. I again thank her for sharing the pictures.

"Did you learn anything? I know the pictures are old and dull. But maybe you saw something moving. I know you were up all last night at the laptop."

"Indeed. I was and indeed I did. The picture words moved my spirit and my spirit will move yours during this induction. I'm your nagual. Your spirit guide."

"You are. I'm beginning to understand what you mean. We're each other's naguals, guides to a deeper meaning to our lives."

"C'est adorable, cher Hillary."

"You know, teddy, I think Bradly Nolan was in love with Mesoamerica, rather like you. In fact, I believe you're Bradly Nolan reincarnated as my nagual to guide me to the treasures he discovered."

"Really? C'est fantastic."

"I mean it. **Lately, I've been contemplating this possible connection and realizing that your spirit is influencing my perceptions."**

I'm intrigued. Hillary's giving me more room inside her guarded emotions. Although in many ways I probably am Bradly Nolan determined to find this lost codex. Nothing will stop me. Of course, I understand there may not be any treasure or ancient prophetic book. Perhaps I'm just chasing the moon. But I've nothing to lose. I've always enjoyed exploring the sites, working with a woman, and developing a new relationship. Playing the game. I am, after all, a pitzilol, a ball player with a youthful heart. From the depths of my essence, I believe Bradly's codex exists and will bring me millions in Euros or dollars. Hillary's too serious a woman to con a con. And I'm quite certain, the gods have intertwined our destinies. "We were together in past lives," I decide to tell her. "Probably several times. You as a man and I as a woman. Once we were brothers, I believe."

"Now you're getting carried away. You as Bradly is fair enough."

"As you say, sparrow," I tell her while imagining her as a man. The image excites me. I like her accomplishments and determination which are masculine attributes. But I don't push for a physical relationship. She might become too emotionally attached to me, too quickly. And she has a side, a feminine side, that's as delicate as a flower. She's the type of woman who could easily crumble and break when it comes to l'amour.

Hillary distracts my equivocating thoughts when she takes her camera from me to review the digital pictures. “I like this one.” She shows me a picture of glyphs at the Temple of Crosses. “Pakal’s son Chan Balam finished this temple. He wanted to record his royal lineage both in legend and in historic fact.”

“Like life itself. We live we dream and the unreal mingles with the real.” I take the camera to look at the picture. Then I set it aside and hold her tiny hand. I feel her shivering even in the heat. “Why are you trembling, little sparrow?”

“Trembling? I’m steady as the rock of Gibraltar.”

“No. I believe you’re either madly in love with me or you fear what’s in store. There’s nothing to fear. I’m your lover and shaman aide-de camp. Through me you’ll find yourself, through you, I’ll meet my fate to become the god who is man and woman.”

“How profound you are, Frank. But you’re probably right. My feelings for you run deep and I’m eager for this butz chan.”

“The four corners of the universe are calling. Do you hear my words echo in the courtyard? The ancient figures on the cold stone panels are speaking to us.”

“Yes. I hear your echo. It does sound like the voice of antiquity.”

“Antiquities? Do you see me as old?” I chuckle and hold up Hillary’s chin as if for a kiss. She peers at me with affection, hope, anticipation. “At **the center of the Maya Tree lies all knowledge and creative power**. The same power lies at the black hole in the center of our galaxy.”

“Ek’ way-nal, the super black hole in Scorpius.”

“Alors, Professor. Let’s enter Ek’ way-nal, the world beyond the five senses. Take off your Tevas and relax. Your bare feet must touch the green grass of Earth.” I remove from my

backpack a silver flask and a pouch. “These are morning glory seeds that a Lacandon shaman in Bonampak gave me. Chew them and drink the balche in the flask. It’s an ancient drink made from bark, morning glory, and honey.”

“Why do I need drugs or alcohol? I don’t want to lose control of my mind. I don’t need to become drunk, do I? I want a clear, sober, and rational mind.”

“You are ever so innocent,” I say. “Mais non. The balche and seeds will only loosen your brilliant mind so you’ll dance to celestial music in your butz chan.”

She hesitates. “I’ve never smoked pot or even tobacco before and I’ve only had a few nightcaps on this trip with you, but never enough to get drunk. Does it take drugs to go beyond the five senses?”

“Hillary. You’re so tender. Step beyond your safe harbor. Do what the Maya did. They took hallucinogenic drugs to have snake visions in a cloud of smoke. Reach beyond the probe of your scientific mind or you’ll never understand the secrets behind the glyphs. You’ll never understand me or yourself. You’ll never become a true lineage shaman. Trust me.”

She smiles and holds the flask like she’s making a farewell journey to the other side of a mountain. “Part of me wants to ‘let go’ and allow you to lead my mind. You’re the best friend of my life, right now. I’m still cautious, however. I’d hate to become so high I’ll miss details in the glyphs and wall images. What if I lose control and stare at the sun’s ultraviolet rays?”

“Never forget, Little Sparrow, I’m here with you. You won’t miss a thing. Au contraire, you’ll capture the power of **Itzamnaj in** the iguana house where all roads lead beyond the stars.”

“That’s beautiful.” She puts a handful of the bitter morning glory seeds in her mouth and swallows them with the balche. She looks at me. Her eyes proclaim she loves and trusts me as

completely as she trusted her father. “My great-great-grandmother Ix Chel was there for Bradly,” she says. “Now you’re here for me. The world has come around full circle.”

“I only want what you want, little sparrow. To be set free and to relish in itz k’uh, the essence of existence. It’s as real as any phenomone astronomique.” I stand before her and look deeply into her eyes. “**In your pretty blue eyes, I see a spirit yearning to join me and transform. To be. To become. I see these words in the codex of Jaguar Blood Moon. You’ll see them too. Together we’ll unleash the greatest treasure this world has to offer.”**

“Okay. I’m ready for this next stage in my initiation.”

“Transformation.” I help her rise from the steps and guide her across the plaza to a bas-relief figure of King Pakal. Along the way, I chant, “Holy Maize God Reborn, bring us to the place of nectar. Holy Queen Bee, open the forest of gods.”

“I’m feeling faint,” she says and I help her onto the nearest stone steps. I sit behind her and place my hands on her shoulders. “It feels like serpents are crawling on my back.”

She grows increasingly sweaty in the sweltering heat. “Look at Kukulkan.” I point at the wall across the yard. “Chant *my blood is dripping itz k’uh.*”

“I see swirling figures and moving artwork. Dancing priests, warriors, captives, and kings are staring at me. Pictures and words are scrambling in my head. I see beaks and eyes of birds with plumed headdresses and jade bead necklaces. Is this in my mind or in the real world?”

I continue to chant *my blood is dripping itz k’uh*.

Hillary stands and reels onto the courtyard lawn. I spread out her shawl as she tumbles to the ground and lies on her back. She peers at the sky. “Make it stop,” she says.

I chant *when the sun enters the Pleiades, Venus enters White Bone Snake and opens the portal.* Don’t fear to see Ometeotl. He’s your redeemer.”

I run my hands along her arms and head. “Breathe deeply. Purify yourself before you enter Ek’ way-nal to the other half of existence. Transform on the mat of K’awiil and awaken a queen.”



Chapter 18: Yol Tan, *Queen of Bone Dog*

After Yax K’uh left the Cloud Center Apiaries, I entreated my brother to let me serve two years as Ta Ochle under the Cab priests. He agreed, but allowed no other young lord to apprentice beside me. **Secretly, I prayed to my patron gods Blood Moon** and **Chaac of the four directions, that Pakal wouldn’t arrange my marriage with anyone other than Yax K’uh. My brother knew my heart belong to the young lord Precious Owl.**

I spent nearly every day at the **apiary** and when the Cab priests were away seeking new hollow logs for the hives, I was alone with the royal bees. I sang, danced, and watched for impending dangers, feeling grateful to be away from Star Flower while greatly missing Yax K’uh. His presence loomed among the buzzing hives. I missed hearing his stories about warriors and battle strategies. I recalled his funny remarks making me laugh at places I probably shouldn’t have laughed.

One afternoon, several lunar cycles after Yax K’uh had left the hives, a whistle came from the forest. At first I dismissed it. Cab priests customarily whistle to one another to announce a hive log or a nest of wasps that they must burn and destroy. If danger should arrive at

the hives, I also whistled to alert the priests. But on this day, I didn't recognize the whistle. I knew it wasn't the call of a macaw, toucan, wild turkey, or pheasant. The sound came from a man I suspected was summoning me.

I looked beyond the ceramic gods protecting the hives, beyond Ah-Muzen Cab, Mok Chi, Colel Cab, Lady Royal Bee, the four Ba Cab patrons, and Chaac Xib Hobin, toward the whistling sound. It came from the ancient Cloud Center temple at the edge of the forest. I quickly looked back at the bees worried an armadillo was invading the hives for their honey and royal jelly.

When I saw no apparent menace, I glanced back to the stone temple shaded by encroaching trees. At the temple's back wall, a young man stepped from the shadows and stared at me. He wore a loin cloth with apron tails and carried a flint knife in his belt. Iridescent quetzal feathers striated his shoulder length hair that glistened under the midday sun. He was holding a bundle in his arms.

It was Yax K'uh, my younger brother Mok Chi. My best friend of spirit. Lately, I had rarely seen him in the Red Palace. He was usually away with Pakal, B'aah Ch'ok, and Second Son, on hunting trips or diplomatic missions to vassal cities. Or he was training with scar dog warriors in the ballcourt.

My heart fluttered at the sight of him. The boy I thought about day and night was now a man of twelve. Why had he waited so long to find me? Why hadn't I arranged to meet him through Star Flower? She did whatever I ask. I knew why. I didn't trust my lifelong attendant. She showed signs of a jealous spirit when I told her certain things. And she was much too happy when Yax K'uh left me alone at the apiaries.

Monkeys began screeching and a breeze brought me the scent of vanilla and cedar. I left the hives and the circle of protective gods, bowed to Chaac Xib Hobin, and approached the young lord.

No one was around but the two of us when I stood before him. He took my hand and led me to a secluded place at the back of the ancient stone temple. Shaded by the dense forest, I leaned against the mossy wall and instantly felt cooled from the humidity.

Yax K'uh stood before me, set down his bundle, and placed his hands on my shoulders. He was now taller than me and I had to look up as we gazed at each other.

"Your eyes are beautiful, Lady Yol Tan." He placed a kiss fully on my lips. My entire body shivered with delight. His kiss was as sweet as Royal Lady Bee honey.

When the young lord stopped kissing, he stood back to look at my face. "I love you, Lady Royal Bee," he declared. "I want to marry you. You will be my lady beekeeper?"

My mind swirled with notions about our love. But deep inside I knew our union could never be. He knew this as well. We both belonged to our Holy King who most certainly had me in mind for a strategic marriage alliance.

"I love you too, younger brother Mok Chi. You're a man now and I'm a full woman. What can we do? My purity is intact but my love for you is overwhelming."

"I have gifts for you." He took from his cloth bundle a round stone calendar. "I give you this to keep the spirits of time. Day by day." He then removed a black stone the size of his fist. It looked like obsidian without a glimmering sheen.

"From a mountain volcano?" I asked as I examined the stone.

“No, my honey beekeeper. During my last hunting trip, I watched Chanal K’uh, Heart of Sky, hurl this stone to Earth through layers of the cosmos. These gifts from sky gods will protect you from bad spirits of Earth and the Death Lords and demons of Xibalba.”

We again kissed in the forest shade behind the old temple until a cacophonous crescendo of monkeys and birds warned us the priests were returning. I re-bundled my gifts and Yax K’uh promised to return as soon as he could. He didn’t know when that would be.

For the rest of that dry season, Yax K’uh appeared at the apiary to meet me whenever he found an opportunity. We were both too chaste to venture beyond our kisses. He would tell me about his hunting trips and his training as a warrior. I would intently listen and rarely talk about my courtly life. I had no marvelous stories to tell, as ladies seldom do, and he already knew all the beekeeping songs and dances.

Late one morning, when Yax K’uh and I were together at the old temple, a troop of monkeys began screeching. I scanned through the jungle and spotted my lifelong attendant peering at us from behind a ceiba tree.

“What are you doing?” I screamed at Star Flower, pulling free from my lord’s embrace.

“You’re my charge, beloved mistress. *A win a ke na.”* Star Flower stepped from behind the enormous tree trunk. **She had soiled and ripped her huipil during her trek through the jungle outskirts.** “I’m concerned for your welfare and purity, Lady Yol Tan.”

The monkeys raised the pitch of their laughter and I waited for the noise to subside. “You care for no one but yourself,” I exclaimed. Then, as if on a dare, I affectionately kissed my young lord.

“Not true, Mistress,” Star Flower protested. “My father gives my life to you. It’s my duty to see you keep your courtly purity. The gods forbid this display of affection.”

I erupted in anger, like the chattering monkeys, then worried my attendant would tell Queen Mother about my liaison with Yax K’uh. Just the other day, I had seen Star Flower privately speaking to the queen. When we were in my private chambers, I confronted her but she insisted that the queen had been inquiring about what gift to give me for the seating of my 15th stone. I of course doubted my servant’s sincerity. She had already proven herself a liar and I didn’t trust Queen Mother either. She has always resented Pakal’s affection for me because she had failed to keep his own three daughters alive past the age of one stone.

I looked at Yax K’uh. My eyes implored he leave so I could punish my attendant. **When he was gone, I took Star Flower’s hand and waited outside the hives for the priests to return then I escorted her back to the palace**.

How I would deal with her was a delicate matter. Sometimes I wished my lifelong attendant would go away. But the girl was as bound to me as I was to her and she had no place to go. **She couldn’t return to her parents’ home and shame them and cause them disfavor with the king.**

Over the next several days, I restricted Star Flower to my private chamber and placed a guard at the door. But she found a way to inform Queen Mother of my secret tryst with Precious Owl. The queen naturally told my brother, unconcerned about the consequences it seems. She evidently felt the matter was too urgent to keep secret.

My brother immediately dispatched emissaries to arrange my marriage with Hummingbird Sun, the **third king of Bone Dog in the bloodline of Foliated Fire Cloud, the king Lake Turtle Macaw had installed in the city he founded.** Hummingbird Sun was the

younger brother of Bone Dog's previous king Fiery Centipede Spine who had shifted his allegiance from Yax Mutul and the Jaguar dynasty to the snake king of Three Stone City.

The year I seated my fourth stone, my brother had retaken Bone Dog because of its strategic location along the trade route of the Usumacinta River. Pakal sacrificed Fiery Centipede Spine and left a regiment of **scar dog warriors in Bone Dog to erect a series of defensive moats.**

"**Half a katun has passed since I installed Hummingbird Sun as king of Bone Dog**," my brother told. "He's now a three katun lord." In the White Hall, we were standing beside the golden perch of Pakal's treasured scarlet macaws. These two birds had belonged to his mother Sak K'uk and were older than the king himself.

"Why must I marry this old king?" I asked while feeding the birds a guava.

"The first queen of Hummingbird Sun entered the road without producing sons and he requires a young princess of my bloodline to give him an heir. Your marriage to him will ensure his allegiance to me. He knows of your powerful birth day spirits. As his queen, you will conjure ancestors from both the Jaguar bloodline and the lineage of Bone Dog because your mother was his third cousin."

"I understand, Holy Brother, that you must make this alliance. But I don't want to marry the king of Bone Dog. His seed is probably useless. And besides, **I love Precious Owl and want to marry him."** I dared to make my plea, feeling as if my life would end without my younger brother Mok Chi living beside me, hand in hand. "Yax K'uh and I are beekeepers under the power of Ah-Muzen Cab and Colel Cab. Together we'll produce children more precious than green obsidian from the capital far north. We can provide you with impeccable daughters to

marry many vassal lords." I argued with my brother although I knew my words were as futile as my emotions.

"I have no time to await these daughters you promise," Pakal scolded. "I'm nearly a three-katun lord myself. You are born to wed the king of my choosing and Yax K'uh is destined to become nacom of my troops. I give you too many concessions, younger sister. A female beekeeper! You want to be an anomaly because you were born with a spirit that embraces what preoccupies men."

The macaws loudly squawked for more succulent fruit. Their vivid blue, green, and yellow wing feathers struck my eyes like Chaac's lightning axe. I was speechless.

"Our daykeepers predict you will produce Hummingbird Sun a healthy heir. I need Bone Dog as my vassal city **to protect my trade interests and** keep the Kaan on the defensive. Already, Yuknoom infiltrates cities near Bone Dog. The snake head lures away my vassals with his own royal sisters and daughters. Hummingbird Sun will not live much longer and soon you'll reign as queen of Bone Dog. You wish to be a warrior queen, Yol Tan. This is what I give you. An opportunity and privilege few women ever attain." He paused a moment to pet the male scarlet macaw named Chaac Aj then he firmly added, "We leave for Bone Dog when the dry season begins and the morning star rises."

I felt trapped, unable to say anything more. My duty in life was to my Holy King. I could no longer push the boundaries of his love for me. I at least took comfort in knowing that Yax K'uh would be part of the royal wedding entourage from Abundant Waters to Bone Dog.

One stone after the Kaan slave king, Sky Hammer, sacked Yax Mutul, my wedding entourage traveled up the Usumacinta to the city of Bone Dog. The royal armada consisted of

300 cedar dugout jukubs. Each had eight paddlers who forged against the currents. Some of the canoes brimmed with tributes of textiles, pots of honey, and sacks of cacao beans, sea salt, and maize. Other canoes carried warriors, lieutenants, and day-keeping advisors. When the armada approached rapids and waterfalls, troops carried the jukubs and cargo along river roads through the dense forest.

A royal jukub carried Pakal, B'aah Ch'ok, Second Son, and me, the princess bride. I sat on jaguar pelts in the center of our vessel under a shelter of palm mats. **At my feet, were my treasured gifts from Yax K'uh and** beside me, on the canoe bottom, sat Star Flower. The river breeze kept us refreshed and an ointment of cedar kept away flies and mosquitoes.

Yax K'uh traveled in the canoe ahead of mine, along with generals, high lords, and priests. During the long voyage, we often caught sight of each other. **This gave me moments of hope that somehow, one day, my life would join with the young lord of my spirit and heart.**

Our wedding flotilla passed many cities and villages. Some were allies of Pakal, others had pledged their allegiance to the snake king Yuknoom. We passed under the bridge at Broken Sky City and the Kaan city that stands on a fortified hill overlooking the river valley. From the stone cliffs that tower above the river like temple walls, Kaan warriors watched our passing flotilla. Under feather and shell helmets, these warriors had painted faces with black and red symbols of the Kaan. They held blowguns, spears, and shields with emblems of the Sun Bellied Jaguar. Pakal and his scar dog warriors were prepared for battle although the Kaan seldom attacked flotillas on the river.

For most of the voyage, I quietly watched the passing scenery and listened to the paddles rhythmically splash in the water. On each side of my boat the itz breath of Chaac mingled with the vast forest vapor. In places the river was brown like cacao or green like jade. It widened,

narrowed, and twisted around flat land and mountains of dense forests with ceiba trees standing above the laughing monkeys. Beautiful birds called to one another. *They're singing love songs to those who travel the river,* I sometimes thought. I saw caiman basking on logs and white tail deer drinking from stagnant pools that smelled like sweaty men after a ballcourt game. Snakes hung from branches over the river ready to strike unwary frogs and monkeys.

High above the forest, I watched the wayob dancers fly as Harpy eagles and my mind produced powerful visions of Yax Mutul. In less than one katun, I imagined myself as a warrior queen defeating the Kaan. Yax Mutul would rise again and become the most powerful city in the world. As an ally and overlord of my brother the king of the Jaguar dynasty.

Before dusk each day our flotilla stopped at sandy beaches. Attendants pitched a shelter for me and Star Flower. For the king and his sons, they pitch the popol naj tent where my brother slept and attended to important matters. On nights free of rain, when the Giant Hunter rose high in the sky bearing the star of my mother in his belt, the king and his sons and lords sat around a large fire burning cedar logs to keep away insects. While crickets chirped and the river swished by, my brother told stories about gods, battles, and the night sky. The oil and feathers in his long hair glistened from the dancing firelight. Beside him sat B'aah Ch'ok, Second Son, and Yax K'uh. Each wore jade ear plugs and peccary bones through nose piercings.

For me, these occasions were the best part of the upstream journey because Yax K'uh sat across from me. Through the flames and smoke, I caught glimpses of his face. When our eyes meet, I felt a spark from the burning cinders ignited the air I breathed. During these happy moments, I intently listened to my brother's stories. One was about the stars of the Giant Hunter, the Ak Turtle who hangs below the white road snake.

“The three hearth stones of creation lie below the smoke hole in the House of the Iguana,” I remember my brother saying. “Our present creation began when the gods ignited the Ak stars and planted the stones. Jaguar Paddler planted the first stone and called it Jaguar Throne in the House of Five Sky. Sting Ray Paddler planted the second stone and called it Snake Throne in the House of Earth. Itzamnaj planted the third stone and called it the Stone at the Edge of the Sky.” Pakal looked at me through the flaming camp fire and added, “The mother of our princess bride is that star.”

At the end of the river journey, ten kins before my wedding date, warriors secured the canoes with sentries. My royal wedding party trekked the white sacbe road through the jungle to Bone Dog. **Scar Dog** troops encamped at the city’s perimeter near the ballcourt while King Pakal, his sons, and I resided in the palace.

Bone Dog is modest in size, compared to Abundant Waters. From the plaza, steps lead to the king’s stone palace on a hillside off the valley clearing. Three pyramid temples stand around the plaza. In the north, the first king’s pyramid entombs Foliated Fire Cloud. On the west side of the plaza, Hummingbird Sun erected a three-tiered pyramid to himself. On its top is a red temple with a comb roof that displayed the city’s patron god, Red Chac Xib Chaac of the East. The god faces the sunrise and bears a shark tooth of power from Fang Moon.

Before I even met my betrothed, the high priest of Bone Dog, Cham Itz’al, took me to the Temple of Directions to contemplate the gods of my new city. Fiery Centipede Spine had erected this stone sanctuary behind his father’s pyramid for the royal and elite of Bone Dog. It lies at the forest’s edge, hidden from the plaza, rather like the ancient Cloud Center temple where Yax K’uh would secretly meet me.

Inside the temple, I sat on a center bench and gazed at the black and red paintings and glyphs on the white stucco ceiling and walls. Cham Itz'al sat beside me to explain the pictures and glyphs. "They represented the nine directions of east, north, west, and south, up and down, and Kan, Kab, and Xibalba," he told me. "They **marked the celestial events since the beginning of the present creation.** On the north wall, the queen of Foliated Fire Cloud is conjuring a snake vision as she prepares her husband for battle. The god Chac Xib Chaac appears in her butz chan."

"My brother is an avatar of Red Chaac," I said to Cham Itz'al.

"Yes. Like Chac Xib Chaac, your brother King Pakal upholds the sunrise and sends destructive winds on his enemies."

I already knew many of the stories portrayed on the temple walls because my brother had recited them at the evening campfires during our river journey. I felt well prepared to become the city's queen.

The Bedding Ceremony occurred on a full moon night in my private chamber at the palace. On a bed platform against the east wall, I sat on deer pelt bedding and looked into an obsidian pirate mirror that Hummingbird Sun give me as a wedding gift. I wore nothing but a cotton shroud and the jaguar canine necklace from my brother. I had rarely removed it since my menarche rite four stones before.

The old king sat at the edge of the platform; his shaking hands grasped his walking staff. He had difficulty with his agility. The room was quiet except for the spitting torches and the scarlet macaw chattering on its perch. Two large hairless dogs slept soundly at the foot of the platform on their own deer pelts. They were wedding gifts to me from the citizens of Bone Dog.

“What do you see in your mirror? Bride from Pakal?” the king asked in a brittle and sour voice. I could smell his rancid breath even across the platform. It was the first time I had been alone with him and his words were not ceremonial orations or polite addresses to my brother his Overlord.

“The mirror gives a smokey reflection,” I suggested, unsure about what the king wanted to know. “I see myself in another way. It’s a face I cannot clearly recognize.”

“You are an ugly bride! I only hope your body proves more suitable for a king.” His words stunned me. People had always told me I possessed the regal beauty of my mother Lady Rigel. Pakal had told me this and Yax K’uh had often praised my honey smooth skin and inward-looking eyes.

“My duty is to please you, Lord Hummingbird.” I could think of nothing else to say.

“Humph,” the king muttered then called for his attendant. A young man entered the chamber carrying a bundle. He helped the king remove his regalia then unwrapped the bundle **and placed it beside the king**. It contained round stones and obsidian blades.

I stared at the objects and looked at the king. He said to me, “I don’t believe you are pure.”

“My lord. I’ve received no other man. My purity awaits only you.”

“Disrobe.” The old king addressed me like a captive. At that moment, I knew I was his prisoner. The king, my husband, was now my master. I had never anticipated such abrasive harshness. “Place the stones in your secret chamber,” he spewed like a venomous snake spitting out poison. “Prove your purity. By my word, your brother Pakal has given me insufficient wares.”

“In front of your attendant? How dare you,” I protested and placed the mirror aside. “Why do you question the loyalty of my brother King Pakal? He’s your Overlord.”

“Insolent child!” The king neared me and slapped my face but his strength was feeble. I felt injured only internally. He had dazed my spirit. Then the king announced, “You no longer have a voice. I’m your only lord. What I give you, what I desire, what I command, you obey without question.” He looked to his attendant and said, “Place the stones in her secret cave.”

“No, sire,” I yelled. “You defile me!” I pulled away from him and sat back against the far wall of the platform, stirring the hairless dogs and making them yip.

“Go ahead boy,” the king snickered and I knew he was playing with me. “And cut the mark off her shoulder.” He referred to a mole of two merged circles on my left shoulder. A birthmark. “This bride from Pakal bears a sign from the Death Lords. The mark makes her hideous and not worthy of my lordship.”

I covered myself with a deer pelt. “No, my lord.”

“Go ahead boy,” the king shouted and the young attendant neared me upholding an obsidian blade. His breath smelled of maize and garlic.

I pushed the steward away.

The king dismissed his man. “I’ll cut it off myself,” he declared, spraying his spittle across the platform. But he couldn’t easily maneuver from where he sat so he remained seated. His breath reeked of balche, the liquor made from forest spirits. He was nothing but a decrepit, hideous, and intoxicated old man. The thought that my pure body must join his, revolted me. I had no choice. Fleeing was not possible. Where could I go in the dense forest? Besides, how could I betray my brother, my Holy Lord? He depended on me to make the alliance work.

As if determining my thoughts, the king stood from the platform using his staff. He again suggested I wasn't pure and vowed to sacrifice me if I didn't produce him a son within the present stone, as prophesized. "If you fail me," he said, "I will return your head to your brother." The king then angrily stumbled from the chamber and did not return that night.

I lay awake on the pelts feeling helpless and afraid. I had no one to confide in, concerning the king's cruel behavior. Not Pakal. Not my handmaidens, not even my lifelong servant. Star Flower used whatever she learned to her advantage and that made me leery of her. My only choice was to keep silent. I convinced myself that to discuss my marriage with anyone is beneath the dignity of a queen. It's sacrilegious, preposterous, a curse that calls upon the Lords of Death. The only thing I could do was suffer what I was born to endure.

Early the next morning, Star Flower remained in the servant's quarters because she assumed the king was bedding me. I plaited my own hair with shells and feathers and dressed in a white tunic and cape of jade beads. I went to the Temple of Directions to ask Red Chac Xib Chaac why I must suffer.

I sat on the center bench and contemplated my situation. I had never known such cruelty. Never suffered from someone's ill-manners. My only fault, if I must bear a fault, was my desire to learn what boys learn. For what purpose was I condemned to such misery? Why was I fated to marry a hideous old man? I quietly awaited an answer but heard nothing from the world beyond.

Then a bee came buzzing through the temple door. It was a different species from the royal honey bees at Cloud Center apiaries. It wasn't a wasp or hornet. "You probably lost your course," I said aloud. "And now this small stone chamber traps you inside with me." I deeply inhaled the pleasant aroma of copal incense and begged the gods to soften the old king's heart

and allow me to keep bees once again, if my new city had a sacred apiary. I didn't know. And if it did, I doubted my husband would allow me to serve as a Cab priest.

All at once, I felt a hand on my shoulder. The soft touch startled me. I wondered if the cruel king had arrived to cut away my birthmark. I grew angry at the thought of him intruding on my solitude in the sacred temple. But when I turned, I saw the handsome young face of Yax K'uh gazing upon me. He sat beside me and took my hand. As a lieutenant in the king's troops, he wore a loincloth with back tails and a pectoral of Lord Sun. Feathers from the Harpy eagle adorned his long hair muddied with red clay and scented from peccary glands. I rested my head on his shoulder and wept.

"Why are you sad, Lady Bee?"

I remained silent, unable to find words.

"Is it because our love is secret?" he asked. "Lady Bee. I have confided in my best friend Kan Xul. He knows about my love for you and I trust him with my life. He will forever hold his tongue. Tell me, why do you weep?"

I told Precious Owl about the cruel king. "Can we leave together, you and I? Can you steal me away from here?"

"If I could, I would carry you into the forest as far away as possible and we'd live together forever. My only hope is that one day King Pakal will wage war against your demented husband. Then I'll lead an army of scar dogs and kill him and take you back to Abundant Waters to be my wife."

Yax K'uh held me and whispered his eternal love. "Do you still have my gifts from the Cloud Center temple?" he asked. "The stone hurled to Earth from sky gods? The calendar that marks time?"

“I keep your gifts at my bedside. Close to my heart.”

“Then the gods will protect you for now. Your husband the king will not live long. By his own devices, or by mine, he shall soon die and you’ll become a ruling queen. But alas, not now. Lady Bee. We can only beg the gods to change our given direction.”

I raised my head from his shoulder and suddenly noticed, outside the front temple door, a figure in the forest. At first, I thought it was a white tail deer or a peccary, but then, all of a sudden, I recognized Star Flower lurking about. She was pretending to seek plants for her remedies and magic.

“My lifelong servant is spying on us, once again,” I told Yax K’uh.

“Then I must take my leave, Lady Bee,” he whispered as Star Flower noticed my gaze and scurried into the forest. “Pakal awaits me at the encampment and your servant wants to make more trouble than you already have.”

“Tonight, I’ll send her to permanently live in the servant’s house outside the palace. Since my menarche rite, I’ve permitted her too many liberties. She takes advantage of me and spends hours practicing the art of plant magic. Her preoccupation goes beyond reason. But why does she spy on us? What are her motives? Is she drunk and demented like my husband the king? Or is it her spirit of jealousy? She envies me for being someone she could never be. I possess what she can never have.”

“I promise to raise the matter with Pakal and request he free you from your alliance with Hummingbird Sun and your bond with Star Flower. There must be a way to stop your misery, my lady beekeeper. Meanwhile, until I return, stay strong in the heart of Chac Xib Chaac.”

Yax K’uh left by the temple’s side door, away from the spying eyes of Star Flower. I remained seated a long while, worried I would never see him again.

The next day, my brother and his army began their journey back to Abundant Waters. He left behind a battalion of scar dog warriors to defend his interests in the river trade and reinforce the stone barricades and moats.

Over the next few weeks, Hummingbird Sun came to my private chamber only twice. Each time, his breath reeked of balche and our union was unpleasant. He spewed vitriolic words and lashed at me with his walking staff. It gave the old king pleasure to scold me for inferiorities I don't possess or for things that really don't matter. He compared me to his first wife who died before he took the throne and failed to produce his progeny.

When the king wasn't present, I slept alone in my private chamber. In the mornings, Star Flower arrived to help me plait my hair and anoint my skin and hair with iztah te, a fragrance of plumeria and tobacco flowers.

My room was smaller than my chamber in Pakal's Red Palace. It had only one window overlooking the front gallery and the city plaza below. When the weather was clear, I sat alone on the front terrace of the palace, drew glyphs in booklets about my patron gods and glanced at the market activity below. Women were trading woven cloth for cacao beans, or selling chilis, maize, squash, and turkeys that gobbled so loudly I heard them on top of the hill. At times, Star Flower and I wove cloth together with backstrap looms and spindles, or we sang and danced on the terrace with female palace attendants born in Bone Dog or brought to the city by merchant traders.

I never partook in the king's royal life except during state visits when he required my presence in his receiving hall to sit beside him as he received tributes. I was a silent queen and responded only when the king spoke to me. My life wasn't as active as it had been in the city of

Pakal where I freely wandered the market plaza and enjoyed spending time with my Holy Elder Brother. Where Yax K'uh told me war stories in the gardens of bees. In Bone Dog, my only solace was to dream about Yax K'uh, night and day.

I asked the old king for a personal healer and he appointed his sister, Ol Nitt. Star Flower protested saying she was better suited for the position. *"A win a ke na,*" she said. "I know everything about plants. I studied under healers at Pakal's City. Under Lady Ja' Naj until she entered the road of no return. And I'm your life-servant, my Lady Yol Tan."

I dismissed her pleas because I really had no choice but to accept whomever the king assigned me. In Bone Dog, I shared little confidence with Star Flower. She never admitted to seeing me with Yax K'uh at the Temple of Directions but I knew she had and worried she would somehow relay this secret to the old king.

The king's sister treated me with the dignity a queen deserves, so unlike the king, and I soon trusted Ol Nitt in ways I could never trust Star Flower. I eventually confessed to her my concern about bearing the king's son. I didn't mention the king's cruelty and his threats to kill me if I didn't produce an heir, but I admitted that the king couldn't issue his seed without help. "I fear I won't produce a b'aah ch'ok because of his age. He rarely joins me in bed, at least not properly as I understand properly to be. And when he does, he's drunk on balche."

My words caused Ol Nitt to chuckle. "Do you even know what proper bedding is? Young queen. I know you had no mother to teach you, but you must understand that my brother has much responsibility. He is a king, after all. You must make him desire you. Make yourself an irresistible seductress, like the youthful Fang Moon. To help you with this, I'll lace my brother's nightly balche with a potent vine and root mixture that restores manhood. We must also mark your bleeding and determine your optimum time of fertility. To help your womb harvest his

seed, I'll prepare for you a special brew made by the goddess Chaac Ix Chel herself. I'll arrange for the king to visit your chamber when your moon is full."

Two lunar cycles after King Pakal and his men departed, I brought the old king to union on my most fertile night. Nothing changed the king's disposition and I knew he bore no love for me. It didn't matter. I had no affection or respect for him. In fact, I hated my husband the Holy Lord of Bone Dog.

Two nights after our union, Hummingbird Sun unexpectedly burst into my chamber with the help of two attendants. An angry spirit consumed him more than I had ever seen. He yelled that I slept with a young lord of Pakal's, a descendant of the Jaguar king who established his city. The old king even said his name. Lord Precious Owl.

"Sire, I joined with no man before we wed. I have slept only with you," I protested, trying to defend myself while fear and outrage filled my heart.

The king refused to believe me and demanded I undergo a purity trial at Lake Turtle Macaw near the western mountains. King Lake Turtle Macaw of the Jaguar dynasty had named the lake for himself and designated it a sacred place because it was halfway between Bone Dog and Stone Mountain, the two cities he had established during his short reign. King Lake Turtle Macaw believed that First Mother and First Father united in the waters of this sacred lake and produced the maize people of Fourth Creation.

"A purity trial will reveal your essence," Hummingbird Sun yelled while waving his staff and nearly falling over. "If you're guilty, the Lords of Death will steal you away to the Watery Underworld. If you're pure, you will bear my heir apparent son."

I had never heard mention of this lake but I knew my brother Pakal had installed the present king of Stone Mountain City Where All Gods Unite. King Roaring Sky Dance is a first

cousin to Pakal's wife, the Queen Mother. I also knew, in my heart of hearts, that Star Flower had gossiped about my meeting with Yax K'uh at the Temple of Directions. Either she or someone else had informed the old king.



Chapter 19: Hillary, *Butz Ch'an at Palenque Palace*

I awaken from a dream on the queen's mat. The jungle whistles, screeches, and howls. The humid air smells of sweat, bark, and seeds--the best medicines in the world. My anxiety subsides.

I repeat the chants of my shaman and fall into an unsteady dance with the figures on the wall. All the while, h**issing serpents creep and crawl over my skin.**

"Become."

I hear his voice.

"Let poison drain from your body into the ground. Let Earth absorb the pain. Purify yourself before the portal to the other half of existence. Lord Sun will burn away the infections in your body and mind."

The serpents slither down my arms and legs, guiding my trance. I can't stop them or the chanting. I can't stop my dance.

“She arrives. Cursed woman.” Frank’s sudden bellow stirs me. **“Don’t leave us blind! Protect us. Lead us to the highest heaven. Make us whole and united.”**

Clouds cover the sun and umbral striations obscure the dancers on the wall. They grow dimer in the darkness of Third Creation. I close my eyes. My mind replays the ‘91 solar eclipse when the sky turned to twilight.

I long to touch the sun but something keeps me from rising. My own will? The serpents? I call to Red Macaw Carrying Fire and we dance until the world becomes black. **When the moment settles and my head fills with song, Waterlily Jaguar roars at the crescent rabbit.**

I’m exhausted and sweating from the dance. I look from side to side but see nothing. My anxiety returns. I have no guide and hear no voice or sound. “Frank, where are you?” I call.

A man’s shadow stands before my eyes; before me and the sun. The eclipse is the face of my lover. Red Macaw Carrying Fire.

On the cool grass I curl into a fetal position and cover myself with the Merida shawl. I don’t want to move. I don’t want another mystical experience under hallucinogens. “Let me return,” I say and struggle to stand but fall back to the ground. The serpents return, soothing me, covering me completely with the shawl tapestry. I want to rest from the dream I’m having but my thoughts dance with kings and warriors of sacrifice. I can’t calm my mind.

I look at the sky. The clouds have parted and the bright sun appears twenty degrees from the western horizon. It feels like I haven’t eaten or slept for many days. I sit up. My head pounds. For a moment I wonder where I am and what’s happened.

We have safely returned.

I hear a faint voice.

Frank sits beside me and rubs my temples. “Unfortunately, fear overcame your dance, Little Sparrow. The Cursed Woman pulled you from Ek’ way-nal.”

“Who’s the Cursed Woman?” Do I speak, I’m wondering, or do the words ring in my mind?

Frank resolves the matter. “She’s a jealous woman who intervenes on the journey to the Other World.”

“No,” I mutter. My head is still spinning but my wits have returned. I sit on the steps by the corridor of pillars and feel angry at Frank for the entire ordeal. I’m mad at myself for succumbing to drugs, for thinking I might discover something beyond my own rational mind. What’s happened to me? How did I become so stupid? “This was a big mistake,” I say and wrap the shawl tightly around me. I’m shivering in the humid heat. My muscles ache like someone has trampled upon me.

“Don’t let her win,” Frank says. “Nothing bad has happened to you. I was with you the entire time, guiding your dance. Don’t let fear overcome you.”

I hold my head. “And this headache. Is this fear as well?”

“Yes,” he sits behind me, massages my shoulders and rubs my temples, relieving the pain. “Now chew.” He hands me coca leaves from his shaman stash of supplies. “It’ll bring you relief.”

“No more drugs.” I push away his hand.

“It’s natural medicine from the Americas. Nothing bad has happened to you, Hillary. Soon you’ll remember the glyphs spoke to you like a revelation from God.” He puts the leaves in my mouth and says, “Chew slowly.”

Disgusted with my foolishness, I stand beside the stone pillar above the steps and chew the bitter leaves then drink from my bottle of water. I'm dizzy. I close my eyes and nearly collapse on the stone stairs.

"Be still," Frank eases me back on the step and sits before me to massage my feet. Suddenly, I feel rested and secure as if a burden has been lifted. As if nothing really matters anymore. I just had a vivid dream and am back to my old self. I feel all right, after all. Good in fact. I begin trusting Frank again, completely. It feels right to be with him, my shaman guide.

"Voila," he softly speaks. "You're returning. The Death Lords are letting you go. Fear holds you no more. Rest, Little Sparrow. Soon the day ends and you have journeyed far. Next time, as your nagual, I'll paddle you across the Usumacinta into the portal beyond the five senses."

Frank quietly chants a French prayer to the Virgin Mary, further soothing my nerves. I'm aware of his words but feel too numb to speak. I try to recall what's happened over the past few hours but because of the drugs I can't remember what was real or a dream or a trance. "Have we been here all afternoon?" I ask Frank. He nods but says nothing when he takes my hand and leads me to the exit gates.

On the drive back to Hotel Tulija in Palenque Village we are both quiet until I remark, "Today's drug indulgence was a special freedom I allowed myself, but I don't ever want to take drugs again."

Frank chuckles but says nothing as the sun tumbles into the Jaguar of Night**.**

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Since I've returned to Mexico City, Monte seems personally interested in me. He practically insists we meet after work to discuss my research and the glyphs in Bradly's diary.

He doesn't want Frank on the expedition. He's disliked Frank since he found his curriculum vitae on my desk. I know he read my note about our lunch at Adonis because someone had moved the CV and only Monte comes into my office.

Frank and I continue our daily walks in the park where he's teaching me Quichen-Mam. I've learned words for jaguar, dog, bird, snake, sun, moon and Venus. I know the Mam numbers and basic questions. Frank likes to say *Wajb'ila ti'ja* which means I love you. He brings me gifts, takes me to dinners and shows, and attends my PowerPoint lectures at the museum, but he never takes me to his apartment and never comes to mine. We haven't made love since we've been back. I'm still not troubled by this because, really, I don't have time for a physical relationship. I'm under too much pressure to finish my work in time for the expedition.

In September I begin applying for professorships at various universities. I need to prepare for a life after the Fulbright postdoc. After the expedition.

By the time November rolls around, I'm on a plane to Phoenix for an interview at Arizona State University. The Director of the Anthropology Department, Professor Mark Feldman, is an expert on Teotihuacan. He admires my credentials and is keenly interested in my upcoming expedition to the ancient queen's tomb. By the time I leave Arizona, I'm confident I have a professorship lined-up for autumn semester in eight months.

As soon as I return to DF, I phone Monte and share the good news. He's delighted and calls me his prodigy. The next day, in Chapultepec Park, Frank and I are sitting under an ahuehuete sequoia. It feels like the birds are singing love songs to me when I share my news with Frank. "When I leave Mexico City, Teddy Bear, I'll really miss you."

"Life is full of surprises, Cherie." His cologne **invades** the air I breathe. "The modern world is a small place. We'll only be a few hours apart."

“You sound like my father, teddy. He said the same thing when he and Mom dropped me off at my freshman dorm in Tucson.”

“You flatter me. I am both Bradly and Daddy.” Frank chuckles.

“You’re being light hearted.”

“I’m not. I’ll miss you too, cher Hill.”

“That’s what Mom called me.”

“Am I like her too?”

“Seriously, teddy. A lot has changed since we met. My feelings for you run deep.”

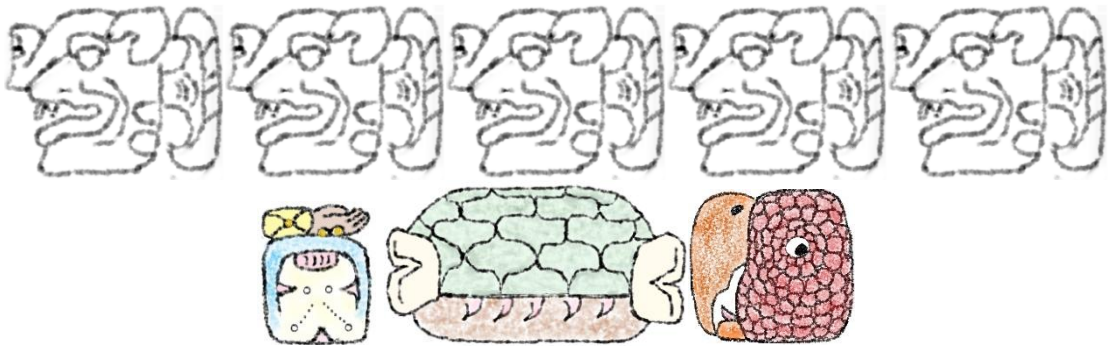
“As do mine for you. La même chose.”

“I mean it Frank. You’ve become more than a mere lover and friend. You’re family, as close to me as my parents ever were. Maybe even closer because you’re my shaman guide. You’ve taken me into the mind of my ancient queen. Into my own mind. I can feel what Jaguar Blood Moon is saying when I re-read the glyphs. Because of you, I sense her whispering to me, *Ta Ochle*, *you are of my lineage tree*.

“**It’s my honor to take you into the world of Jaguar Blood Moon. But I feel we’re only part way there. We haven’t completely passed through Ek’ way-nal. We have more work to do before we become transformed.”**

“Really? What more is there to do?”

“Continue to study the glyphs like you’re trekking the jungle roads to the queen’s tomb. Like you’ve already embarked on the expedition. This way, you’ll pick up clues and hidden features before we even begin our journey to Lake Turtle Macaw.”



Chapter 20: Yol Tan, *Purity Trial at Lake Turtle Macaw*

For two days, the king and his entourage trekked along the jungle scabe to the western mountains. Stewards carried the old king on his litter but he insisted I walk as part of my purity ritual. I didn't protest but I confided in Ol Nitt that I was perhaps one month along with the king's child. The king's sister didn't tell the king. Instead, she gave me seeds to chew during the trek to keep the fetus strong and viable.

As soon as our party arrived at the lake, I cooled my sore feet at the water's edge and watched little minnows shoot away as I wiggled my toes. Tree roots and vines, palms and ceiba trees with orchids and bromeliads crept to the lake's clear water. Scattered boulders and foliage edged the NW shore.

By mid-afternoon the king's men were busy hoisting firewood down the southern limestone cliff while stewards prepared the night's sleeping shelters and set small fires around the lake. An hour before Lord Sun entered Jaguar of Night, attendants placed the king beside the main fire at the water's edge to watch the ceremony across the lake.

It began when Ol Nitt handed me a lit cigar laced with mushrooms. I stood at the lake shore, deeply inhaled the smoke and grew lightheaded. I heard macaws squawking and imagined Seven Macaw at the top of his tree. A distant turkey gobbled and screeched. The cook was

preparing the king's dinner. I doubted I'd be joining him for the meal because I wasn't sure I'd survive whatever the king had in mind for me.

As I inhaled the smoke and scent of itz nectar, Yax K'uh's image appeared in the cool waters. My beloved Mok Chi. I saw him as Pakal's powerful nacom wearing his Tlaloc helmet. My Precious Owl, a warrior, a mighty hero of the ballcourt. My heart suddenly embraced the lake as the most beautiful place in the world.

Two priests in loin cloths, their hair muddied and tied, dove into the water before me. The image of Yax K'uh sank under their rippling splash. The priests swam to the far shore where they ignited a sacred fire before the entrance to a cavern in the cliffs.

Ol Nitt instructed me to remove my sandals, huipil, and skirt. Priests were singing and dancing near the king while attendants dressed me in a tunic with strings of shells and heavy jade beads. Ol Nitt wove beads into my hair until the king stood from his chair and said, "Now, bride of Pakal. Swim across the lake to the fire at the cave entrance."

"The weight of this garment will pull me down," I broke my silence in protest. "And I can't swim like a warrior or a mighty player of the ballcourt."

"Lady child," the king said with impatience. "This is the heart of your trial. You must swim across the lake and dry yourself before k'ak k'uh, the sacred fire. If you fail to make the distance, if you fail to dry your garment, then you lack the purity I require from my bride. I will sacrifice you to the Watery Underworld if the Death Lords don't take you first."

I waded into the cool lake fearing I'd fail the king's trial. Then a surge of anger overtook my fear. Why must I suffer such injustice and question my own integrity? I asked myself. The king is repulsive, not me, and I hate him with all my heart.

“Swim, princess bride,” the king yelled, raising his staff while bracing himself on the shoulder of an attendant. “Swim before Lord Sun becomes Jaguar of Night!”

In the dwindling light, I waded farther into the lake then dove toward the high cliffs at the far shore. My garment caught hold of the water like jagged flints on fish netting. I heard the jungle sounds of twilight and tasted the fullness of fresh water. I gulped its sweetness. Despite my burden, I propelled myself forward as bubbles of water surrounded me like the jade beads strung from my dress and hair. I couldn’t tell them apart.

I made it to the shore below the cave. The two priests were dancing and singing around the sacred fire. As soon as I climbed from the water onto the fallen scree, the priests dove into the lake and swam back to the king. I was alone to perform the rite.

On my climb to the sacred fire, one of the beaded strings on my garment caught a shrub growing from the rocks. I tugged to free myself and the strand broke. The beads scatter everywhere. I was sure this would curse my trial. The irascible king probably had counted every bead and shell attached to my garment.

At the cave entrance, I stood before the flames of k’ak k’uh and felt instant relief. It seemed I had passed the test after all. To help dry off, I stretched my arms out from my sides. On the distant shore, the king was sitting in his litter watching me as dancing lords and priests surrounded him and sang hymns to the wayob spirits of the lake.

Suddenly, from behind, I heard a swooshing like Chaac’s winds emerging from all directions. The air felt dry and heated, its dampness extinguished. The odor of wet fur filled my nostrils. I heard a multitude of squealing voices and wanted to hold my ears but I kept my arms extended to let the sacred fire dry off my clothes. I was determined to master the king’s trial like brothers **Hunahpu and Xbalanque had outwitted the Death Lords of Xibalba.**

Demons of the underworld began pelting my back with stones. They were tricking me into failing the king's trial. One stone, then two, then many stones all at once hit my back.

I stared into the flames, hoping a voice would tell me which road to take. But only screeches came from behind.

The pelting intensified. I glanced to my side and saw hundreds of small brown bats escaping from the Ek' way-nal of Xibalba. Although my arms grew heavy, and the pelting pained me, I remained steady and unmoving. I refused to fail the king's test.

My hair and garment ensnared bat after bat. Each one winced and struggled to free itself. Some fell into the fire and squealed as they burst into flames and smell of cooked peccary meat. I braced myself as a whirling black cloud of bats nearly knocked me into the sacred fire. **My chest felt crushed and my heart pounded like a turtle shell drum.**

Even after the moon had lowered tenfold, I stayed unmoving at the fire, never lowering my arms. Across the lake the king was gazing at me with amazement. **This was his trial, I realized, not merely my swimming across the lake.** He had placed me before the cave when the underworld messengers emerged to feast. People die from bat bites. They become **frothy and crazy. I felt myself becoming mad with fury, like a rabid dog, at the decrepit old king, my tormenter.**

"Hummingbird Sun, hear me now." My scream echoed across Lake Turtle Macaw. "I call upon Camazotz, the death bat monster, Hum Hau and Cizin death gods, and B'a Ajaw, head lord of Xibalba. I call upon Blood Moon, daughter of Lord Cuchumaquic. I invoke Chac Xib Chaac. Grant me the strength of K'awiil and Baby Jaguar that I may enter the tree and pass this trial set forth by my demon husband, the king of Bone Dog."

When I ended my invocation, the swirling bats faded away until each and every one dissolved into darkness. Those entangled in my hair and garment vanished in puffs of smoke, one by one, like the smoke from a snake vision.

I removed my dry clothes, tossed them in k'ak k'uh and stood naked before the dancing flames. I felt no pain and saw no wound or bruise on my skin. The bats hadn't punctured my essence. The king had not defeated me. I was a scar dog warrior and pitzl hero of the ballcourt.

I jumped into the moonlit lake. Without any garment to weigh me down, I easily swam toward the king's shore. He rose from his litter like he feared my approach. Maybe he feared I had cursed him. His sister, my healer Ol Nitt, waited for me with a woven cloth to cover my naked and unblemished body.

Nearly one solar cycle after marrying the king of Bone Dog, on day 5 Caiman, I produced his prophesized son. As soon as my child entered the world and the old king confirmed he had a son, he took my baby from the birthing room to live in his private chambers. His healers and nursemaids would see to the infant's needs. Not me. Hummingbird Sun didn't allow me to even hold my son or give him my milk. Only in private could I call the baby b'ayal, my first born. The old king named him Tapir Rabbit 5 Caiman, Tul Til. He had accepted the child was of his harvest because the bats had not bitten me during my purity trial.

Over the days to come, I saw my b'ayal only when the king required my presence in his receiving hall during visits from emissaries of Pakal. The king wanted his Overlord to receive reports that I was happy with my child and husband. During these tributes, I sat beside the king's throne but a nursemaid held my b'ayal, the b'aah ch'ok, on the other side of the king. At times, I tried to take him from the nursemaid but the child didn't know me and cried. This made the old

king laugh. “My son knows you are unworthy of being his mother,” the king would say. I suspected my b’ayal had inherited the king’s cruel seed.

The year Tul Til entered the world, I received news that my brother Pakal had sacked two vassal cities of the Kaan east of the Usumacinta River. He had returned to Abundant Waters with captive snake leaders and a dignitary from Yokib. The news of Pakal’s victories brought cheer and hope to the citizens of Bone Dog. Their Overlord would protect them, they believed, and sustain their city. I also found comfort in my brother’s power and might although I realized he was growing old. But he couldn’t stop waging wars because his kingdom and vassals would never have peace until the Kaan hegemony met its demise and Yax Mutul took back its powers.

After the birth of Tul Til, Hummingbird Sun rarely came to my chamber and I dreaded the times that he did. He would always torment me.

One night he admitted, “I intended to marry a Kaan princess instead of you, bride of Pakal. Yuknoom offered me riches and a strong position **as the king of a major trading center**. But Pakal forced me to marry you.”

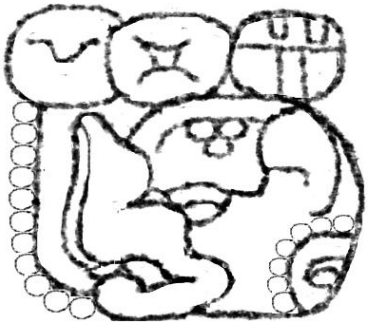
I pled with my husband to accept me because I wanted to mother my child and be a queen to my adopted city. But the king struck me with his walking scepter of the Hunn god and left me alone in my room where I spend the night crying. After that, the king stopped visiting me all together. He didn’t need me anymore because he had the son he desired.

When Tul Til seated his fourth stone, tension developed between Hummingbird Sun and my brother. First, an envoy from Pakal arrived in Bone Dog to investigate my welfare and gather intelligence from scar dog warriors defending Pakal’s interests. My brother threatened to sack Bone Dog because he had heard rumors that Hummingbird Sun was dispatching envoys to vassal cities of King Yuknoom.

In response, Hummingbird Sun held Pakal's emissaries hostage and killed his own citizens he suspected were loyal to Pakal. One of these men fled to Abundant Waters to inform my brother that the king of Bone Dog formed an alliance with the Kaan.

Bone Dog began stirring with gossip about an impending attack from the Jaguar king. Most citizens rallied behind their Holy Lord Hummingbird Sun, Ta Ochle of Foliated Fire Cloud, the first king of Bone Dog.

When the old king told his people that Yuknoom was now their Overlord, Kaan troops began arriving in Bone Dog and killing Pakal's scar dog warriors or forcing them to flee.



Chapter 21: Frank, *Copan*

It's a month before Hillary starts immersing herself in the Mam language, in Todos Santos. I of course am driving her there but first, we're taking a side trip to Copan and Tikal.

"I want to explore the ruins without any more shaman training," she tells me as I drive my Land Rover to Copan from DF. It's about a 600-mile drive through Veracruz, Tabasco, and Guatemala to the border of Honduras. I love long drives and am used to driving from my apartment in DF to my home in Antigua. It takes me about one full day

despite the tolls and border crossing. Most customs guards usher me along because I know them and the know me.

"Pourquoi?" I reach over and touch Hillary's hand while keeping my eyes on the road. "Are you retreating into your scientific mind?"

"Not necessarily. At Copan and Tikal, I want the history and archaeology to speak to me. My spiritual training in Palenque overwhelmed me."

"I know, Little Sparrow. No more hallucinatory drugs. Only empirical chit chat until you're ready to experience more. But it won't be up to you. Your next spiritual encounter is up to the whim of Ometeotl."

"When is my apprenticeship over anyway? Don't I qualify by now?"

"Consider it done. I hereby anoint you a full-fledged lineage shaman. You study Mam in Todo Santos until the expedition and you're all set. No curse can stop you from entering the tomb. And I'm certain we'll find the codex. I feel it in my bones."

"Me too," Hillary says and I turn my focus back on the road.

We stop in Quetzaltenango, a city the locals call Xela for the nearby late-classic Quiche ruins Xelaju. I've been here many times to procure antiquities from the inhabitants. I don't tell Hillary this. She needn't know. It's not like I must excavate and dig for my treasures. The locals have plenty to offer someone like me, a man who speaks their language and treats them with respect. What I offer for the antiquities is more than they earn in a year's worth of toiling in the milpa fields.

After two nights at Hotel Modelo, I take Hillary to a hot-springs I've been to many times, by myself, with business connections, and lovers who aren't of the same caliber as my little sparrow. I convince her to bathe in the nude. She's still somewhat shy, not

knowing what to expect from me. I don't push physical intimacy. It's her spirit I want to possess. Not her body. She isn't my Anita or *les amies de rue* and I want the powers of her ancient book.

After relaxing an hour in the hot springs, we drive to the ruins of Iximche, another site I've seen many times. "Iximche was the late post-classic capital of the Kaqchikel Maya," I tell Hillary as we sit on the stone steps of a mound enjoying cold orange soda.

"The Kaqchikel?"

"That's right. They allied with the Quiche until they became enemies. Just like ball players make strategic moves. One moves to show his hand. But it's a ruse. A feign."

"Are you a trickster, Mr. Guillamont."

"No. Merely a business man. A strategist."

"A ball player?"

"Por supesto. After the Spanish conquest, small pox wiped out most of these native peoples. In the end it didn't even matter whose enemy was whose."

"It's the plight of us all. Isn't it?" Hillary asks.

"How so?"

"Even if we're strategic in what we do, keep our guard up and make our play, someone or some force of nature can come along and wipe away all that we've done. Even who we are. This is how I felt when Mom and Daddy were killed in that plane crash."

"Alors, Cher Hill. We only lose if we give up to that more powerful force. I believe we must master our own fate. Despite tragedy. We must always be and become. Enter the Ek' way-nal portal of forever and transform into who we will become. That's who we are."

"You're being way out there again, teddy bear."

“Naturellement, little sparrow. Ek’ way out there.”

“Hillaryous!”

Our next stop is the chaotic metropolis of Guatemala City where Hillary meets her other Fulbright academic sponsor Dr. Carlos Morales at the University of San Carlos. He’s helping her get a work permit for the expedition and a special permit from the Institute of Archaeology and History (IDAEH). He’s too old to join our team but two of his graduate students are coming along to document the expedition from Todos Santos to the cenote cave at the bottom of the Cuchumatanes. While she’s tied up, I attend a few business meetings of my own.

From Guatemala City, we drive six hours straight to the Copan archaeological site across the Honduran border. For three days, we stay at the Paty Hotel in Copan Ruinas Puebla.

“Copan was **at the far southern reaches of the Maya World,” Hillary says as** we explore the ruins in the mud and pouring rain. **“The ancients called this city Ux Witik. A river made the area fertile for their corn fields. Teotihuacano traders reached here. One theory is that the Teotihuacanos established the city’s first dynasty.”**

“C'est possible. Now to the ballcourt. Walking about an ancient Mesoamerican ballcourt is like a stroll in Chapultepec park. I can image being one of the pitzl players. Aiming a hard ball off their hips and thighs.”

“Talk about acting off the hip.”

“Sometimes they used an enemy’s head as a ball.”

“Like the game Afghan horsemen play. Only I think they used a goat head.”

“It’s called Buzkashi and they players use an entire goat carcass.”

“Not for me. Guss I’m not much of one for sports.”

We spend most of the afternoon at the Hieroglyphic Stairway so Hillary can take endless pictures of more than 2000 glyphs. “This is another favorite Maya structure of mine,” I say. “After the Copan ballcourt. In fact, it’s why I why I took that job with the National Institute of Anthropology.”

Hillary pauses for a moment and snaps a photo of me at the stairwell bottom. **“I bet you’re sometimes sorry you quit your job with the NIA. You would’ve lived here a while.”**

“Alors. I’m much more intrigued to be with you on the hunt for an ancient codex.” Hillary smiles and hands me her camera to photograph her before the stairwell. “You know,” I say as I snap a few photos. “These steps are like life. Each commemorates the epochs of sixteen kings from the founding father Great Sun Quetzal Macaw.”

“How’s that like life?”

“They records each king’s births, ascensions to the throne, deaths, and the wars he waged. That’s life. Were born, struggle, wage war, reach the crowning apex, but we all die no matter who we are or what we’ve accomplished.”

“We should all be kings. Or queens.” I hand her the camera. “Unfortunately,” she adds as she takes closeups of the glyphs. “Early archaeologists disassembled everything they sloppily tried to but the steps back together. Makes it hard for modern archaeologists to decipher. That was to be part of the NIA research job I quit. “

“That too is like life. Random and haphazardly upset by other people. By acts of nature.”

“That too,” Hillary says. “The twelfth king of Copan is the top stair. He ruled 67 years. As long as king Pakal of Palenque. He died at age 91 and his son 18 Rabbit entombed him under the Hieroglyphic Stairway.”

“I love the name 18 Rabbit. He was a great ruler as well. Reigned over 40 years and built many of the monuments, stelae, and altars at this site.”

I take her hand and we walk among the tall stelae of 18 Rabbit. “These stelae connect 18 Rabbit’s life to celestial events and the creation story,” Hillary tells me as we stop at one stela. She takes a photo of me with my arm around the king 18 Rabbit. “This stela is 18 Rabbit portraying himself as the Maize God Reborn holding the double-headed serpent staff as a sign of his divinity. It also records that Copan allied with Tikal, Palenque, and neighboring Quirigua.”

“Would you like to drive to Quirigua?” I ask.

“I don’t think we have enough time. What’s interesting is that 18 Rabbit installed the king of Quirigua then fourteen years later, under the support of the Calakmul Kaan, that same king of Quirigua sacked Copan and beheaded 18 Rabbit.”

“Why do you think that happened?”

“Tikal had just defeated the Kaan and the snake kings sought revenge and control of the jade mines near Quirigua.”

“That’s the name of the game. Install, ally, betray and kill.”

“That’s a little harsh, teddy.”

“Maybe. But so is life.”

“About the time the Europeans discovered Palenque, Diego Garcia del Palacio discovered Copan in the name of king Philip II of Spain. Colonel Juan Galendo excavated

Copan less than ten years before John Lloyd Stephens purchased the site for $50 and made the Maya ruins world famous. His book inspired my great-great-granddad to explore the ruins for himself. He even learned the art of bloodletting as a way of ingratiating himself with the natives."

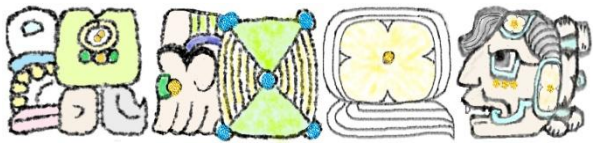
"Bradly Nolan, a man after my heart."

"Like I said I think you are him, if that makes sense. It does at least to me."

I take her in my arms before the 18 Rabbit maze god reborn. She seems to melt in my arms. "Maybe we'll make love tonight so you can dream of being Jaguar Blood Moon as Maze God Reborn. A dream is a vision without the use of hallucinatory drugs."

"Make love? Are you sure teddy?"

"I'm sure. After passionate love you'll fall into your ancestor's spirit. Align your troops for battle. You'll maneuver to overcome your adversaries."



Chapter 22: Yol Tan, *1 Kimi 14 Xul*

By the time my brother was a three-katun lord he no longer led his scar dog warriors into battle nor did he travel on long journeys. He commanded maneuvers from his popol naj at the Red Palace. B'aah Ch'ok, Second Son, and nacom lords led the scar dog troops **to fight for Pakal**.

When my brother learned of Hummingbird Sun's betrayal, he sent the b'aah ch'ok on a mission to sack the Kaan vassal city of Bonampak and he appointed Second Son Kan Xul as the **Officer in Charge of a Venus War operation to sack Bone Dog.**

Pakal named Yax K'uh, my beloved Precious Owl, as nacom to Kan Xul and commander of five Scar Dog regiments and one battery of Alemehenob elite warriors. Their mission was to defeat the Kaan who had infiltrated Bone Dog, capture Hummingbird Sun for sacrifice, install me as the ruling queen, **and defend the interests of the Jaguar dynasty at the southern river trade route.**

On the morning three stars conjoined, Second Son Kan Xul and nacom Yax K'uh led Scar Dog troops over the moats and walls of Bone Dog. Wearing shell helmets and cotton armor padded with packs of salt, and armed with blowguns, spears, shields, and maquahuitl clubs, Pakal's warriors slaughtered Kaan guards at the city gates. The nacom's offensive was to penetrate the palace with his Alemehenob team and take me under his personal care during the siege.

When Hummingbird Sun learned of the attack, he secured me and my lifelong servant in a lower chamber of the hilltop palace. He placed a Kaan guard before my door and said he was keeping me safe. This wasn't true. I was nothing to the king of Bone Dog but a valuable hostage.

Batabs and priests ushered my husband away from the city with his lords, stewards, and my son Tul Til. They planned to hide in a forest cavern until the battle was over and the king either returned to his palace victorious or retreated to the closest vassal city of the Kaan.

The basement where the king placed me was not meant for a queen. In the dark sweltering chamber, Star Flower and I held each other and listened to battle screams from the plaza down the hill. The cacophony was worse than a thousand screeching bats and the skirmish seemed to last many kins but it ended when evening fell.

At that time, a palace guard escorted me and my servant to the king's receiving hall. Bone Dog lords crowded around the room, along with elite warriors of the Kaan. Hummingbird

Sun was sitting on his throne dressed in full regalia. Tul Til was on the bench beside him bearing a smile of contentment. Several scar dog warriors with their hands bound behind their backs kneeled on the floor before the throne platform.

My heart filled with dread when I saw Second Son and Yax K'uh among them, stripped of their pectorals, weapons, and Tlaloc shell helmets, and with their hands tightly bound behind their backs. I quickly understood that Pakal's surprise assault led by Second Son and Yax K'uh had failed. The Kaan had outwitted Pakal. With the support of Overlord Yuknoom, I later learned, Bone Dog had prepared for the siege and three flanks of Kaan warriors stood ready for battle at the back hills of the city.

Attendants helped the king stand before his captives. His shouts across the hall shook the macaws off their perches. "On behalf of the Great Yuknoom, I, Great Hummingbird Sun of Bone Dog, have captured the second son and nacom of the Jaguar king. They are my hostages. If Pakal fails to pay ransom, I'll sacrifice them to the gods on a day priests deem auspicious."

A Kaan general then spoke and called upon surviving scar dog warriors to join his troops or he would behead them. Some joined to spare their own lives and those who didn't remained as captives for the king to behead after a Victory Game in the city's ballcourt.

Hummingbird Sun held the games when Fang Moon appeared at sunrise. From a northern platform in the ballcourt, the king watched the game. Tul Til and I sat beside him. I didn't want to witness the sacrificial games but my husband commanded me to attend.

During the day long games, Second Son and my beloved Yax K'uh valiantly engaged the opposing team of Kaan warriors. Their efforts were futile because they couldn't win. The king was holding the games only to further humiliates his captives.

Before sunset, King Hummingbird Sun declared victory for the Kaan team and his guards tied and bound all the scar dog warriors and forced them to kneel before the northern platform. The king had several of Pakal's men beheaded. It was a gruesome sight. I noticed that each sacrifice excited my b'ayal Tul Til.

Instead of sacrificing the second son of Pakal, my husband freed him to return to Abundant Waters to shame his father and relate the ransom price for his nacom. He then imprisoned Yax K'uh in the palace basement where he had held me during the failed siege.

Later that same night, Hummingbird Sun surprised me with a visit in my bed chamber. I had believed he'd no longer trouble me and that Yuknoom would give him a young Kaan princess to please him. But my assumption proved faulty.

The king sat at my bed platform with his walking staff and attendant. "During the victory games," he said. "I was impressed with the distinctive ballcourt skills and strategies of Pakal's second son. I want another heir from you, sister of Pakal. I want you to give me a second son."

That night, I tried to comply with my husband's wishes but he was too drunk after celebrating his victory games. He failed to join me in congress. This outraged the old king. He blamed me for lacking allure and began lashing me with his staff while his attendant braced his stance. In his anger, the king yelled, "I'll sacrifice Yax K'uh even if Pakal pays the ransom price if you fail to give me a second son within the year."

When the king left my chamber I lay on my mat, stared at the ceiling glyphs, and agonized for Yax K'uh lingering in a basement chamber, uncertain of his fate. I feared he'd die from starvation or illness because of his captivity. I didn't know if the king would release him or sacrifice him in the ballcourt. My heart urged me to act but there was nothing I could do. His fate

wasn't in my hands. I called on the power of K'awiil to allow me to have congress with Yax K'uh and conceive his heir. Boy or girl, son or daughter, it didn't matter.

"Sky K'awiil," I prayed. "Awaken itz k'uh, the sacred winds of all gods. Bring forth in my womb Ta Ochle, a bloodline heir for Yax K'uh before he enters the rainbow road of no return."

The next morning, I consulted with my personal healer about the king's demand for a second son. Ol Nitt again provided me with herbs to increase my fertility. She advised the king when to return to my bed at my most fertile moon. As much as I trusted Ol Nitt, I knew she was foremost a loyal sister to the king. She might grow suspicious and advise her brother **if I told her my plan was to somehow have congress with Yax K'uh and make the king believe he had filled me with his seed**.

I remembered something Yax K'uh had said at the bee hives. *Stealth is a warrior's best strategy. What one ally knows others need not.* And so, instead of asking the king's sister for a potent sleeping drug, which I intended to give the king while I found my way to Yax K'uh, I enlisted the help of Star Flower. I still didn't trust my lifelong servant but I really had no choice. I told her that the king had trouble sleeping after our congress. "I simply need to help him rest. And please don't spread this as gossip. The king hears every word echoed through the court and he's sensitive about his potency as a man. He demands I give him a second son."

My request elated Star Flower because I had asked for her help instead my healer's. She promised to prepare a maize cake to help the king sleep like a baby jaguar sated with mother's milk.

When I was at my most fertile moon, the king stumbled into my chamber with two young attendants bracing his every step. They eased him onto my bed platform.

Dressed in a white sheath and red sash of cotton weave, I lay on my bed, my head propped on jaguar pillows. Hummingbird Sun looked me up and down and said in his decrepit voice, “Tonight, you will conceive my second son and I shall name him Kan Xul.”

“I beg your pardon for saying this, Lord Husband. But it is *you* who makes conception happen. It is *you* who issues the seed.” I couldn’t help but speak the truth. I felt empowered by the spirit of K’awiil. I knew the winds of Chaac would make magic happen that night. For me and Yax K’uh, My Precious Owl. My beloved Mok Chi.

“Insolent Jaguar bride,” the old king scolded. “You make it happen or you die by my own blade along with the nacom of Pakal.” He stood at the bed platform with the aid of his staff. I knew he was about to swipe my head so I rose and helped him sit back down. As graciously as I could, I poured my husband a ceramic vessel of balche and gave it to him with the maize cake from Star Flower. “My servant made this cake to help you retain your potency.”

The king looked at me with sneering eyes and ravenously drank down the balche and bit into the cake. Before he could even wash down the crumbs, he fell unconscious on the floor.

I called for the attendants outside the door and they placed the king on my bed. Then I summoned a trusted kuleboob guard.

When the kuleboob entered my chamber, he looked at the sleeping king then at me.

“Yes, the king sleeps,” I told him. “Now I bid you take me to see Yax K’uh. The nacom knows me from my childhood days in Pakal’s City. The king has asked me to gather intelligence concerning Pakal’s next maneuver. No one but your queen can persuade the nacom to betray the intelligence of his Holy King Pakal.”

By torchlight, the kuleboob led me down the stone steps to the basement corridor. With each step I took, the stench of urine intensified.

At the bottom of the stairway, two Kaan guards were standing at a curtained door. “I dismiss you,” I said but they didn’t budge.

One man uttered, “I beg your Lady’s pardon. Why do you arrive here during the time of sleep?”

“Do you question your queen?” I approached the door ready to open the curtain myself and defy the king’s guards. “The nacom will talk to me but not without assurance that I don’t bring trickery. For my husband and his new Overlord Yuknoom, I seek to learn Pakal’s intentions. I command you move aside so I may proceed with my orders.” I listened to my own voice echo through the basement corridor.

The guards departed and I ordered the kuleboob to stand vigil outside the door and alert me if anyone should happen along. Although K’awiil had filled me with power, **I still feared my husband would awaken and come to the basement to check on his hostage, or to check on me. Star Flower could have reasoned out my plot and informed the king. I just didn’t know what might happen.**

Upholding my torch spitting smoke and flames, I closed the curtain and entered the dark and dank room. It had a pot for making water and another for drinking and a plate of uneaten corn cakes. The copal burning in the room didn’t conceal the smell of blood, urine, sweat, and sickness. Attendants purified the room with incense to keep the captive’s spirit alive so the king could decide when the Death Lords would receive him.

In the dim light, I saw Yax K’uh slumped against the far stone wall. He was sitting on a mat of woven jade palm, prepared to meet his demise like a brave warrior. His head was bowed and his matted hair retained the blood and mud from the games. He wore only a loin cloth and sandals made of deer hide.

“Mok Chi, younger brother,” I called. He raised his head. I saw abrasions on his face, legs, and arms. Battle wounds of a scar dog warrior.

“Who goes there,” he asked unable to see my face beyond the light I upheld.

“Ix Cab, Lady Beekeeper,” I said and walked toward the water pot, took off my sash of cotton weave, and dipped it into the warm water. I approached Yax K’uh, placed my torch on the stone floor, and washed his face, arms and legs.

I lay with him on the palm mat and placed my head on his shoulder**. Although his breath was heavy**, Yax K’uh related how he came to the city to steal me away from Bone Dog and take me back to Abundant Waters. “I would convinced our Holy King Pakal to permit our marriage, Lady Beekeeper.”

I told him that Hummingbird Sun beat me with his staff and kept my b’ayal from my embrace. I described the king’s Purity Test at Lake Turtle Macaw and related my ruse to see him this night under the powers of K’awiil.

He laughed for the first time.

“The impotent king now sleeps in my bed,” I continued to say. “I’m fertile and have drunk a brew to make me conceive. I want your child, my beloved Mok Chi. A child from the love of K’awiil, not from cruel spirits of Xibalba.”

“The gods speak by your powers of wit,” he told me as I lay in his arms. “Tonight, I plant my seed for our harvest until the end of all time.”

Before the break of first light, the kuleboob at the door alerted me. I hastened back to my private chamber before the king stirred and noticed my absence. I shook him awake and said he had succeeded in having relations with me. Instead of being happy, he grew angry because he couldn’t remember our union. He accused me of sorcery and hit my face with his fist. Then he

called for his guard. The same kuleboob who accompanied me to the basement entered the chamber. The man was equally loyal to me and the king.

Out of the king's hearing, I convinced the kuleboob to keep secret my meeting with the nacom. "You must not further confuse our Holy King," I explained. "A fickle minded spirit taints him. He may not remember he ordered me to gather intelligence from his captive. I assure you, kuleboob, you have performed a great service to your kingdom and your queen will reward you with riches."

In the days and nights to follow, I never again met with Yax K'uh because the king no longer came to my bed chamber. Still, I feared that if I left my room at night to secretly meet with my beloved, the king would return looking to bed me again.

By the end of the next lunar cycle, I knew I was carrying a child, the secret seed from Yax K'uh. I convinced the king that the fetus was from the night he came to my chamber and that he simply didn't remember our joining in union.

It was about this time that an envoy from my brother arrived in Bone Dog. The messenger stood before the throne of Hummingbird Sun and said, "King Pakal knows his nacom is too great a treasure to return, even with tribute paid. In his holy words *Bone Dog chooses the support of Yuknoom and negotiations with a traitor are futile."*

The king immediately ordered the envoy beheaded. He then dispatched a messenger to Abundant Waters to inform Pakal that he, King Hummingbird Sun, vassal of Kaan Overlord King Yuknoom, was sacrificing his captive nacom to the gods of Bone Dog. He sent no word to Pakal about my fate or that I was again with child. **My husband planned to keep me safe because his priests claimed I carried his second son. And besides, Hummingbird Sun**

couldn't sacrifice me because his citizens revered me for my conjuring powers of two royal bloodlines.

Two-hundred and sixty sunrises after the failed attack, the king held the public sacrifice of Pakal's nacom at the ballcourt. At the north end of the playing field streamers of corn silk and stalks with husks surrounded the royal platform. Tul Til, who had seated six stones, sat next to the king on his double-headed jaguar throne. The two were inseparable.

By the king's orders, I sat beside him holding my newborn daughter Jade Moon 1 Rabbit. I named my beloved child after the mother of Yax K'uh. This time, the king didn't take my baby from me because it wasn't the promised second son. In fact, anger consumed him over my producing a girl. He called me a sorcerous and Jade Moon an ill-omen. I feared for my beloved daughter's life and rarely, if ever, did I let her free from my arms. Each moment, since my daughter's birth ten kins before, I implored the gods to keep her alive and viable, despite my old husband's curses.

At the center of the ballcourt was a round stone marker dedicated to the first king of Bone Dog, Foliated Fire Cloud. Beside it, Hummingbird Sun dedicated a new marker with glyphs recording his recent victory over Pakal.

When the sun passed zenith, the citizens cheered as warriors escorted Yax K'uh to the arena's center. I was horrified at the sight of warriors marching my Precious Owl to his death. I tightly held Jade Moon.

Priests blared conch shells and beat turtle shell drums. I looked at the b'aah ch'ok Tul Til as he excitedly clapped when a Kaan batob coerced Yax K'uh to his knees at my husband's stone marker. They had bound his hands behind his back.

When my baby whimpered, I fed her my milk but kept my eyes on her father, my beloved Mok Chi. The cheering crowd awaited the blood sacrifice. They hoped to witness the captive's essence fly to the sky as a hummingbird spirit. The sacrifice would ensure the gods brought bountiful harvests to the citizens of Great Hummingbird Sun and his Kaan Overlord Yuknoom.

The king stood at the edge of the platform, supported by his attendant, and raised his K'awiil scepter. He demanded the nacom invoke his ancestors and gods to give their powers to his kingdom. But instead, Yax K'uh called out the names *Ix Cab* and *Kaywak U*. The king didn't realize he was chanting my name and the name of our daughter. My husband believed my beloved Mok Chi was calling the name of his mother.

Yax K'uh then began chanting for the Lords of the Watery Underworld to cause the king a gruesome and painful death. "Lords of Death." His voice echoed through the ballcourt. "Take Hummingbird Sun to the houses of blades, bats, and fire in the dungeons of Xibalba. Cause him eternal agony for the harm he casts upon Earth. Upon my beloved. Your victory is short-lived, foul king. The Lords of Death will take you down the dark road of no return. You'll never enter the portal to the highest branches of the Maya Tree."

Outraged, the king signaled the execution. The batob stood over the captive. With a sharp obsidian blade, he severed the nacom's head in a long tortuous process that pleased the spectators, especially my son. They cheered as if the king himself had just bloodlet on their behalf. Hummingbird Sun then ordered a dispatch to Abundant Waters to give King Pakal the head of his nacom with the message that the king of Bone Dog remains loyal to the Great Yuknoom.



Chapter 23: Hillary, *Tikal*

"Lookie here. A little deer rodent greeting us Frank," I say as we enter Tikal National Park. Because of its remoteness in the Petén rainforest, only a few tourists are around.

"Regarder." Frank points at a tall straight palm with orchids. "A spider monkey also comes to greet us."

Once inside the park, we head straight to Temple IV, the tallest pyramid the fifth king of Tikal had built. To reach the top platform we climb a series of ladders that jungle vines and roots nearly consume. "I feel like I'm back in the days of Stephens and

Catherwood," I tell Frank as we climb. On the other side, we hike down a steep path that offers a spectacular view of the thick multi-layered rainforest canopy.

"This is why the ancient Mayas believed in so many levels of heaven above Earth," Frank suggests.

"Good point." I stop to catch my breath and drink from my bottle of water. I share it with Frank. He seems equally out of breath but is lighting a Gauloises, as he always does. I step aside to avoid the smoke and sit on the bottom step. "You know," I say after. "John Lloyd Stephens made it as far as Lake Petén but didn't reach these ruins." Frank sits beside me. He smells sweaty or maybe it's me. I also smell his Versaci cologne.

"Vraiment?"

"The Lacandons told him that beyond lake Petén was a mysterious city. One never reached by white men. I remember from his book."

"Did Bradly Nolan make it here?" Frank snuffs out his cigarette. "Is it in the diary?"

"Ah yes. The diary. No, I haven't forgotten, Teddy Bear. You'll be the first to read it other than me."

"I know. After you become a world famous astroarcheologist. Like Howard Carter."

"Carter was just an archaeologist, Frank. Not an archaeoastronomer." Frank chuckles. "No, Bradly never made it to Tikal and Daddy and I only traveled to the sites in Mexico. As I've told you."

“What do you know about this ancient metropolis?” Frank asks. “I’ve been here only a few times as a tourist to see the sight. It’s not one of the places near to my business connections.”

“I wish you’d tell me more about this business of yours.”

“I will.”

“I know. When I share the diary.” We both chuckle. “As for Tikal, the ancients called their city Yax Mutul after their founder Yax Enb’ Xook. He ruled between 100 and 200 AD. Very early in Classic Maya history.”

Frank puts his arm around me.

“Now I’m certain I smell our sweat mingle,” I joke.

Frank chuckles. “I heard a great queen ruled Tikal. I mean Yax Mutul.”

“That’s right, teddy. Archaeologists believe that the 12th ruler was Une Balam or Baby Jaguar.”

“She must have been the earliest ruling Maya queen.”

“Three hundred years Before Jaguar Blood Moon.”

“Fascinating.”

“It really is. Each tidbit I learn about ancient Maya history is like uncovering a treasure.”

“A good analogy. Like finding a new and valuable antiquity.” Frank pulls me into a hug and a short kiss. “How did Baby Jaguar become ruler in a patrilineal culture?”

“From what I’ve read Great Flint Claw took the throne from Baby Jaguar and made Tikal a superpower in the Maya world. He died at the same time a warlord name Fire Born arrived in Tikal.”

“Fire Born? I love the name.”

“Archaeologists believe Fire Born was an emissary of Spearthrower Owl, the ruler of Teotihuacan. It appears Fire Born may have killed Great Flint Claw and installed the son of Spearthrower Owl under the authority of Teotihuacan.”

“A political move after my heart. It happened throughout French, Roman and British royal history. The Normans invaded Britain, and so did the Romans and Anglo Saxons and Vikings.”

“Each time the invaders became the rulers. With the force of Teotihuacan behind it, Yax Mutal expanded its power over the Maya world, except for the cities the snake kings controlled. Tikal, Palenque, and Copan were vassals of Spearthrower Owl. They adopted his Tlaloc-Venus warfare techniques.”

“What about our queen Baby Jaguar?”

“I don’t know. Not much has been uncovered. But there was another ruling queen of Tikal.”

“Who? Baby Macaw?”

“No. The Lady of Tikal. She took the throne at age six and for sixteen years she co-ruled with her husband.”

“Palenque had a ruling queen as well.”

“Three queens of power, in fact. Pakal’s mother Sak K’uk, his wife, and a ruling queen named Lady Yohl who may have been related to Pakal and Sak K’uk.”

“What happened to Lady Yohl?”

“Kaan King Scroll Serpent invaded Palenque and Lady Yohl surrendered. The Kaan broke Palenque’s spirit and might, for a while. King Pakal restored his city.”

“The snakes didn’t like queens?”

“As is often the case. One theory suggests that the Kaan wanted to destroy Palenque’s bloodline and stop the foreign influence of Teotihuacan. The same with Tikal. The rulers of Tikal stopped using Teotihuacan imagery when under Calakmul’s authority.”

“How did the superpower Tikal fall to the snakes?”

“A king named Yuknoom became the greatest ruler of the Kaan dynasty. He was the snake equivalent of Pakal.”

“Or, 18 Rabbit of Copan.”

“Maybe. People called Yuknoom the “Shaker of Cities.” He forced a split in Tikal’s royal family between brothers Sky Hammer and the ruling king Nuun Chaac. Yuknoom installed Sky Hammer as king in a snake vassal city. Eventually, Sky Hammer, under the Kaan, attacked Tikal and defeated King Nuun.”

“Sky Hammer? What a splendid name, like Thor’s hammer. The Mjolner. Any more queens sparrow?”

“As a matter of fact, Sky Hammer’s daughter Lady Six Sky became a ruling queen of another Kaan city. Sky Hammer sent her there in a marriage alliance. The people revered her because of her royal blood ties to both Tikal and Calakmul.”

“Hard to beat that.”

“Lady Six Sky was a go between queen for the two superpowers. Under the Kaan, she led ten wars on behalf of her son before he turned ten. She was one of the greatest warrior queens of the Classic Period, along with, perhaps, the two ruling queens of Yax Mutul, the warrior queen of Coba, and of course Jaguar Blood Moon. To date, I’ve

deciphered that Jaguar Blood Moon led a military campaign to Tikal where she observed a Venus transit of the sun. Like I did in Paris before I arrived in Mexico City."

"Imagine that, little sparrow." Frank takes my hand. "You've learned more history about the Maya than I ever knew. And just in a few months you've deciphered the codex from the old pictures you shared. When will you share the diary?"

"When you tell me about your businesses and your boyhood in Paris? I want to know."

"Forget that for now. Focus on your knowledge and the spirit of the warrior queen. To transform, to enter the portal of Ek' way-nal, you must let go of your storehouse of knowledge and see yourself as your own warrior queen. You must let the spirit of Jaguar Blood Moon become who you are."



Chapter 24: Jaguar Blood Moon
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When Jade Moon 1 Rabbit seats her second stone, I decide to facilitate the king's demise. He's lived long enough and needn't torment me or my daughter any further. Once again, Star Flower is my only option for help.

With carefully chosen words, I ask her for a potent brew that eases pain and brings about peaceful sleep. "It's for my own needs," I say. "I'm experiencing restless nights without sleep."

Star Flower gladly helps me, as I knew she would. She strives to be in my good graces so she can enjoy advantages over other courtiers in the servants' quarters.

On a night the full moon turns blood red, I arrive at the king's bedroom door. My visit is unusual but the guard allows me entrance. "I am the queen," I say. "My moon is full because of Blood Moon."

The king is lying on his bed platform restlessly attempting to sleep. When he sees me, he yells, "Why are you in my room? I want no more daughters from you, sister of Pakal!"

"I bring you a brew for your ailments, Lord Husband." I approach the platform, help him sit and offer the ceramic vessel I carry.

"What's this?" he asks with a slur. The king's nightly balche has already left him intoxicated and his behavior is unusually passive.

"It's a brew of pulque mixed with potent medicines and extra honey to hide the bitter taste.

"Medicines? I don't trust this brew. I don't trust you."

"I'll drink some myself, Lord Husband. To prove you wrong." I feign taking a sip while knowing a small amount won't harm me. Although, I fear he may see through my scheme. But he doesn't say anything more. He's truly ailing. He takes my vessel and smells it. I know he only smells the honey.

“Well, all right, mother of my son. I do feel unrest in my bones.” He shakily takes the vessel as I hold my breath. Perhaps because we’re not in my bed chamber and his attendants aren’t around, he isn’t lashing at me. Or maybe my appearance confounds him. I help him hold the cup as he drinks with trembling cold hands. He then lies on his bed and makes a quick, exasperated snort like a peccary’s last gasp after the butcher’s knife enters its heart.

I stand at the platform and whisper near my husband’s grizzled head, “I call upon the Lords of Death, Gathered Blood, father of Blood Moon, One Scab, Flying Puss, Disease and Decay. Great K’awiil, take Hummingbird Sun on the dark journey of no return. Lock him in the house of bats in Xibalba. Hurl flint blades of fire at him. Cause him never-ending agony for the death he cast upon my beloved.”

I then gather up the vessel, wipe my husband’s drooling mouth and return to my chamber.

At daybreak, a trusted kuleboob informs me that attendants found the Great Hummingbird Sun struggling for one last breath.

Although I paid an unexpected visit to his chamber the night before, his lords don’t suspect me of casting harm upon the king. He was sickly and old. They believe his union with me caused his heart to erupt and they don’t blame me for that. In fact, they find it amusing and are glad for the king. They believe in the last throws of his life, he took a woman to bed.

I feel no remorse or need for atonement. I merely nudged the feeble king into the inevitable. And there were no witnesses to my cursing the decrepit old man or my offering him a special brew.

I immediately send word to Pakal that the king has passed. I implore my brother to restore the broken alliance between the Jaguar Kingdom and Bone Dog and plead for his support

as I aim to sever the Kaan strangle-hold on my adopted city. Most of Bone Dog's elite lords and generals swear their allegiance to me as co-regent and ruling queen until the b'aah ch'ok comes of age. A few of the king's closest advisors flee the city and join the Kaan in their snake capital far north of Yax Mutul.

Before rumors sway my citizens against me, I hold a public rally at the bottom of the palace hill in front of the central plaza. To portray myself as the Moon goddess and a powerful new ruler, I wear a belt that dangles spondylus shells with glyphs of Chac Xib Chaac, and a netting of jade beads over a knee-length huipil. My headdress of paper bark has the glyphs of my patron goddess Blood Moon.

While I'm speaking to my citizens, my daughter is beside me with her nurse. Tul Til 5 Caiman is nowhere in sight. I don't trust the heart of the crown prince, especially now that he's seated eight stones. His manners toward me are unpredictable. And I don't want to alarm my citizens with his bad behavior while reassuring them that I'm their ruling queen. People aren't aware of the rift between their late king and me. They don't know that the b'aah ch'ok and his mother haven't bonded in kinship. Citizens only understand that now they must look to me for guidance. They believe my bloodline powers will assure Bone Dog of prosperity and that when my son is of age, he will take the mat of accession. Secretly, I'm hoping that day will never happen.

Before my gathered citizens I uphold the staff of K'awiil and announce the king's passing. "Priest healers have declared the king entered the road as a natural course of his age. He's been ailing for many years and now suffers no more."

Rumbles of concern wave through the crowd. I must quickly appease their fears. "The king is gone but our city will not fall. You'll not starve and die from disease and petulance," I

announce. “I’ll conjure the power of the Jaguar lineage and that of my mother Lady Rigel, Star of Creation, descendant of your first king Foliated Fire Cloud.”

The citizens cheer for my bloodlines and call on me to lead them to bountiful harvests and victories.

When the next Fang Moon appears with the morning star, I ascend to the throne at a public ceremony before the steps leading to my palace. A sacred fire burns beside a newly erected stela marking my birth, my arrival in Bone Dog, and my ascension to the jaguar throne on this day 12 Ik’ 15 Yax K’in. The stela notes that my precious daughter is present at the seating but deliberately omits the name of my son.

On a platform beside the steps, I sit cross-legged before my bloodletting vessel. To prepare for the Venus blood sacrifice to the gods and to my bloodline, I purified myself in a sweat bath and drank a hallucinogenic brew. Jade Moon sits on the platform with a nurse and her brother Tul Til. By my request, Star Flower has given my son a special brew and he now sits passively. I didn’t want him at the ceremony because of his disruptive behavior but the citizens call for his presence. I must assure them I’m keeping their world in order. Tul Til 5 Caiman is their future king in the direct patriline of Foliated Fire Cloud.

A priest hands me a lighted cigar laced with herbs that numb my sense of touch but increase my powers of perception. I pierce my tongue with a sting ray spine and pass a cord of thorns through the hole. The pain is nearly undetectable, like the bite of a royal stingless bee. My blood drips onto bark paper in the stone bowl. The glyphs on the blood-stained paper say *Chac Xib Chaac, god who upholds the rising sun and paints the sky blood red*.

I light the paper with the cigar. Priests blow conch shells, chant, and throw copal and chicle sap onto the fire. As the smoke rises, I call out, “Lady Rigel, my mother, great-great-granddaughter of the first king of Bone Dog. By the powers of K’awiil, appear before me in my butz chan vision.”

From the flames smoke plumes surround me like an umbilical cord to the cosmos. Ek’ way-nal opens and the smoke spews forth a hazy vision that fades in and out as if a snake opens and closes its maw. The face of a queen wearing the helmet of Tlaloc Chaac Ek appears. She materializes like a misty apparition in a pirate mirror.

“Are you my mother, Lady Rigel?” I ask.

Daughter of Lady Rigel the vision faintly speaks. *I’m Lord Pakal’s mother Sak K’uk.*

Her words hum like swarming wasps at the break of dawn. “What words do you speak? Mother of my brother. *Kaloomte Lakamha Ajaw Ix,*” I ask the countenance in my snake vision. “I summoned my bloodline mother, Lady Rigel? Why do you appear before me?”

I am your bloodline. The voice becomes clear.

“You are first wife to my father Precious Jaguar Macaw,” I say. “You’re a great queen, like Lady Yohl. Like Une Balam and Lady Yax Mutul. But you’re not my mother. Lady Rigel of Bone Dog, second wife to your husband, is the vision I seek through the hazy portal of Ek’ way-nal.”

I am your granddam the voice declares.

I clasp my head to focus on the vision through the portal to the world beyond. Jade Moon 1 Rabbit stirs on the platform, aware of my agitation.

Your father is not my husband Precious Jaguar Macaw. Your sire is my son King Pakal, lover to your mother. Lady Rigel now serves my husband in the world beyond the rainbow road.

I hold my head tighter. It pounds from what I hear. “What words do you offer me, mother of the Jaguar kingdom? I fail to understand.”

Heed what I tell you, queen of Bone Dog, daughter of my lineage tree. The demons of Xibalba possess the soul of Hummingbird Sun. The seed of your harvest Tul Til contains tainted blood from your husband. He’s a rapacious caiman and will manifest your demise. The daughter of your harvest will carry forth the bloodline of Lady Rigel and the lineage of your true father, my son. Jade Moon 1 Rabbit is guardian of your Maya Tree, Ya koknam wa te*. You will take the name of your father’s dynasty and your patron goddess. You are* Jaguar Blood Moon*. I place the Tlaloc Chaac Ek helmet on your head and give you the atl atl to wage war. The legitimate king of Yax Mutul resides under the foot of Yuknoom. Together with my son, your father, you’ll battle Kaan vassals and sacrifice Kaan lords to K’awiil. Because of you, my granddaughter, King Nuun will scatter Kaan blooddrops and restore Yax Mutul to its former greatness and glory.”*

I inhale my cigar and blow smoke onto the vision. “How can I honor my father Pakal now that I know my true bloodline?”

In two solar cycles you must lead an entrada of warriors to Yax Mutul. On 9 baktun 11 katun 16 tun 15 uinal 2 k’in, you will mark the Venus transit from atop the pyramid of Yax Mutul’s founding father. Your blood sacrifice will conjure powerful visions that show you how to proceed.

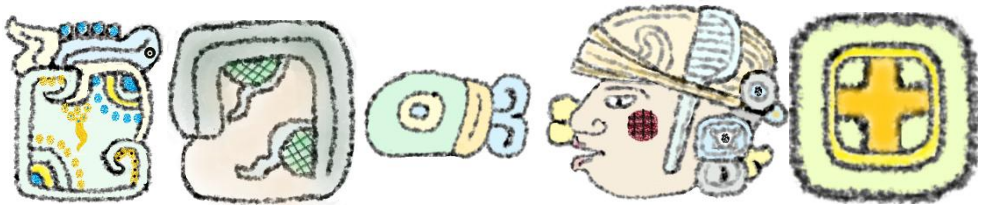
The priests beside the platform begin beating turtle shell drums. The flame of my bloodletting bowl intensifies and the vision dissipates in plumes of smoke until it’s no more.

I drink from my water cup. My attendant wipes my brow. I stand, face my citizens, and declare, “The Kaan king Yuknoom corrupted your king with the promise of power. My husband broke from the shield of King Pakal. Fear not citizens. The Great Queen Mother of Pakal has

revealed my regnal name. I am Jaguar Blood Moon. I take the power of K'awiil and invoke Chac Xib Chaac to make possible the harvest until the end of time."

The citizens cheer in waves of fervor. I gesture for their silence. "We now take allegiance with the Jaguar Kingdom and Yax Mutul. Until my son reigns by the power of K'awiil, I take up the warrior helmet of Tlaloc Chaac Ek to rid our kingdom of Kaan snakes. Citizens. Be not afraid. Listen to the highest voice of sky K'awiil. To your Holy Queen Jaguar Blood Moon. Be kind to one another but battle injustice without mercy and I promise you victory."

The crowd shouts, "Jaguar Blood Moon! *K'uh Ajaw Ix.* The queen's bloodline is strong and mighty. She is a wise woman with the heart of a fearless jaguar."



Chapter 25: Frank, *Stone Mountain City Where All Gods Unite*

From the Petén Rainforest, we drive 330 miles to Huehuetenango and spend the night at Hue Hue Hotel. The next morning, I escort Hillary to Zaculeu, the White Ruins.

"How often have you been here?" she asks as we wander among the stones. "I mean, you seem to go everywhere on your secret business dealings. Teddy bear."

"I was here only once, en réalité. When I came to Todo Santos to learn Mam and found a shaman for my apprenticeship. Master Antonio."

As we wander the Zaculeu ruins, I tell Hillary what I know about the history of these mountains. It's important I keep her impressed with my vast knowledge of her field. She must grow to trust me completely, as her spiritual guide, lover, and academic equal.

“The Maya have lived in the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes since 1500 BC,” I says as we rest on the steps of the Zaculeu pyramid arising from the lawns. In Mam *cuchy matan* means to unite with the force of God.”

“That seems fitting.”

“The Mam king Quicab the Great ruled these mountains until the Quiche Maya overtook the region during the time the Popul Vu was written.”

“Quicab? I like that name,” Hillary says as she takes my pictures on the steps.

“Me too. Zaculeu was his capital and part of an ancient trade route between Mexico and Huehuetenango.”

“Stephens and Catherwood surveyed Zaculeu,” Hillary tells me as I deeply inhale the fresh mountain air. “The year Queen Victoria died, my great-great-granddad visited this site on his way to Todos Santos to find the ancient queen’s tomb.”

“And here we are.” I place my arm over her shoulders, drawing her close to me. It’s something she likes me to do. “On our way to find the queen’s treasures. The coveted mysterious codex.”

Hillary rests her head on my shoulders and seems content. “Yes, Frank. I know we’re destined to find my ancestor’s tomb and with your help I’m learning the hidden mysteries of the codex of Jaguar Blood Moon.”

“Indeed, the ancient text is never far from my thoughts.”

From Hue Hue I maneuver up the mountain, around old trucks and buses chugging up and downhill belching out clouds of black smoke. We pass potato and milpa fields of beans, corn and squash, sheep and goat herders, pine trees, hemlocks, and apple and peach orchards.

As the sun breaks through clouds hovering above green patch-work mountains, we reach 8000 feet in elevation and pull into Todos Santos, the main town among the mountain villages of San Martin, Santiago, San Juan, Atilan, and Chimaltenango. The dry thin mountain air is about 70 degrees.

I drive down the cobblestone streets feeling a surge of nostalgia as I see women in denim blue skirts, red huipils, and woven shawls walking with their children and boys and men in red and white striped pants and blue shirts with embroidered broad collars, are sitting outside concrete shops crocheting handbags. I recognize some of them from the year I spent learning Mam at the Proyecto Lingistico in town.

That was ten years ago but the locals never change. Only the tourists pass through this village on their way to never becoming. Not me. I'm not a tourist. I'm a man on a mission to win.

"It's the mam custom for Men to crochet and women to weave," I tell Hillary as we approach the city's park. It still has its model of the mountains on a concrete table and a gazebo flanked by bougainvillea. Children from a nearby school are running into the park, shouting and cheering. It takes me back to my time here. Not to my boyhood. I never had a chance to run, play and shout in a park. I was too busy surviving on my own with the help of mes amies de rue. During my year of studying mam, I spent a lot of time in this park meeting with the locals who acquired the antiquities of my trade.

Just past the park is the whitewashed mud-brick Proyecto Linguistico with a large front veranda furnished with tables and chairs. A few months before, while Hillary was busy at the museum, I drove here and arranged for Hillary's three-month enrollment at the school. I know the head teacher Julian and asked him to arrange a homestay with a

village shaman. He introduced me to Mam Antonio. I've convinced Hillary that Master Antonio initiated me as a shaman. Antonio doesn't speak English or much Spanish and I'm not worried that Hillary will find out I really learned my spiritual skills under a master in Oaxaca. When I first met Hillary, I wanted her to think I had strong spiritual ties to these mountains so she would hire me as her spiritual guide. Once she accepted me, I was hardly going to confess the truth. Changing one's story midstream is a sure sign of weakness and vulnerability. It's something I never do. Unless it's a ploy in the ballcourt. I stick to my original story that way my thoughts never confuse me. This may be why I want to become both man and woman. As the god Ometeotl, with the power of all, the world can never confuse me or lead me astray.

Julian is expecting us and opens the front gate. My old friend warmly greets me and suggests I park beside the mango and peach trees in the front yard.

After introducing Hillary and making small talk in both Spanish and Mam, I arrange to leave the land rover for the night while I escort Hillary to the homestead. "I'm planning to leave tomorrow," I say.

"What?" Hillary asks. "I thought you'd spend a few days with me. Help me nestle in to the rustic conditions."

"Nestle in? What's that mean?"

"Adapt to the rudimentary rural conditions of the milpa farm."

"I would, little sparrow, but I'm eager to reach my apartment in Antigua and manage my affairs until the expedition in May." I kiss her head and draw her close.

"Your secret affairs, again." Hillary looks a Julian who only smiles. He knows I deal in antiquities and probably wonders if I've kept this from my girlfriend.

“You’ll learn soon enough. Maintenant, we need to get you nestled at the shaman’s homestead.”

I open the back of the Land Rover and Hillary slips on a gray Sun Devil’s sweatshirt to fend off the growing chill of evening. For the expedition, She’s fitted binoculars, a shortwave radio, a field phone, **Bradly Nolan’s machete, safari helmet, and compass,** And **dozens of books because she can’t use her laptop at the homestead** into two duffle bags that she plans to take to the homestead. Sometimes I can’t understand the complexities of this woman. She doesn’t seem reasonable about matters that I take for granted, such as traveling as lightly as possible.

I had previously warned Hillary that conditions at the shaman’s homestead were rudimentary and she’s not used to roughing it. ***There’s no electricity, the guest bed has fleas, and you’ll have to use an outhouse*** **I said. She hesitated at first but I suggested she needed to immerse herself in Mam and learn about Antonio’s ancestry.** ***Shamanism is typically passed down through the generations*** **I told her.** ***Any shaman in Todos Santos, including my master shaman, could be related to you by way of your great-great-great-granddad Grandfather Thunder.***

“**I suggest you take only a knapsack and leave the rest of your luggage in the school’s office with your laptop,” I tell her as I slip on my leather Versace jacket. “You can retrieve what you need while you attend your lessons each day. Take one book at a time to the milpa farm.” I wink at Julian who nods in agreement.**

“I want to take at least one of my duffel bags,” Hillary protests. “If I’m going to rough it, I need to be prepared for any kind of medical emergency. I plan on doing a lot of reading while at this homestead.”

After some back and forth I realize I can't convince this stubborn woman to be more practical. "D'accord. I suggest you bring one of your duffle bags to the homestead. Which one?"

"Let me arrange my things. It'll only take a minute."

After a good fifteen minutes, I heave Hillary's bag over my shoulder and we head down the main road of town. She carries her backpack and camera bag and is wearing a fanny pack stuffed with pens, notepads, a flashlight and batteries.

"This is too heavy," I tell her. "What's in it? A set of encyclopedias?"

"Don't be silly. Only the essentials. I'm going to live out in the wilds for three months, you know. With fleas."

"Remember, be Coyolxauhqui, the lady who loves spiders, gnats, and ants."

"Not a chance."

Down the street, outside a tiendra, I set aside the bag and enter the shop to buy a gift for Master Antonio. The inside smells of exhaust from the trucks and buses that make it into town. The back shelves are packed with Jesus statues wrapped in clear plastic, red packaged firecrackers, toilet paper, sacks of coffee, panela, and bottles of aguardiente.

"Life in Todos Santos depends on corn, sheep, and sugarcane brandy," I tell Hillary as I purchase two bottles of aguardiente and two packs of Payasos cigarettes, a Guatemalan brand with a clown on the package.

Outside the storefront I greet a young caballero passing by. His named Sergio. We've had previous dealings. Like everyone else I know in town, Sergio's glad to see me. I'm a generous man when dealing with the locals. I pay close attention to their habits and customs. People appreciate an outsider respecting their way of life which is why I

understand Hillary's decision to become a lineage shaman and enter the queen's tomb on the traditional date.

I hire my friend to help me carry Hillary's duffle bag to the homestead. Sergio and I each take a strap and from the edge of town we amble down a narrow muddy path through cornfields, over a trickling stream and up a steep hill. Hillary is struggling behind us with her knapsack, fanny pack, and hefty camera bag with the tripod attached.

I look back at her. "Comment ça va, sparrow? I told you, you have too many bags."

"Maybe, but I intend to take lots of pictures."

After about twenty minutes of trekking, the shaman's daughter Minga, short for Dominga, happens along. We greet each other and I introduce Hillary.

"Nice to meet you," Hillary says.

Without replying, Minga takes Hillary's three bags, heaves them on her head, and leads us on to the homestead. Sergio and I laugh.

"See, I told you little sparrow. You need to travel light."

"I know," she says as we follow Minga. "Maybe next time. For now, I'm just glad Minga came along."

At the homestead three whitewashed adobe brick houses sit on a hillside clearing. They're surrounded by maize fields and apple orchards.

"The shaman's son Eduardo lives in the bottom house with his wife, two daughters, and Mama Cat," I tell Hillary what I remember from my previous visit when I was making arrangements. "Master Antonio and his wife live in the house higher up the slope. The main house at the top of the hill is where Minga and her sister Rita live with their children."

“Rita and Minga?”

“Rita’s short for Margarita, like the drink.”

At the main house, the angling sunset illuminates a red woven tapestry hanging from the red tile roof. Before a split front door painted red with green trim, Rita sits at a handheld loom and four small children play on the sod veranda. Antonio’s old wife, Mim Antonella, is sitting on the ground sifting purple, red, and yellow beans through her fingers while blowing away the chafe.

“Farther up the slope are the pig pens and a corral with two plow horses and two stallions.

“I see them,” Hillary says.

“My brother rides the stallions during the races in the All Saints Festival, the biggest celebration of these mountains. My papa is too old,” Minga tells us in Spanish as her five-year-old son José tugs at Hillary’s sweatshirt. The dusty little boy takes her hand and leads her to the door.

“He’s used to foreign guests staying at the main house while they study at the Proyecto,” I say. “It’s how they make extra money for the All Saints Festival in November.”

Minga speaks to her mother in Mam and the old woman begins to laugh. “The story of your many bags amuses Mim Antonella,” I translate.

“Where’s her husband, Master Antonio?” Hillary asks. “I’m eager to meet him and learn what he might know about my ancestry.”

Hillary’s urgency is another characteristic of hers I find troublesome. She’s impatient sometimes and wants to immediately get to the crux of the matter at hand, so

unlike me. Although I eventually get to what I'm after and achieve my goals, I'm willing to step back and wait a moment to understand the players on the field and what's going on around me. I suppose you might say that while living on the streets of Paris, avec mes amis, I learned to be tactful about each of my plays.

I speak in Mam to Minga and Rita and explain to Hillary what they say. "Antonio went to the hospital. The sisters tell me."

"Hospital?" Hillary asks as if her hopes are dashed.

"Gas pains." Mim Antonella suggests by placing her hands on her stomach.

Before she can even comment on the news, José practically pulls Hillary inside the one room house. Sergio and I follow with her bag.

A central hearth is cooking a pot of beans filling the room with the aroma of chilies and garlic. The smoke exits through a smoke hole in the roof among ears of corn hang from the rafters.

"As with all Maya homes I've ever been to," I tell Hillary. "The hearth has three stones to represent the stones of creation,"

"I know," Hillary says as the boy giggles while still holding her hand. "The stones are the stars of Orion's belt. Alnitak, Saiph, and Rigel. Where the corn god reborn emerges from the celestial turtle's back."

Minga places Hillary's bags on the guest cot against the far wall. Sergio and I set her duffle bag at the foot of the bed. While Hillary unpacks in the remaining daylight, Sergio and I sit at the hearth and enjoy the fresh tortillas, guacamole, and beans Minga and Rita offer us.

'Where are you sleeping teddy?" Hillary stops her unpacking to ask.

“At the shaman’s house on another guest bed.”

Rita and her mother begin chucking maize for tomorrow’s tortillas, their faces glowing from the hearth fire. I glance across the dark room and see Hillary unpack flea spray. She pulls back the covers and sprays the cot.

I look back at the women now watching Hillary. They smile and nod at me probably wondering what my lady friend is doing. I’m almost sorry I warned Hillary about the primitive conditions of the homestead.

The next morning, I postpone my departure and escort Hillary to the town’s clinic to meet Master Antonio. We find him in a room with three other occupied cots. He’s thin, frail, toothless and looks puzzled after I greet him like he’s my old master shaman. He doesn’t seem to remember me the one time we met when I was making arrangements for Hillary’s stay.

“This is my friend Hillary, Mam Antonio,” I say. “The one I told you about. She’s staying with your daughters while she studies at the language school.” I gesture Hillary beside me at the old man’s bedside. “She’s the great-great-great-granddaughter of a Todos Santos master shaman. Like yourself.”

The old man grins at me as if I’ve made a joke. Or maybe he’s just proud of his occupation. I know I am.

“His name was Grandfather Thunder,” I continue. “You must know about him. At the beginning of the twentieth century. When Queen Victoria died.”

The old man mumbles something and I help him drink a glass of water from his bedside table. Suddenly, he perks up and starts speaking in Mam. I translate for Hillary as

she stands anxiously beside me with her knapsack over her shoulder. She's as eager as I am to find the treasures of her heritage.

"After the civil war and the genocide of my people," Mam Antonio says. "The world changed. These days everyone pays more attention to the church than to ancient ways. My position in the community dwindles. Death will be a welcome guest."

"Do you know about the shaman Grandfather Thunder from one hundred years ago?" Hillary impatiently asks me to translate.

Her question brings a grin to the old man's face. "Yes," he says. "Grandfather Thunder was a great healer. And so was his wife Itzamatul, Grace of the Skies. Like my wife Mim Antonella."

"Fantastic." Hillary nudges me. "Ask if he's heard of Bradly Nolan."

"All right, sparrow. All right." I tap Hillary's shoulder. "Patience."

I ask the old man and translates his words.

"He says he remembers stories about the foreign man. People call him the Sak Itz'at, the wiseman who became one of us. But Master Antonio also says that people never fully trusted him because he was an outsider. Antonio was born fifteen years after this foreign man left Guatemala. In those days, he says, everyone remembered the outsider. Antonio's father told him the Sak Itz'at pulled teeth and treated ailments by bloodletting."

Hillary grabs my arm. "That my Bradly."

"Antonio says the foreign man married the daughter of Grandfather Thunder then fled the village with treasures from the Cuchumatanes. His departure shocked the people of these mountains. They feared being cursed if they even mentioned his name."

"Cursed by Jaguar Blood Moon?" Hillary asks.

I ask the old man. He takes a deep breath and says more.

"He says the sak itz'at took his child. The mother died in childbirth, a sacrifice to the Almighty. That was the start of the curse. But he doesn't know about Jaguar Blood Moon."

Antonio closes his eyes. I take his hand.

"That child was Joseph Waldman my grandfather's father," Hillary exclaims. "I must have family in Todos Santos. Tell Master Antonio that he and I may be related."

The Shaman suddenly speaks in Mam.

"He suggests we visit the oldest living Mam in the Cuchumatanes. Her name is Grandmother Consuela May. She lives with her great niece in San Juan Village on Sun Mountain. All of her nine children are dead. Some died before reaching maturity others died during the genocide."

"What are we waiting for. Let's get started. We need to meet this old grandmother."

"Not so fast, sparrow. It's a long trek on the Sun Mountain trail to her village. We'll leave at the break of dawn."

"You've been there before."

"A few times."

I shake Antonio's hand and wish him a speedy recovery before we leave.

On the way back to the homestead, I'm quiet but my heart's racing. We've made such quick progress and are closer to finding the treasure. As I'm thinking about how I'll become who I am destined to be, Hillary interrupts my thoughts with a question. Just like a woman. Like a child really. Sometimes questions are so unnecessary and silence is the answer to everything. At least for me when my mind is strategizing.

“Are you sticking around a few more days? Teddy.”

“D’accord. I plan to remain until after we meet with Consuela May. I’m too intrigued by the notion of learning about Bradly Nolan, information that could lead to the ancient treasures. I can stay a few more days. My business and my contacts in Antigua will still be waiting for me.”

“What contacts in Antigua? Teddy.”

“In due time. We must now focus on Mam Consuela May. Tonight you need to get plenty of rest. Dream about your ancestor, the ancient queen. Call on her spirit to lead us to the codex, the story that will take us through the Ek’ way-nal portal.”

“Maybe. Maybe not. I haven’t found anything about this portal in my translations,” Hillary says.

“You’re always so rational. So logical. The glyphs can’t be fully interpreted in such a factual way. Tonight let the spirit of Jaguar Blood Moon translate the glyphs for you. See the picture words through her eyes. The brave eyes of antiquity.



Chapter 26: Jaguar Blood, Moon, *Bravery Test*

When I become ruling queen, Bone Dog has very few warriors of its own. Until my husband switched alliance to the Kaan, he relied on Pakal’s scar dog warriors. Then he relied on

sun bellied Kaan warriors. After Hummingbird Sun entered the dark road, the Kaan warriors fled Bone Dog to rejoin Yuknoom and his allies. But rumors quickly spread that they would return with reinforcements and Yuknoom himself to destroy the gods of my adopted city and sacrifice me and take the power of my bloodline.

To remedy this situation, I summon men from the cities allied with the Jaguar Kingdom, including Ux Witik, Edzna, Coba, and Stone Mountain City Where All Gods Unite to join my entrada to Yax Mutul and wage war against the Kaan. Over the next two lunar cycles, young men arrive in Bone Dog, from near and far, to join my forces.

During the third lunar cycle past my ascension, Kan Xul arrives with two thousand scar dog warriors. Nearly five stones have passed since Kan Xul returned to his father in shame and Hummingbird Sun ordered my beloved Yax K'uh beheaded. Pakal has sent his second son to help me train my troops before the entrada that may last as long as two solar cycles. While I'm away, Kan Xul and 1000 troops will remain in Bone Dog to protect Pakal's southern trade interests and keep order in his re-claimed vassal city.

In the receiving hall I welcome Kan Xul. We discuss strategies for my upcoming mission. He wears leather sandals with straps to his knees, a loin cloth and apron made of royal weave, and jade anklets, bracelets, and ear and nose plugs. His bare chest displays the pectoral insignia of a Jaguar prince and his hair braids hold quetzal feathers and pink spondylus shells.

In my jade net dress, I sit on my jaguar throne. Kan Xul sits before me on jaguar pillows and my daughter is beside me as always. Tul Til and Star Flower are feeding the macaws at the far corner of the hall. Because they're beyond earshot, and the birds are loudly squawking, I take the opportunity to speak freely to Second Son. "I don't trust my son's judgment, heart, nor his intentions. The heir apparent needs to vastly mature before he takes the mat or he'll rule as a

tyrant like his father. The b'aah ch'ok of Bone Dog is a selfish boy. He insults me and disrespects his sister. While I'm away, I won't miss him but I'll spend every night crying for my daughter. I'd bring her on the entrada if it weren't so fraught with danger.

"Who will see to her care?"

"I've arranged for my healer Ol Nitt to watch over my daughter. My servant Star Flower believes she should care for Jade Moon but I don't trust her. As a compromise and to tame her spirit of jealousy, I told my life-servant to care for the b'aah ch'ok as his personal healer. Now I'm asking you, Second Son, please keep the crown prince occupied and away from my daughter while I am gone."

"I vow by my life to keep Jade Moon safe," Kan Xul reassures me. "I won't allow the b'aah ch'ok to behave inappropriately. I'll teach him the manners befitting a king."

I smile, feeling much affection for Kan Xul, the eternal best friend of my beloved Yax K'uh. "One day you'll be a great king of the Jaguar dynasty," I tell him.

"This is my life's aspiration and what my father has trained me for. But I'm second in line and my father is thriving in his old age. Still, we can dream of possibilities. Can't we?"

I look at my daughter beside me. She's happily playing with a doll made of corn husks. "Jade Moon 1 Rabbit always warms my heart."

"Mine as well," Kan Xul tells me. My daughter smiles and tells her doll the same thing.

"Second Son. I have something vital to tell you."

"That you'll be a great warrior queen?"

"Yes. But no. Your granddam Sak K'uk manifested in the butz chan of my accession. She conveyed that Holy King Pakal is my father. Not my brother as I've always believed. You are my brother, Lord Second Son."

Kan Xul smiles with eyes that absorb the sunlight entering the open balcony. “I’m overjoyed to call you sister,” he replies. “I have loved you as a sister since we were children. I adore you as much as I loved Yax K’uh. Many times, he told me of his love for you. I believe your daughter is his seed of harvest. She has his complexion and face.”

“I grew up honored to be the younger sister of King Pakal. But I’m even more privileged and empowered to be his daughter. After I arrive in Yax Mutul and defeat the Kaan, I want to announce my true lineage. Do you believe our father will allow this? I haven’t told my citizens that I’m the daughter of Pakal. Something holds me back from revealing this revelation. Do you think I make the right decisions?”

“Dear sister queen.” Kan Xul takes my hand. “On more than one occasion our father confessed you are the seed of his harvest. It’s a secret he kept from his father. But many years have passed since Precious Jaguar Macaw entered the rainbow road. I know our father himself will proclaim you as his true child. You possess his mother’s bloodline and the bloodline of Lady Rigel, the princess he loved with his heart spirit. But I advise you to keep this secret until after you return to Bone Dog. You don’t want to draw out new enemies during your journey to the Venus transit.”

Kan Xul’s pectorals jingle as he reaches over and touches the shoulder of Jade Moon 1 Rabbit. “Are you prepared to become the next warrior queen?” he asks my little princess.

Breaking from her doll, Jade Moon politely replies, “When I seat my eighth stone, I’ll keep royal bees like my mother once did at Cloud Center.”

“My daughter has a brave heart,” I boast. “She’s inquisitive, intelligent, and kind to her attendants and animals. She has the burgeoning essence of a great leader and possesses no

malignant spirit. My greatest hope is that one day she'll take the mat of Bone Dog and break the patriline of my son and his father Hummingbird Sun."

Kan Xul laughs and gestures at his attendants standing across the hall by the entry. They approach and place upon the platform a large palm-leaf basket. Second Son reaches inside and pulls out a jaguar cub. He hands it to my daughter. "My batabs found her in a forest lair," he says. "After they killed the mother. This baby jaguar is my gift to you, Jade Moon 1 Rabbit. Une balam will bring you the power of baby K'awiil and one day you too, will become a queen in the lineage of two great dynasties."

My precious daughter cuddles the baby jaguar and smells its fur incensed with vanilla ointment. "I promise, dear uncle, to fulfill your wonderful prophecy." She then whispers her secret oath in the baby jaguar's ear.

During the wet season before the entrada departs, through rain and sweltering heat, my warriors practice hand-to-hand combat in the ballcourt. They're barefoot and wear only loincloths with skirt tails. Their bodies bear scars and tattoos of their clans and the dates of special events. Each man wears a stingray spine or peccary bone through his nostrils and has feathers and leaves lodged in his long, muddied hair.

Every day Second Son and I stand at the northern platform and give commands to prepare my troops for battle. To show my powers of the Moon and K'awiil, I wear my netted jade dress and the royal belt with glyphs of Blood Moon and Red Chac Xib Chaac of Sunrise. My jade ankle cuffs bear glyphs of day and night spirits. A shield at my back has the crescent of Fang Moon.

On the first day of training, I stand before my troops and orate, “With our gods you’ll defeat the sun bellied jaguars of Yuknoom. You are pitzl players against the Lords of Death, mightier than a warrior wasp. You possess the power of discipline and bravery. The Kaan threat is ever-present. King Nuun sits on the throne of Yax Mutul but Yuknoom infiltrates his kingdom. You will clear away the snakes and restore Yax Mutul to its former glory!”

The warriors cheer and make war cries. They vow their lives to me, their warrior queen. “*K’uh Ajaw Ix* is the Moon Goddess prepared to wage war,” they yell. “Our queen shows no fear and will lead us to victory against the Kaan.”

One morning, near the end of our training, Kan Xul and I are walking among the troops discussing which men to appoint as nacoms, lieutenant batabs, and elite soldiers.

“To determine leaders among your warriors,” Second Son tells me. “You must put them through a trial. A warrior must prove his worth by fighting jungle beasts without weapons or by swimming through the cataracts of the Usumacinta.” Second Son pauses in his steps and looks directly at me. He places his hands on my shoulders. “To command your troops, you must select men who will serve you to their deaths and put loyalty above all fears. Such men you can rely on. You must devise a test for bravery, endurance, and wit.”

I take to heart Kan Xul’s counsel because I feel a strong kinship with him now that he’s firmly my brother and not my nephew.

During the night, I dream of ways to show bravery and when I wake in the early morning, I know my bravery test will involve warrior wasps. Because it’s the onset of dry season, the wasps are beginning to swarm in the forest in preparation for new colonies. These swarms present the perfect opportunity for my troops to demonstrate courage, wit, and stamina. When I

share my idea with Second Son, he proclaims that the Death Lords of Xibalba couldn't have fashioned a better bravery trial.

I stand on the ballcourt platform before my men wearing a shell headdress that carries the emblem of Xux Ek, the wasp goddess Venus as the evening star. Kan Xul is beside me as I orate to my troops. "Our battle patron is Xux Ek. She'll guide you, protect you, and fill you with her itz k'uh, her holy essence and spirit. In battle you'll carry her banner and effigy along with the White Bone Centipede of King Pakal and the Baby Jaguar of Yax Mutul."

The men cheer and chant *Xux Ek*.

"In a dream, Xux Ek revealed a bravery trial that involves the forest warrior wasps. Their sting inflicts pain only the bravest can endure."

The warriors cheer and shout and raise their fists in victory. Every man wants to undergo the trial.

"I'll be the first to endure this test," I say and the voices of my men become still. "I expect my bravest warriors to follow my lead."

The following day, Second Son and I lead a thousand men into the forest. Wearing sandals, ear spools of bone, loincloths, and yucca cloth jackets, the troops spread through the undergrowth of ferns, saplings, and liana vines. They search for swarming warrior wasps on low branches and logs. With Kan Xul, my priests, and stewards, I also search the forest for the swarms. A string of beads at my calf dangles a jade emblem of Chac Xib Chaac. Everyone has painted his face with red and black symbols, including Kan Xul and myself.

In very little time one of my men loudly whistles and we gather around an enormous ceiba tree. On a low hanging branch, a swarm of wasps cluster in a colony the size of a man's

torso and the color of obsidian blue. We all stand thirty paces from the swarm to avoid the hovering scout wasps. Without warning, a perimeter wasp can alert the entire swarm to attack and sting a man to death no matter how brave he may be.

An attending priest hands me a lit cigar laced with white flowers that brings about sleep. I puff and billow out plumes of itz vapor and cautiously walk toward the throbbing colony. Their droning voices and my pounding heart intensify with each step. My presence doesn't alarm the wasp scouts because of the white flower smoke.

As I approach the colony, my mind is unwavering. I recall something Yax K'uh once said at Cloud Center Apiary. *I'm sustainer of those who sustain me. I don't fear the bites of bats nor the stings of wasps. A scar dog warrior is unafraid of injury or death because fear destroys strength and wisdom*.

I stop before the branch that bends from the weight of the swarm. The mass of wasps hum, crackle, and murmur. While I puff clouds of smoke onto the cluster that reeks of menstrual blood, I carefully and slowly insert my small tattooed hand inside the breathing body. It feels like each wasp moves aside for me. They are numb, in a trance from the white flower smoke. And so am I.

For a moment I feel the heat of their pulsating energy, then I slowly pull out my hand and step back without suffering a single sting. I've passed my own trial and feel as brave and determined as I was ten stones before when my husband forced me to endure his purity trial at Lake Turtle Macaw.

Over the next few kins my warriors and I continue to search for new swarms. Many brave men endure the trial. Those who remain unblemished, I promote to nacom generals or batab

lieutenants. And those inflicted with wasp stings show no signs of suffering pain. The welts they develop are badges of honor, the wounds of a scar dog and Xux Ek warrior.



Chapter 27: **Frank,** ***the Irascible Mam Consuela May***

The next morning, Hillary and I trek the Sun Mountain trail to the village of San Juan. Because of the chill, Hillary's wearing cargo pants and her Sun Devil's sweatshirt. I'm wearing my leather jacket over a turtleneck sweater. As always, I'm carrying her camera bag and knapsack. It contains a notepad, bottles of water, and a parka in case it rains. The trail follows a mountain crest with views of both valleys. We pass corn fields, pine, apple and peach trees, and sheep herders and their sheep.

At the top of a ridge, we stop to rest. Hillary's feeling lightheaded in the high mountain air. And I need a smoke.

Shortly, a young man happens along leading a mule carrying a load of wood. His name is Luis, he tells us, then happily speaks about his family farm outside the village of San Juan. He talks mostly to me but is impressed with Hillary's few words of Mam. Words I taught her myself.

"Do you know Mim Consuela May?" I ask Luis in Spanish.

“Everyone knows Grandmother Consuela,” he says as he takes the cigarette I offer. A Payasos unfiltered. I’ve run out of Gauloises which makes me all the more eager to get back to my flat in Antigua where I have an ample supply from Paris.

“Have you heard of Bradly Nolan, the Sak Itz’at,” Hillary eagerly asks.

“I don’t think so,” Luis replies.

“He was an apprentice to a great shaman about a hundred years ago.”

“What’s his named? This shaman.”

“Mam ah Peku, Grandfather Thunder.”

***“Lo siento,”* Luis replies. “I never heard about this gringo. Grandmother Consuela will remember. She’ll know about this old shaman.”**

“Can you take us to her?”

“Por supuesto. I’m happy to help. But let me warn you, her mind plays tricks. You must be patient. If today isn’t a good day to meet her, you can stay with my family and visit her tomorrow. My wife and daughters welcome you to our homestead. I can be your guide in the Cuchumatanes.”

Luis escorts us to the village where I buy aguardiente and cigarettes for Luis and for the old woman. Then Luis takes us to an adobe house on a farmstead. We find Consuela May feeding turkey chicks in the yard. Luis calls her name and she approaches us hunched over carrying a young turkey by its wing. She wears a worn and faded blue skirt and red huipil and her hair is as white as the turkey chick’s down feathers.

“She seems to be in a good mood,” Luis suggests before he leaves with his mule and wood for his own homestead. He invites us to stop by on our way back to Todos Santos.

The old woman ushers us inside her modest house. We sit on tiny wooden chairs around the three stone hearth. The old woman's grandniece prepares us a meal of tortillas with beans, guacamole, and goat cheese.

After we eat, Mim Consuela drinks her aguardiente and smokes a Payasos. She's pleased with my gifts.

"Have you heard of an old shaman named Grandfather Thunder?" I ask. "Or a foreigner who lived in these mountains a hundred years back."

"People called him Sak Itz'at," Hillary adds.

With raspy breaths, the old woman speaks in Mam. I translate. "In the old days, she says, before the civil war, women with babies in their bellies married the men they tricked."

We laugh and the old woman takes a hefty drag off her Payasos and continues her story. "Back then, the shaman was a respected town elder. Not so much these days."

Hillary takes Mim Consuala's frail hand and says, "Do you remember stories about Grandfather Thunder and a Sak Itz'at named Bradly Nolan? Grandfather Thunder had a daughter. Ix Chel. She's my great-great-grandmother."

The old woman bears a toothless grin. Her breath reeks of alcohol as she explains that her ancestor is also the daughter of Grandfather Thunder.

"She says the gringo you speak of murdered Ix Chel, stole her child, and fled from the mountains. Such a man is your grandfather, not mine."

"What?"

"Those are the old lady's word's."

Undeterred by the comment, Hillary says, "We're looking for something Sak Itz'at left behind."

"An ancient Maya codex?" I add while thinking *Yes, I'm a man who patiently persists, play by play, until I gain what I'm after. The ball's in play and I'm ready to knock it squarely through the stone circle high on the perimeter wall. The one with scarlet macaws.*

"And the book written by your Sak Itz'at." Mim Consuela interrupts my thoughts.

I translate and Hillary looks at me. "Frank. Bradly must have left behind another diary. Mim Consuela must be telling the truth. Bradly has a second diary. It's here, with the codex!"

I wink feeling as thrilled as Hillary now that we're finally onto something.

Grandmother Consuela takes another swig of her aguardiente and tells me, "What your daughter seeks is down the south hill beyond the pigs. At the place of three crosses. The ancient book lies under a pile of boulders."

"The old lady thinks you're my daughter." I chuckle and translate.

"Boulders?" Hillary asks. "Or does she mean rocks we can set aside?"

Mim Consuela finishes her aguardiente and unscrews the second bottle. She suddenly becomes agitated. "You bother me, chiquitos," she yells. "Go find your treasure and leave me alone!"

"Bien," I say to Hillary. "It's nearing dusk. Let's get started."

Mim Consuela suddenly laughs as if she's gone mad and gulps down the aguardiente like it's lifesaving medicine.

Hillary and I politely thank her for the information and get up to begin our search for the three crosses before nightfall. When we reach the door, the old woman yells for her grandniece to provide us with shovels for our task.

In the dim light of dusk, we locate three pinewood crosses at the edge of the old woman's milpa fields, beyond a dozen pigs snorting in a mire of mud. Before the crosses, vines and grass are covering a large pile of rock.

"It appears to be an old grave or an ancestor shrine," I remark as we clear the foliage and move the rocks. The full moon begins to appear on the horizon and I start digging in the hard soil. "I'm Huitzilopochtli brandishing his hatchet at Earth."

"That's funny, Frank. And who am I?" Hillary asks as she continues to clear the weeds and grass.

"Why you're the rabbit who hopped down from the Moon."

"Thought I was your little sparrow."

"That too, sparrow. But hush now. We've treasures to uncover and secrets to reveal."

"Right? Huitzilopochtli teddy."

For several hours, we toil under the cold light of the moon until I finally throw my shovel into the corn field. "The old lady plays tricks on us, little sparrow."

"But she knows about a second diary," Hillary reminds me as she tosses her own shovel aside, sits on the ground, and wipes her sweaty brow with her soiled and ripped Sun Devils sweatshirt. "I feel like one of Mim Consuela's oinking pigs."

"The old lady sends us on *un fausse piste* and now she laughs. Cursed goddess of mischief. Such craftiness keeps her heart going, no doubt. She's the rabbit outwitting the coyote."

"I thought I was the rabbit."

"You are. But she's Ix Chel the trickster who gives birth to the rabbit on the Moon."

We both laugh and I sit beside Hillary and light a Payasos. "I suggest we return to the old woman's house and sleep on blankets beside her hearth."

"If she'll let us."

"Oh, she will. I'm certain of that. She wants to see our faces. It's part of her amusement."

Early the next morning, the grandniece feeds us tortillas and eggs while Consuela May sits on a small chair smoking a Payasos. Her expression is somber. She isn't laughing about her prank from the night before. After several minutes she suddenly says, "On his dying bed, my granduncle Grandfather Thunder, told me his grandson would return. How will I know him? I asked. He said the boy has a birthmark in the shape of a heart on his shoulder. I waited many years but his grandson never returned and the lineage of Grandfather Thunder died with his daughter. Women no longer became shamans after Ix Chel, your great-great-grandmother and my cousin."

I translate between bites of my egg burrito.

"Bradly wrote about that birthmark in his diary," Hillary exclaims with excitement. "The old woman must know something, Frank. She must be telling the truth now." Hillary then shows Mim Consuela the birthmark on her shoulder. "Tell her you're a shaman and

you initiated me as a lineage shaman. Tell her I'm next in line and am here to take up the mantle of my great-grandfather and his mother, Ix Chel, my great-great-grandmother."

The old woman studies Hillary's birthmark. Then speaks.

"Mim Consuela claims her father was friend to Sak Itz'at. She says her father took her to where the diary and ancient book lie buried under rocks. In the mountains across from her village at the place of three crosses."

"Another place of three crosses?"

"That's what she says."

Hillary and I draw a map according to Consuela's specifications and we head back to Todo Santos. As we trek along the Sun Mountain trail, I keep wondering if the old woman isn't sending us on another goose chase. A con like myself can sense when someone's playing tricks or making a scam. But I feel optimistic. Although it could simply be that I'm as eager to find the codex as Hillary is to relocate the ancient queen's tomb. Maybe I'm becoming too eager which is never a very smart play.

By early afternoon we reach Antonio's homestead, soiled, sweaty, and weary from our trek and the ordeal of the night before. We find Antonio standing at the corral wearing a blue jacket and a white straw hat with a blue stripped band. He looks fit and well. I shake his hand as if he's my old master and describe our misadventures in San Juan. The shaman laughs and suggests we take a purification bath in the *ohook*, the sweathouse attached to the front veranda of the main house.

"Antonio says our sweat will cast away the bad spirits who trick us from our rewards."

“A sweat bath sauna sound perfect,” Hillary says.

For the next two hours Hillary and I sit barefoot and wrapped in towels on a bench inside the stone, mud, and corn-straw sweathouse with a conical roof. All the while, Antonio is outside chanting songs. Every so often he opens the ram-skin flap and tosses water on the pebbles smoldering over coals and fragrant Palo Santo wood.

“What’s he chanting?” Hillary asks at one point.

“Headaches, twisted stomachs, and cramps disappear. Let the steam restore your body and spirit.”

When we exit into the fresh thin air, under the bright afternoon sun, I take Hillary’s hand and say, “How do you feel now, little sparrow?”

“All my muscles are relaxed.”

Although Hillary isn’t exactly the type of woman, or man, who can please my sexual cravings, my lustful nature, she’s the only woman around. And I’m beginning to feel a kind of attachment to her, an appreciation for her ambitions and achievements. Maybe I’m even beginning to like her quirky behavior or maybe it’s simply because of the sweat bath and exertion of last night. For whatever reason, I take Hillary in my arms and say, “Let’s take a sunset horse ride onto the upper slopes of pine and cypress trees. We’ll return in the moonlight. I’m feeling invigorated and refreshed and amorous for my little sparrow.”

“What do you have in mind? Teddy.”

“You’ll see. A surprise. Can’t you feel the romance of the setting and moment?”

“Yes.” She snuggles in my arms. “But I’ve never even ridden a horse.”

“We’ll ride together,” I whisper in her ear and wink at Antonio who’s standing nearby grinning at us.

I the pay the old shaman to ride his best horse and he saddles up his sturdy black stallion.

“His name is Tzimin Chaac,” I tell Hillary. “It means Thunder Horse.”

“I love it,” Hillary says and I help her sit snugly behind me. She holds my waist and we head up the slope.

I ride along a dry riverbed and down a ravine of scree, boulders, grasses, wildflowers, and gnarly cypress trees. Years back, when I was staying at the Proyecto and studying Mam while making side connections, I often rented a farmer’s horse and rode into these mountains. Usually with cabajero amigos. It was my first time on a horse. As a boy on the streets of Paris, avec mes amies de rue, horses weren’t even in my dreams. Only surviving day to day was. Horse riding is a luxury, a pleasure, and I took right to it.

“You’re a good rider, Frank. Where did you learn to ride?” Hillary tightens her grip around my waist, for comfort, not from fear of falling off. She trusts me implicitly.

“Here,” I say and ride on. It’s the one shred of truth I have to offer my sparrow. It makes me chuckle to myself.

“I love this teddy. The air’s so cool and fresh. It smells of pine. Every cell in my body feels refreshed and revived. I really love you.”

“I knew you’d love this. And I love you too, sparrow.”

We arrive at a trickling brook where Thunder Horse drinks then we ride upstream past stonework channels that could be modern or ancient. We stop beside a waterfall tumbling down a mountain crevice into a small frothy puddle. The crevice appears to me like a woman’s vagina. It’s erotic. Sensual.

“This is a perfect place for love,” I say. “See how the mountain winds and the force of the water have bent the cypress trees clinging to the rocks.”

“It’s beautiful,” Hillary says as she tightly holds me and rests her head against my shoulder.

“And the waterfalls crevice looks like a vagina.”

Hillary hits my arm. “I don’t know about that. But it’s beautiful, teddy bear. You must have been here before.”

“Not really. I think our horse understands where to take us. I sense magic in his pace.”

I dismount and help Hillary down and tie Thunder’s reins to a pine tree. On the cool grassy earth at the edge of the waterfall, I spread out a blanket from the saddle roll. The fading sunlight casts a rainbow in the waterfall’s mist. A gardenia-like fragrance seems to be coming from the rainbow colors.

“Lie back on the tapestry, little sparrow. I want to make love to you, right here, right now. I feel love for the Rainbow Goddess and her little rabbit. Ix Chel. Open your womb jar to me. I know you desire the sun.”

Hillary sits and inhales deeply. “I was beginning to think we’d never make love again. I thought maybe you didn’t like our experiences six months ago in Copan and Coba. Love making must have to do with water sources and rainbows.”

“How clever you are sparrow.” I help Hillary lie back on the blanket. Mist falls on her face like the sparkling makeup mes amis in Paris loved to wear. “Blue diamond sparkle on your face,” I whisper. “My mind and body are becoming consumed. I wish to immerse

myself in the sensation of fully making love," I whisper in her ear and smell her scent. "Your Secret deodorant smells of gardenias, Little sparrow."

"What's that?"

"Your fragrance is driving me mad."

"It's not that at all. Why haven't you wanted me since Copan? Why don't you ever take me to your apartment in DF? Why are you so secretive?"

"The time has never been right until now. It was too important to lead you into the spiritual world, not the physical one. But tonight, in the moonlit chill, it's time we physically unite once again. The sweat bath entwined us with spiritual love." I embrace her and catch my breath. "Feel the mist and let your thoughts explode with constellations, planets, Novas, and every feature of the night sky. Mine has."

We make love for the third time. This time I don't hold back. My play has fallen beyond my control.

"Frank," she says after we lie back and she rests her head on my chest. "I'm not taking that job in Arizona. I don't want to leave you, my Teddy Bear. You're everything to me."

"As you are to me." I reach for my knapsack.

"What are you looking for?"

"I'm not through with our lovemaking."

I remove a wool sock and remove from it a dildo that glows in the moonlight like a Maya stela. "Hillary. Will you use this?"

I'm not surprised when she turns away and says, "No."

"Why not? Little sparrow. You can use it on me."

"No," she again says with alarm as she looks back at me. "You've just confirmed my concerns. I knew there was more to you than an old man making love only when he has the stamina. You have a perverted, lustful side."

"It's what I like," I plead in a whimper while remembering mes amis in Paris.

"I can't even fathom what you're suggesting."

I simply smile at her face shining in the moonlight and nonchalantly rewrap the object and place it in my knapsack. I then say with a chuckle, "Que sera sera, Little Sparrow. Your time will come soon enough. Both you and I will become one in a world that's transforming."

She says nothing as we pack up and ride back to the homestead. The moonglow on the ground looks like the freshly fallen snow I once saw under streetlamps on Rue Place Blanche**.**

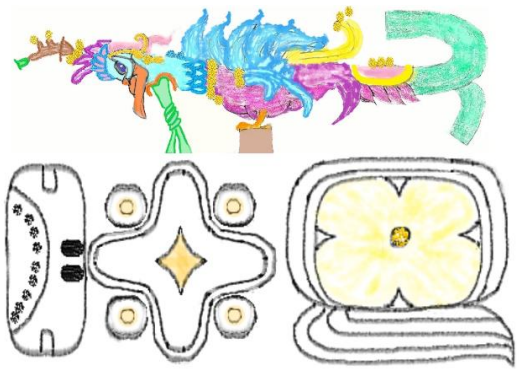
Before the main house on the homestead, I help Hillary from the steed. "Tonight you'll sleep alone in the house of Rita and Minga. But I'll think about you all night long."

"Me too teddy."

"I'll dream about your misty face while you dream about your ancestor queen. Join her on a long march to save the world. Dream of warrior queens who can guide your destiny."

"I think you're my destiny. Teddy."

"Yes. Sparrow. And you're mine. But no more about me. Think of your queen tonight and you'll dance with the wayob spirits when we recover the ancient codex of Jaguar Blood Moon**.**



Chapter 28: Jaguar Blood Moon, *Entrada to Yax Mutul 7 Kab'an 5*

Six paddlers propel my royal jukub down the Usumacinta River. Nearly 3000 Xux Ek warriors surround me in three hundred canoes. Their faces are painted red and black and they wear short-sleeved cotton jackets dyed yellow with black puma spots. Each man carries a spear, a puwa blowgun, a knife at his hip, and a shield at his shoulder.

I haven't traveled the river **since my bridal armada one half katun before, during the time King Nuun had sacked Dragon Waters and dethroned his brother Sky Hammer. Now King Nuun is back on the throne of Yax Mutul but under the snake king Yuknoom**. My mind is set on restoring Yax Mutul to its former glory with the help of King Nuun and his lineage powers.

At each night's encampment, cooks prepare meals while men build the popol naj shelter where I parlay with my nacom and batabs and where I sleep. The troops sleep in netted hammocks while scouts patrol the perimeter with torches. The shoot peccary, squirrels and rabbits wandering the night to supplement our supply of corn, squash, and cacao beans.

Kaan warriors are watching our movement. But I have a strategy for this campaign. My troops show no effigies and banners that betray our intentions. Our shields bear no emblems. When we encounter Kaan warriors, I claim my kingdom retains the alliance Hummingbird Sun had formed with Yuknoom.

“I lead my troops to Yax Mutul for the Venus Transit,” I tell lieutenants of the Kaan. “My warriors fight for Ox Te’ Tuun, city of the Yuknoom.”

As my brother Kan Xul advised, I never reveal I’m daughter of Pakal. If I must, I claim I broke ties with the Jaguar Kingdom when my husband allied with the Kaan.

Down the river past Yokib, we travel an eastern tributary. When we reach the river’s end, men store the canoes and post sentries. **Along a wide white scabe leading to Yax Mutul, four elite warriors carry me on a mahogany litter while my troops haul our supplies and tributes.**

The night before Thirteenth Moon, we encamp outside the Mutul capital. The next morning, King Nuun and a lord of Yuknoom named Maize Snake, meet with me in my popol naj.

“I’m ruling queen of Bone Dog,” I inform the king. Because the Kaan lord is present, I can’t reveal my true intentions. “Bone Dog pays tribute to you and your Overlord the Great Yuknoom. I’m faithful to my dead husband’s alliance and have brought warriors to fight for the Kaan on my way back to Bone Dog. After the Venus transit.”

Later that day, Mutul warriors transport me on my litter into a city larger than any I’ve ever beheld. Tall red pyramids and ancient stone buildings dominate the plazas. The temples on top of pyramids have crests displaying gods in bright blue, blood red, jade green, and precious yellow.

“Why are so few Kaan warriors in the city?” I ask Maize Snake.

“Our troops are away fighting battles in Ux Witik and Edzna,” the Kaan lord tells me. “And they’re waging a war against the warrior queen of Coba.”

“Yes, I’ve heard tell of her strength and force.”

“She dares oppose the power of Yuknoom.”

I say nothing but have many thoughts stirring in my mind. *One day soon,* I want to say, *I too will use my strength and force to smite you and your venomous king.*

In the receiving hall of the palace, King Nuun formally welcomes me and receives my gifts of woven textiles and baskets of cacao beans and jade. On the king’s throne platform, I sit on a pillow beside Nuun seated on his jaguar throne. His young queen sits beside him and appears near to giving harvest. Clay vessels on the platform burn copal, a pet jaguar lounges at the king’s feet, and a scarlet macaw chatters from its nearby perch.

A servant pours a cacao brew into the king’s ceramic drinking cup. After Nuun takes a drink, he offers it to me. He says, referring to his queen, “This is Lady Macaw Waterlily, daughter of Yuknoom’s younger brother.”

The young pregnant queen says nothing but politely nods. Nuun then asks the attendants to take his wife to rest in her private chamber.

I’m glad because I don’t trust the king’s Kaan bride nor any of her servants and certainly not Maize Snake. Fortunately, the Kaan lord is away investigating an incident at the city gates.

When I’m alone with King Nuun, I reveal my true intentions for coming to Yax Mutul. “I have broken from my husband’s alliance and am maintaining a pretense in front of the Kaan. I am daughter of King Pakal and loyal only to him.”

“I love and admire your father, then,” Nuun tells me. “He’s a great king. We were once allies until the Kaan stomped on our gods.”

“Listen to me, king Nuun. I married one of my father’s vassal kings.”

“Hummingbird Sun of Bone Dog?”

“Yes. He betrayed my father’s trust and formed an alliance with snakes. On the date, 1 Kimi 14 Xul, my brother Kan Xul, second son of Pakal, waged war against my husband.”

“I have heard that story, my lady.” The king drinks from the cup and again passes it to me.

“Unfortunately, Kaan warriors stood ready,” I continue. “Hummingbird Sun captured and sacrificed Pakal’s nacom Yax K’uh, the true father of my daughter Jade Moon 1 Rabbit.”

“I grieve to learn your news.”

“King Nuun. I’m here to help you restore Yax Mutul to its former power as the world’s mightiest city.”

“A city that once was.”

“I want to restore Yax Mutul as Overlord to my father.”

Nuun quietly tells me of his reign and his struggle against the Kaan. “As eldest son, I took the mat of Yax Mutul. In retaliation against my family for refusing to surrender the power of our bloodline, Yuknoom installed my younger brother as king of Dragon Water. My brother is a traitor. He swore allegiance to the Kaan and betrayed me and my city. We held back for seventeen years. Our enemies flanked us on three sides. The Sun Belly Jaguar outmaneuvered my forces. On 2 Ix 12 K’ayab, the snakes defaced our monuments and desecrated the tombs of Lady Yok’in and her husband.”

“This was during the time of King Lake Turtle Macaw of my father’s kingdom,” I tell King Nuun. “In a snake vision, Sak K’uk, mother of Pakal, appeared to me. She prophesized that during the meeting of Venus and Lord Sun, I’ll have a great vision on the pyramid of your founding father. I will help you rid your city of Kaan hegemony.”

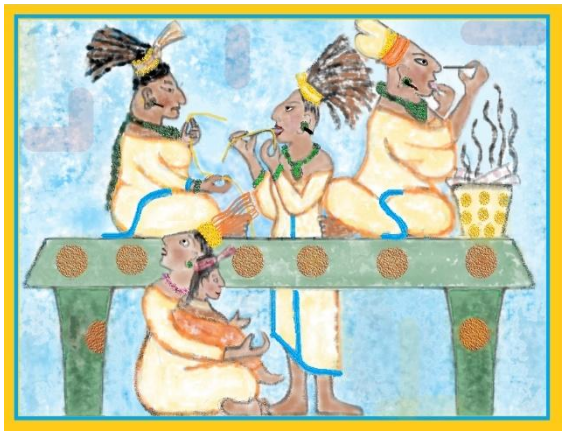
“Dear noble lady. There’ll be no peace while Yuknoom remains alive.”

A servant man enters the hall and offers maize cakes with honey and guava. When he leaves, I ask the king to continue his story.

"After I seated thirty-six stones, I fled for my life and left Yax Mutul in the hands of Yuknoom. Two years later, Yuknoom captured my first queen and children and held them captive in Ox Te' Tuun. He threatened to sacrifice them if I didn't return to Yax Mutul as his slave king and summon the powers of my royal bloodline for his campaigns. He will kill me before I surrender **the powers of my lineage, the greatest Maya tree in world history."**

"What's become of your family?" I eat a bite of my honey cake.

"I don't know their fate. I continue to serve my citizens as Yuknoom's slave king. My greatest hope is that my family and I will reunite one day. Now you arrive with a regiment of warriors, gracious queen. I accept your offer of help if you'll accept mine. I have men loyal only to me who will join your forces when you return to Bone Dog. At the Venus transit, I'll conjure my linage founder Yax Enb' Xook to wield upon you and your warriors k'ulel, the cosmic force that makes victories possible."



Chapter 29: Hillary, *A Night in Antigua*

A friend of mine
Does not grow old

His youth remembers him.
From all of time
Escape is bold
When age recoils to whim.

A friend of mine
Is going young
His gender's passed away.
And now
He takes another hood
To live another way.

Frank and I spend two days searching for the three crosses Mim Consuela May described and we mapped out. We find nothing but the rabbit's laugh. Disappointed again, Frank heads off to Antigua and I read my many books and walk in the milpas around the homestead until the dogs start nipping my heels.

Most late afternoons, after six hours of one-on-one lessons at the Proyecto, I sit on my bed, lean against the sod-brick wall and write in my notebook. I imagine Bradly doing the same thing one hundred years before. And when I do, Bradly looks exactly like Frank. He is Frank or Frank's him. I can't stop thinking about either man. It makes my head spin and sometimes I think I'm Bradly living in conditions at the beginning of the 1900's. Then my head really explodes.

At night, as I try to sleep on the uncomfortable bed, the room grows colder and colder. I constantly smell urine and wonder if animals roam freely inside the house. I think about bugs and tells myself *I'm not Coatlique's daughter Coyolxauhqui, the goddess who talks to spiders and centipedes.* I toss and turn and start having doubts about the codex. Did Bradly somehow forge the Brownie pictures and his diary? I also wonder about Consuela's claim that Bradly murdered Ix Chel. What if this were true? Then Frank's face appears and he haunts me for the rest of the night.

After Frank's been gone for more than two months, I decide I've studied enough Mam. I want to be with him before he returns to Todo Santos and we trek to the queen's tomb. I miss everything about him—his mature looks, his spiritual insights and intelligence, and even his mystical notions about the world. I decide to surprise my teddy bear with a visit, for a night or two at most. Besides, I want to see where my mysterious lover lives and learn a bit more about him.

With nothing but the clothes on my back and a rainbow-colored handbag that Eduardo crocheted, I catch an antiquated bus that rumbles down the winding dirt road of the Cuchumatanes. The bus is overflowing with smoking campesinos and mujeres with babies. One sits beside me and her baby wets on my side causing my colorful crocheted bag to bleed. I change buses in Hue Hue, Chimaltenango, and Guatemala City before reaching the city Guatemalans call Old Guatemala. Antigua was the first capital of the Spanish colony. After a devastating earthquake in 1773, the Spanish Crown moved its colonial capital to Nueva Guatemala de la Asuncion, today's Guatemala City**.**

In vast contrast to the traffic, smog, and poverty of Guate, as the locals call Guatemala City, Antigua is a quaint town of baroque Spanish churches, monasteries, and buildings painted pastel colors. Jacaranda trees line cobble stone streets and the central park has a three-tier mermaid fountain. Agua, Fuego, and Acatenango volcanoes surround the tourist mecca of coffee shops, internet pastry bars, restaurants, night clubs, and language schools. It's a place I could live for several months. But I have other things to do at the moment. Like embark on an expedition to my ancestor's tomb.

Outside a café near the city's central park, I sit at a table and phone Frank. Unfortunately, my call goes straight to voice mail. "Teddy. Surprise! I'm in Antigua!" I declare over my

cellphone perhaps a little too loud. People at the neighboring tables are glancing at me. I lower my voice. “I’ll book a room at the San Rafael and wait for you to meet me.”

As I’m ending my call, I notice a Maya boy of five or six gazing at me from across the street. He wears flip flops, slacks, and a worn T-shirt. When I first sat at the café table, I had noticed him loitering near an old man’s vendor cart. He retrieves soda bottles from customers and I assume he works for the old man.

Such a beautiful little boy, I think to myself as I place the phone in my crocheted bag on the table.

As if catching my thoughts, the boy crosses the street and approaches me. His big brown eyes meet mine and he flashes a beaming smile. “Buenos dias, Señorita, Por favor,” He holds out his little hand for money.

The waiter appears and sets a plate of burger and fries before me. He shoos away the boy. “Pardon, Señorita. I suggest you avoid giving the *golfillo nino* money. This encourages his bad behavior.”

I take a bite of my burger and notice a commotion across the street. At the vendor’s cart, the boy is struggling to retrieve a floppy rainbow bag from the old vendor. I stand and yell, “That’s my bag!”

The boy looks at me, yanks the bag from the vendor’s grasp and crosses the street to return it to me. “Lo siento,” he says and smiles. He’s adorable, like the little China doll I found in the attic under the Mansard roof of the old Victorian. I think it belonged to my grandmother Ruth.

“What sort of scam are you playing? Little man,” I ask. The boy says nothing and continues to grin. He makes my heart burst with good feelings. Maybe love or empathy or

compassion for this little spirit of a man. I leave cash on the table and invite the boy to a meal in the park. He looks like he could use something to eat.

From a park vendor, I buy chicharrones and sodas then sit with the boy on a bench shaded by flowering flamboyant trees. Before us is the three-tier fountain of mermaids**. Fragrant honeysuckle beds surround us and women with baby strollers, local business men, and foreign students from the language schools stroll by. After a night of rain, hot sunshine now infiltrates the city. Agua Volcano appears before us. I recall a flyer posted by the café register warning tourists not to climb any of the three volcanoes because "bandits lurk in the forests to rob unsuspecting tourists."**

"*Gracias, Señorita. Estoy muy agradecida*," the boy says as he happily eats his meal.

"Where are your parents?"

"I don't know."

"What's your name?"

"Pablo. My mama and papa lost me in Guate last year. They disappear in La Ciudad."

"What?" I ask with concern. "How? Why did your parents come to the capital?"

Pablo doesn't answer as if he doesn't understand my question. It's as if the gods have lifted away that part of his young life. He only remembers living on the rough streets of a big city, always hungry and begging for food.

"Sometimes police beat me," he says, and gulps down his soda. I give him mine.

"Beat you?"

"Si. And older *chicos de la calle* make me sniff glue."

I smile at the boy and wonder what to say or make of his terrible situation, if he's telling the truth. For a moment, I listen to the water splashing in the mermaid pool. "It's a beautiful

day," I then say. "You've had unbearable bad luck little man. But you look healthy and happy." I take his little hands. "Except for your dirty hair and fingernails." He laughs at my tease. "Your face has no scars and your eyes gleam with innocence. Perhaps the gods haven't completely ripped away you spirit. How'd you get to Antigua?"

The boy drinks the rest of my soda and wipes his mouth with his shirt. "I heard Old Guatemala was a magical town with castles and mermaids and plenty of tourist money. I hid in the back of a pickup truck delivering frozen meat from the airport to restaurants in Antigua."

"You're a smart little man. No one caught you."

"No Señorita. I hopped off in an alley behind an art gallery restaurant that serves French, Italian, and Spanish food."

"Is that where you live now?"

"Si. I sleep under a dumpster behind the restaurant. The waiters smoke cocaina in the alley and bring me food. I have a good life now, in Old Guatemala."

Although it's a longshot, I show Pablo a picture of Frank on my cellphone, the one of him standing beside the stela of 18 Rabbit. "Have you seen this man?" To my surprise he has.

"Señor Frances. Mucho dinero," the boy says. "He eat at the art restaurant and give me cigarettes when I ask him."

"You smoke?" I ask although I'm not surprised. He *is* a little *golfillo nino*.

"Si, Señorita. I like cigarettes."

Before I can say anything more, a car loudly honks from behind in the direction of Fuego Volcano. I turn and see Frank alongside the curb in his Land Rover. He again honks. "Doctor Jacobs," he shouts through the open window. "I've been driving around looking for you. I see

you're with the little *golfillo*." Frank gestures the boy over, gives him a few quetzals and a pack of Gauloises then tells him to scram.

"Señor Frances, Señorita, *muy encantado*." Pablo politely nods and walks past the fountain back to his haunts in the tourist mecca of Antigua.

Frank takes me to his two-story apartment a block from the park. It has a garage, front and back patios and views of the park and all three volcanoes. On the ground floor is the kitchen and a commodious living room with an entertainment center, a black leather sectional, two matching easy chairs, and a rustic blue-green patina coffee table. Alpaca tapestries hang on the walls. A blue replica of Michelangelo's David stands beside an elaborate black leather bar before a wall of liquor.

I walk to a corner curio cabinet to examine erotic ceramic figurines with large erect phalluses and male and female figurines masturbating. "Moche culture of 2000 years ago," I suggest. "You've been to Peru, Monsieur?"

"They're knockoffs," Frank says as he picks up my bags and gestures I follow him up the spiral stairs.

His suite has a large hacienda bed and a vanity against a mirrored wall. Across the room is an entertainment cabinet stocked with porno videos and CDs. "What are you? A sex addict?" I ask, remembering the dildo on our romantic horseback ride in the Cuchumatanes.

Frank is standing at the bed viewing text messages on his cellphone, apparently. He breaks from his task and says, matter-of-factly, "I'm a lover of love."

I'm uncomfortable with all the porno and don't want him to pull out another "stela." At the same time, I don't want to appear too prudish because I *did* travel all the way from Todos Santos while thinking about making love for our third or is it our fourth time. "You have a

beautiful place," I finally say. "You must be rich. What do you do? This isn't within a linguist's or shaman's pay grade."

Instead of answering my question, he suggests I freshen up while he makes arrangements for a small party. "Make yourself at home," he says. "The bathroom has a spa and sauna. My friends and I will celebrate my birthday tonight and welcome you to my home in Old Guatemala."

"But I wanted to be alone with you, Teddy Bear. Like our moonlit night in the Cuchumatanes. By the misty waterfall."

"First, we celebrate *avec mes amis*," he playfully whimpers in a voice I've never heard before. "*Apres, on fait l'amour*," he adds, as if sensing my desire for him like a whiff of perfume.

"But I have nothing to wear to a party," I suggest. "I brought only what I have on. I wasn't intending to stay for more than a day."

"Now you travel lightly?" he jests.

"I was hoping you'd drive me back to Todos Santos, tomorrow. May is only a week away and we need to get ready for our expedition."

"We'll see, Little Sparrow," Frank says, setting his phone on the night table. "For now, let me find something appropriate for you to wear to my party." He walks to the glass wall across the room and opens a wide, hidden door. He turns on a light revealing a huge walk-in closet. On one side are men's clothes on the other are colorful evening dresses, scarfs and boas. Men's shoes align the floor across from colorful women's heels neatly arranged. On the shelves above are hat boxes, purses, and Styrofoam heads with wigs. Frank removes a sleeveless black sequin gown from a hanger and asks me to put it on after I shower.

“Frank, do you have a wife? Girlfriend? A lover?” I ask somewhat alarmed. This man I love has more sides to him than I imagined.

“Oui, Oui. Mais . . . She went away,” he reassures me. “I live alone now, Cherie.”

“And you kept her things?”

“She died.”

“I’m so sorry,” I respond in reflex, feeling awkward. Frank doesn’t seem upset. To change the subject I ask, “Was she even my size? I’m quite petite you know.” He says nothing and heads downstairs to arrange his party.

After a hot shower I put on the gown. It snugly hugs my boyish curves. I refuse to wear the heels Frank set out for me and am barefoot when I curl up on the living room sectional and listen to the marimba music on the stereo. The TV is airing a telenovela with the volume turned down.

Frank later appears in the living room, freshly showered and shaved. He wears a navy-blue terrycloth robe, sheepskin slippers, and a fresh dab of aftershave. He sits in a recliner and makes a few calls on his cellphone. His deep, resplendent Spanish and the scent of his cologne lull me to sleep.

Within the hour, a loud knock awakens me. I sit up and yawn. At the door stands a thin young man dressed in jeans and a white long-sleeved shirt, unbuttoned. A thick gold chain hangs on his bare, smooth chest. Three ladies stand with him, two are no more than 20. They look like Guatemalan whores with a gangbanger.

Tattoos and cheap jewelry adorn the ladies. One wears a short red spandex dress and tall black heels, the other has on a white tank top and denim cutoffs hugging her buttocks. The third

woman is older and large. Her blond hair is an obvious wig. She wears a black skirt, a turquoise cashmere sweater, a red diaphanous sash around her neck, heels, and chandelier earrings.

Very gaudy I think then realize that this large old she is a he. The same person I recall seeing months earlier at the Cancun Sheridan bar when I sat alone drinking a Perrier waiting for a table and thinking Frank was meeting business associates. “Frank?” I exclaim.

Frank turns from his friends and says, “Je m’appele Françoise, Mademoiselle Professor.”

It dawns on me that the other two women are not who they seem to be either. They’re all men **prepared to party.**

Frank offers his “lady” friends and the young man drinks from his bar and everyone helps himself to a plate of food from an assortment laid out on the kitchen counter. **I see falafel, chicken, nachos, and quesadillas. When I was dozing off, I remember Frank making the order from the nearby Rainbow Café where I encountered the street boy.**

Feeling famished from the long bus ride and remembering I barely ate my hamburger before I took Pablo to the park to feed him, I get up to help myself to a plate of food. I pour myself to a glass of wine from a bottle of Margaux Bordeaux on the counter and return to the sofa. The guests are dancing with Françoise.

The two ladies must be from a brothel strip club, I surmise as I watch them from the sofa. Or a transgender bar in Guatemala City. As Françoise twirls his lady friends like a debutant of the ball, I’m wondering **what he's expecting from me during his little soiree.**

The young man dressed like a man is standing at the kitchen counter smoking a cigarette. He suddenly **breaks from the fiesta and** sits on the floor at the green patina coffee table. His back is to me. I don’t know his name because Frank never introduced me to his friends. He simply fell into dancing with them.

On the smooth green-blue table, the young man strings out rows of white powder. He rolls a quetzal note and snorts a line, leans against the sectional and raises his head back to absorb his high. He takes off his shirt and tosses it behind him, just missing me.

I sip my wine and stare at the virgin Mary covering his smooth back. The tattoo has horns and a forked tail. The Devil Virgin stares at me. *This boy is maras,* I'm thinking to myself. *He's a drug dealer and probably a soldier of the Mendoza family.*

The gangbanger turns and asks, "Te gusta?" referring to the cocaine.

"No, me gusta," I say and turn my attention to Frank. He's dancing with a drink in his hand. His two young "ladies" have their hands all over him/her. It's a very confusing sight, like snakes that are vines of a tree. Like the snakes I felt during my spiritual trance at Palenque Palace.

I begin to feel nervous. Having drugs at a party is a criminal offence. And I'm in a foreign country! I don't know the Guatemalan laws concerning drugs. Why would I ever look into such a matter? And what about being in the presence of MS13?

I reproach myself for being so paranoid. This is a party, I think, and everyone's happy, loose, and sexy. Dancing, eating, drinking, laughing, snorting, dancing. **My mind chants to Mark Anthony's *Amar sin Mentiras* now playing on the stereo.**

While Frank's in a slow dance with his ladies, he catches sight of my stare. He's been neglectful, he seems to realize, and leaves his friends to join me at the sofa. He snorts a line on the coffee table, breathes in his high then sits beside me and places his hand on my knee. "Are you happy, little sparrow?"

His dimpled smile cracks his makeup. He has red lipstick on a tooth. His *White Diamonds* perfume assaults my senses. Or is it Versace's *Yellow Diamonds*? It's not the cheap

knockoff scents from street vendors. From his lady friends, no doubt. “I’m fine,” I suggest while feeling annoyed. “This is such a travesty. Why are you ignoring me?”

“A transvesty?” He chuckles.

“I guess you might say.” I nibble on a falafel.

“Come dance with me.” He takes my hand. **The he that is a she.**

My mind wobbles. “No.” I pull away. “Not now. But save me a dance, Françoise.”

He rises to fetch me more Bordeaux. I’m grateful he doesn’t push himself on me, sexually or invite me to snort cocaine. I have my limits to all this frivolity.

When Françoise returns, he/she sits beside me and offers a peyote pod. “It’s a natural part of the terrain,” he says. “The ancient Maya and Aztec astronomers used it. So did your people of the American Southwest.”

“I know what drugs they used. I’ve read, *The Teachings of Don Juan and the Yaqui Way of Knowledge.* Why are you dressed up like a . . .”

“Un amie de la rue?” he finishes my words.

I gaze at his face, the man who is my lover. A woman? The alcohol is making me tipsy. I’m not used to alcohol and my emotions wax toward loving him and all that makes him a he. I take the pod because I’m suddenly feeling titillated and romantic about Frank dressed as a woman. Perhaps he’s just trying to show me another side of spirituality, or at least of his spirit. And I now want to re-experience the place beyond the five senses like I did at Edzna and Palenque. I want to, once again, enter the portal to the world beyond droll drab normalcy. So, I swallow the pod.

“Good girl,” Françoise says. Her red nailed masculine hands are caressing my hair. “Tonight, **we’ll become together in our wayob dance**.”

I relax on the commodious sofa, dizzy from the wine, sleepy from the exertion of the day's journey from a mountain village to an orphan boy to a cross-dresser. Frank covers me with a striped woven blanket, a rainbow of colors, and tells me to rest for a while.

I quickly fall asleep but only for a moment. When I jolt awake, my heart is fluttering. I'm sweaty. Do I have a high temperature? I wonder as I sit up, knock my knee on the wooden coffee table and strike my funny bone. "Mon dieu!" I yell.

Françoise is putting Edith Pilaf songs on his stereo. He approaches me and offers his hand. He leads me to the area by the kitchen counter and we begin slow dancing. My head reaches his bosom.

"To the shrilling French voice of Little Sparrow, we dance together, the ladies and the man," Françoise whispers in my ear. "*Wayob K'awiil Akot*. Our spirits entwine, companion of mine. Through the generations we dance." He swirls me under his arm then pulls me into a hug. "Now you lead. Like a man," he whimpers in my ear.

Awkwardly, mechanically, I try to lead Françoise in the dance. The room smells of cigarettes, drugs, alcohol, and potent perfume. The peyote is making my ears ring. Or maybe I'm hearing Maya priests blasting conch shells? I'm wondering.

My head spins and the Bonampak murals begin casting shadows over my perceptions. Images fill my head with wayob dancers, like a PowerPoint show.

At the rising of Venus, priests in jaguar loincloths are blowing trumpets and beating turtle shell drums with deer antlers. Masked dancers are marching, warriors in jaguar skins and feathered headdresses are hurling spears, axes, clubs, and obsidian knives. They fight in a battle to the death. The king and queen are receiving their son to the throne while tortured captives are suffering on the temple steps.

The sounds and visions are stereophonic in my head. I don't know where I am or what I'm doing. Am I lying on the sofa imagining the Bonampak murals? Or am I dancing by the kitchen counter with Françoise? To the songs of Little Sparrow.

Over and over again, she sings, "Non, je ne regrette rien . . . c'est les mots d'amour."

In the dance, the king wears bright green quetzal feathers, jade earrings, necklaces and bracelets. The young prince ascends to the jaguar throne of a long-lasting dynasty. A patrilineage.

I lead him/her in another dance under the mansard roof.

The masks high on the wall are constellations, flower stars, and sky gods. They are watching me lead Françoise. Behold the sacrifice. The glyphs tell me the story and the names of the dancers.

"Je n'en connais pas la fin . . ." Like an angel, she sings love songs to the patriotic children of the fatherland.

Voluptuous women in white robes appear with their children, like Lacandon women at the edge of the jungle. They are sitting at the blue green patina table and drawing blood from their tongues and ears. They praise the gods for the king's victorious battle.

My blood drips on the names of many gods. The paper burns and from the smoke appears a manifestation of myself as a man and a woman.

To have such a vision, I must sacrifice my blood . . .

I awake! But I'm not beside the green coffee table. I'm upstairs in the bedroom suite. The ladies, the man, the whores, the gangbanger are fornicating in the commodious bed. Or is porno playing on the TV?

Frank, dressed in heels, garters, and silk stockings, is upholding a syringe. Instead of shooting up drugs, he's drawing his own blood. My blood. He's bloodletting. Enemas? Infusions? Dildos, cuffs, whips, and clamps. I want to wake up and never return to such a medicated stupor.

It's well past noon when I stir from deep sleep. I'm lying in Frank's large hacienda bed, dressed only in my underclothes. I'm disheveled. Has someone violated me? I sit up. Blood splatters are on the bedsheets and my hands. I want to scream.

I remember the syringe and the bloodletting. Things have gone too far! I must flee from this lunatic.

I see Frank beside me. As a man. All man. No one else is in the room. The house is silent.

"Little Sparrow," Frank whispers, pulling me into a gentle embrace. He kisses my brow. He confuses me. Did nothing happen the night before? Or am I changed forever?

Frank holds me against his warm smooth body. I feel his heartbeat as he strokes my back. It's an irregular beat, probably from the drugs. Certainly, if nothing else, he over exerted himself the night before. Why would I ever take him on my expedition after such a display of wanton foolishness? The answer is simple. I love him despite his erratic irrational behavior. He makes me feel complete. He's my spiritual guide and companion. My nagual. My family. And I want him with me when I discover the treasures of my ancient Maya queen.



Chapter 30: Jaguar Blood Moon, *Red Fire Macaw Transits Lord Sun*

9 Baktun 11 katun 16 tun 15 uinal 2 k'in

A stately man is given,
In ecstasy his own,
Demoralizing answer,
Succession to the throne.

On the festive day, the citizens await at the bottom of the founder's pyramid erected during the eighth baktun. At the peak of sweltering heat, King Nuun, his high priests and I climb the stone mountain to the temple of Chac Xib Chaac. When Red Fire Macaw meets Lord Sun, priests chant, dance, make music, and light the sacred fire before the temple door. King Nuun performs his rite and faces his people in the acropolis far below.

In the back of the temple, I sit crossed-legged on a central stone bench where generations of kings and queens sacrificed their royal blood. They maintained the world order by conjuring a snake vision and calling for the council of royal ancestors and gods.

In the corners of the small chamber, two attending priests light clay bowls of copal incense and royal beeswax. A priest hands me a potent cigar. I deeply inhale.

With a stingray spine, I pierce the hole in my tongue. My blood drips onto the bark paper in a stone vessel before me. The paper bears the names of many gods. I light the paper with my cigar and it burns with plumes of smoke.

“I summon my ancestors to conjure K’awiil, the divine powers from my royal bloodlines,” I say.

My blood sacrifice, my itz k’uh, spews a smoky vision. From the serpent’s mouth, the hazy face of a woman appears. She wears the helmet of Tlaloc Chaac Ek. The chanting priests cannot see what I see as they throw copal resin into the bloodletting vessel.

I’m Lady Une Balam the vision says *Baby Jaguar of Yax Mutul, patron of the Jaguar kingdom and the kingdom of Ux Witik. My celestial brother is Chac Xib Chaac. By the miracle of creation, we sacrifice to become reborn. Hear my story, Jaguar Blood Moon*.”

“Great warrior queen of Yax Mutul, I hear you. I am Jaguar Blood Moon, queen of Bone Dog.”

The vision face fades in and out then speaks. *Before Spearthrower Owl’s entrada changed the world, my earthly brother overthrew my seating. He forced me to flee Yax Mutul six katuns before the 9th baktun. My children and I journeyed to the Place of Reeds, city of Spearthrower Owl, domain of the feathered serpent and Great Mother God. The king treated me well in my exile. He married my granddaughter. I devised his entrada to Yax Mutul, the city of my birth. I sought retribution for my exile. The warlord Fire Born led the entrada. He tromped on the gods of Yax Mutul and replaced my brother’s son with my great-grandson. In this way, I broke my brother’s patriline and established my lineage tree.*

The priests chant louder and toss bees wax into the bloodletting vessel to produce more smoke for my butz chan vision.

At the seating of the ninth baktun my harvest spread across the world. Quetzal Jaguar, founding father of the Jaguar Kingdom, is my great-great-grandson. He is grandson of Spearthrower Owl and my granddaughter. The founder of Ux Witik is my great-great-grandson.

Grandson of Spearthrower Owl and my granddaughter. The founder of Coba is my great-great-granddaughter, granddaughter of Spearthrower Owl. The guardian of her tree and her namesake took the mat of Coba the year you were born, Jaguar Blood Moon. The great queen of Coba now leads my harvest in warfare against the Kaan. My lineage is yours. Through you I continue to rule and live.

I stare at the smoldering paper, drag on the cigar, blow smoke at the bowl and call for K'awiil to bring forth my mother Lady Rigel. But the face in the snake vision proclaims herself to be Lady Yok'in, second great queen of Yax Mutul.

I'm ancestor of Lady Rigel the vision says. *Hear my story, Jaguar Blood Moon. I ruled Yax Mutul with my husband under the Tlaloc Chaac Ek alliance of Spearthrower Owl. My younger brother took my life and the throne. He sacked Ux Witik before Lake Turtle Macaw installed the first king of Bone Dog. The Kaan sacked our city and killed my brother and broke his patriline. This was my retribution. Now I tell you, Jaguar Blood Moon, my grandson was Foliated Fire Cloud, great-great-grandfather of your mother Lady Rigel. You are of my dynastic tree. Through you I continue to rule and live.*

I inhale the sweet copal scent. My mind reels from the revelations of my butz chan. "Am I guardian of the bloodline of two great queens of Yax Mutul?" I peer into the flames of my bloodletting vessel. The glyphs on the paper project the god names with burning edges. I watch the face of Lady Yok'in grow clear as she continues to speak.

Yes. Jaguar Blood Moon. You are lineage guardian of two Mutul queens. As Lady of my lineage tree, I prophesizes the events of my bloodline.

"What do you foresee, great Mutul queen?"

In one half katun, the brother of King Nuun, under the shield of Yuknoom, will sacrifice Nuun in the ballcourt of Yax Mutul. Sky Hammer will take the mat of our city and celebrate with Yuknoom in Three Stone City. While he's away, the lords of Mutul will install the son of King Nuun. At this time, *when* ***the warrior queen rules Coba, your father King Pakal will enter the rainbow road of no return and his first son will ascend the mat. Three stones will pass and Yuknoom will follow the dark road of no return. At nearly three katuns, the second son of your father, Kan Xul, will rule after his brother. But a Kaan vassal will retaliate and sacrifice Kan Xul in the ballcourt.***

"Tell me this isn't true." I inhale the cigar and blow a plume on the bloodletting vessel. "I dearly love my brother, Second Son."

What I tell you will come to pass. The son of King Nuun will endure. He'll become a great leader of Yax Mutul and build reservoirs, plazas, and the largest pyramids in ***the world. He'll don the war gear of Tlaloc Chaac Ek and take down the flint and shield of the Kaan when 18 Rabbit becomes the greatest king of Ux Witik.***

"What becomes of the Kaan, the snake warriors of the Sun Bellied Jaguar?"

When the son of Yuknoom enters the dark road, seven snake kings will follow until the Bat dynasty returns and the snakes crumble to dust.

"Will the Tlaloc Chaac Ek alliance of Spearthrower Owl endure?"

I fear not, Jaguar Blood Moon. Chaac will arrive from all directions. His mirrors will reflect his flashing thunder axe. Rains will come from the south. Hurricanes will destroy the land. Abundant Waters will be the first to fall in the changing of the baktun. People will move away and built new cities. The citizens of Ux Witik will not celebrate the tenth baktun. The thirty-

third king of Yax Mutul will erect the last stela. His people will leave when the new world order begins.

From the smoke and serpent's maw, the face of Baby Jaguar appears beside Lady Yok'in. Together their voices resonate in unison.

This is our prophecy Jaguar Blood Moon, guardian of the Maya tree. At this meeting between Red Fire Macaw and Lord Sun, we give you the power of our bloodline. Take up the shield and flint of Tlolac Chaac Ek, don the clothes of the Moon and uphold the banner of your patron spirits. Now is the time to fight the strangling coil of the Kaan.

The voices fade and the vision ends as the smoke retreats into the stone bloodletting vessel. The paper still smolders with the glyphs burning the color of my blood.

A high priest announces, "The meeting of Red Fire Macaw and Lord Sun has ended."

I awaken from my trance.

Later in the day, I privately meet with King Nuun in his receiving hall and recount the prophecy of the two Mutul queens. "You will defeat the Kaan," I tell him. "You and your son will restore Yax Mutul to its former glory." I don't share the story of his capture and sacrifice. Once spoken, I believe, the prophecy can't be stopped. Otherwise, it remains a vision that might change. As a warrior queen, I must be careful with my words. Once crafted, once etched in stone, I can never change them. Fate is a story for the gods to tell. My mandate is to battle for Yax Mutul with the helmet of Tlaloc Chaac Ek and the crescent moon shield of my powerful ancestors and gods.

When the rainy season passes, King Nuun provides me with men from his regiments and from neighboring vassal cities. **Because the Kaan lord Maize Snake is present, the king and I maintain that I've kept the alliance of my deceased husband, have broken all ties with King Pakal, and am now leading warriors to fight for the Kaan on my return journey to Bone Dog.**

In a forest clearing outside Yax Mutul, I speak the truth to my troops. "My father is King Pakal. My snake vision during the Venus transit revealed my bloodline. I descend from the founders of all great cities except those the Kaan has established"

The gathered troops cheer *"Yulu uayano! Eya!"* and call my name and the name of the Wasp Star Xux Ek.

"All the cosmic forces will unite to give us victory. We'll rid the world of snake headed kings. If you die by the hands of our enemy, you will soar to the highest branches of the world tree like a hummingbird and return to Earth a powerful lord."

I depart Yax Mutul leading nearly 4000 warriors aligned to my cause. Along the way to Bone Dog, my Xux Ek troops sack the cities that pay tribute to Yuknoom. Before each siege, I encourage my men to fight **for the glory of my bloodline's right to reign**.

My troops move swiftly from city to city defeating the Kaan. I remain outside the battle zone to plan maneuvers through my nacom and batobs. *"Yulu uayano! Eya!"* warriors cry as they charge down the market plazas into the temples and palaces carrying banners of my patrons Xux Ek, Chac Xib Chaac, Une Balam, and Blood Moon.

I use strategies Yax K'uh and Kan Xul taught me and create new tactics of my own using ballgame deception and cunning. We strike cities I deceived on our journey to Yax Mutul when

my troops claimed allegiance to the Sun Bellied Jaguar. Now, when the Kaan vassal king welcomes me believing I'm loyal to the Kaan, my troops lay siege and I demand the captive king denounce Yuknoom and pay tribute to the Jaguar, Mutul, and Ux Witik alliance. If he refuses, my batobs behead him and I install a loyal king.



Chapter 31: Hillary, *Expedition to the Tomb of Jaguar Blood Moon*

Three days before the sun's zenith passage, my team and I depart 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 the muleteer and his mules to carry it. Luis, the man we met on Sun Mountain 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 GPS and Bradly's antique compass and the coordinates he outlined in his diary. I feel like he's guiding the way or at least like I'm living as he lived one hundred years before. The thirty-year-old wife of Luis, whom we call Zak-Cook, is our camp cook and curandera. Like Master Antonio's wife, she knows how to use the medicinal plants of the forest and can diagnose ailments by reading the pulse. This all seems akin to bloodletting, somehow.

We first ride horses along dirt roads through pine and oak groves. Halfway down the mountain slope we enter the cloud forest. Ferns, orchids, mosses, and bromeliads grow on tree branches and trunks. The air is so thick and heavy, I struggle to breathe. Deafening bird racket

and monkey screeches come from all around. Even with my protective REI cargo pants, long-sleeved tee and Bradly Nolan's safari hat, gnats, flies, and mosquitoes are a constant nuisance.

When we reach the rainforest on 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 Bradly Nolan's machete to clear my path while picturing my virile great-great-grandfather forging his way to the queen's tomb. When I look at Frank ahead of me, I sometimes think, for a moment, I'm seeing Bradly. It's as if I'm having one of Frank's drug-induced spiritual visions. In the sweaty heat, it can be confusing. Sometimes I wonder if he's using mystical powers to throw me into a trance. Or maybe, just maybe, I think, I want it to be real. I want Frank, my Frank, to be my Bradly reincarnated.

By late afternoon on day one, clouds roll in and soon enough, 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 our canvas tent. Monte and José Juan sleep on one side of the center pole and Frank and I on the other, each in our own sleeping bag.

Frank is now completely a man and the nonsense of Antigua is far from my mind. Maybe his as well. My thoughts exclusively entail what treasures we might discover in the tomb. So far, no one has said much about what lies ahead. Perhaps they'd hate to jinx the expedition by building up hopes. I've already gone way beyond this notion. I'm expecting to uncover priceless artifacts including the codex of Jaguar Blood Moon. Everything has gone smoothly since I

discovered Bradly's trunk. I'm sure Mom and Daddy are looking out for me, guiding me as they had in life, and I know they'd never let me down.

When morning arrives it's still pouring outside. We're stuck 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's the first time Frank and my academic mentor have interacted beyond a few cordial words. Most of the time they avoid 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. They're acting like they're playing a serious game among men. A man's game. Not that I want to join them, anyway.

"Jade figurines from Chiapas," Monte replies as he studies his cards. "A beautiful god with a slanted forehead. Like a Moai of Rapa Nui or the **Chachapoya** Warriors of the Clouds."

"Ometeotl?" Frank deals 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 as he studies his cards, about to make his play.

"Por supesto, Señor Guillemont." Monte sounds irritated, I note. I'm well aware the two men dislike each other.

"King to a Queen," Frank slaps down his cards.

"Picaro! Estafador! You're 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.”

The men quit the game and Monte and the grad students go to the other tent.

By noon the sun appears and quickly evaporates the wetness. We break camp and resume hacking through the jungle with Julian and Luis blazing our trail. The day’s humidity and smell of jungle rot intensifies. I’m sweating, batting insects, slashing vines, and closely watching my every step to avoid venomous snakes and ant hills.

“Leaf cutting ants are notorious in this region,” Monte tells me as he hacks away in front of me. “They strip all the foliage on their trails of pheromones.”

“That reminds me of the Polpol Vuh episode in the House of Knives,” I say. “The leaf cutting ants help the hero brothers outwit the Death Lords of Xibalba.” Our laughter instantly stirs up a cacophony of monkey chatter and screeches.

“The jungle seems to have a mind of its own,” I suggest. “It’s an eerie feeling.”

“That’s right, sparrow. This jungle’s watching our every move and listening to our every word.”

By mid-afternoon I’m exhausted and call for a break. No one wants to stop because we hope to set up camp beside the lake before night falls. But I have 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 gathering around me. Everyone’s quiet but the jungle birds and howler monkeys. I inhale and smell the deet and what smells like wet moldy socks.

“Okay,” I say once I feel refreshed. “I’m ready to forge ahead.” Before I even rise from the log, however, a scratchy sound rings in my ears, like radio static or aliens transmitting a cryptic call. It’s eerie. Suddenly, a long thin insect appears.

“A wasp!” I scream and everyone glares at me.

“Don’t move. Don’t swat it,” Monte yells from ten feet away. He’s sitting on a fallen log in the thick undergrowth. Zak-Cook and the muleteer are nearby.

“Soyez tranquil,” Frank shouts as he stands from beside me.

But it’s too late. I instinctively swat the wasp from my face and it drops to the top of my boot and hiked-up cargo pants. It sting my leg through my thick sock. Again. And again. And again. I scream, “It’s hurting me!”

Zak-Cook rushes to help me.

The wasp clings to my leg. 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-Cook 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’s lurking in this place.”

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

“I can’t put on my shoe. My ankle’s swollen and I’m feeling headachy and nauseated and in a great deal of pain.”

“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, our cook prepares a mixture of plantain, tobacco, aguardiente, and a vine from a forest thicket. She applies the paste to my swollen ankle. It immediately eases my pain and headache. She makes a tea from the same mixture without the alcohol. The tea brings me further relief.

That night, I'm barely able to sleep on my hammock under a mosquito net. As soon as the sun comes up, I roll from my hammock and announce, "We can get going now. I'm all right and apologize for delaying our expedition over a little wasp sting!"

Everyone laughs and we pack up and head out even without breakfast or coffee. We're all too anxious to reach our destination and find all the ancient treasures awaiting us.

By late-afternoon we come across a round pool of clear, aquamarine water that matches our GPS coordinates. Luis cuts a path to the cenote's edge while the rest of us set up camp and Zak-Cook 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. At the opposite shore, ferns and saplings grow from scattered boulders before limestone cliffs. I notice a pyramid mound of rocks before a dark cave entry.

"I see the waybil," I shout. "I see the queen's lineage shrine! This is the place."

Monte quickly appears beside me and takes his own pictures.

"It's just as Bradly described in his diary," I say then quickly realize I've blurted out something **I shouldn't have. I look around for Frank, hoping he hasn't overheard me. I haven't yet shared the diary with him. What will I say to Frank if he's heard me? *I love you***

Frank but respect Monte more, academically. Fortunately, Frank is out of earshot at the camp table listening to a shortwave radio.

After a meal of quinoa and beans, Frank, Monte, the grad students, and I sit 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 the Moon shines on the water and illuminates the cliff walls. We're all feeling invigorated about finding the cenote and cave.

At midnight, the moon flushes out most constellations. "See Jupiter near Spica," I say, pointing at the sky. Frank is sitting beside me smoking his last cigarette. "And can you make out 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 on top of the Milky Way Tree." Everyone chuckles from the excitement and anticipation of the moment.

I squeeze Frank's hand feeling happy beyond reason. 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 my Bradly's ruling Maya Queen and hopefully find her priceless codex.

On the morning of the zenith passage, I peer outside the tent and see a clear, blue sky above our field camp. I inhale the warm air. Frank appears at my side, puts his arm over my shoulder, and says, "The hero twins are dancing with joy. Their father is reborn on the back of a turtle."

Zak-Cook is already at the stove on the camp table making coffee. The graduate students are at the top of the south cliff hoisting down wood for the sacred fire and equipment for our exploration in the cavern.

We eat a quick tortilla and quinoa breakfast then Monte, Frank, the grad students, and I wade into the clear, cool water that sparkles with an orange sheen.

"We have two hours before the zenith sun strikes Lake Turtle Macaw," Monte says.

"I know. Let's get going and find what we find," I say and plunge into the lake wearing diving shoes, shorts, and a J. Crew T-shirt over my swimsuit. I swim toward the waybil shrine at the far shore then dive underwater through warm and cool currents that caress my body like veils of silk.

When I resurface, Frank's already at the waybil lighting the ceremonial fire. Monte and the students are climbing out of the lake. It's disappointing that I'm not the first to arrive at the cave. I don't have the stamina of a powerful man.

Shortly, we're all standing around the waybil. Frank tosses resin into the flames. He sprays a mouthful of aguardiente over the lineage altar where candles burn on the remnants of old candle wax.

Frank summons the queen's spirit with words I helped him write. "We honor Jaguar Blood Moon, founder of her dynastic tree. We reestablish this ceremony at Lake Turtle Macaw on the date of her entombment. On this zenith passage, *May 23, 2005,* Ta Ochle returns to enter the cavern of your tomb and announce your greatness to the world. Don't curse us. Guide us to your treasures and secrets."

After Frank completes the rite, all four men, like gentlemen, or as Frank probably pre-arranged, 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 the echoing drips of water and my fluttering heart with each step I take. At any moment, I anticipate seeing 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. At one point, 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 Earth's blood hardened to stone.

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

Time 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 into a virgin cave untouched by humankind.

"Perhaps the murals and tomb lie in deeply hidden chambers." My words echo through the empty cavern. No one speaks. Everyone's busy with his task.

I continue to explore the cave. At times I can't help but wonder if I misinterpreted Bradly's diary. Or, worse yet, have I miscalculated the grid? Did we stumble into the wrong cenote cavern? Is the waybil shrine at the entrance meant for something else?

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 after. Even Fulbright wants this from its scholar.

"Doctor Jacobs! Are you sure this isn't a fool's folly? *Una busqueda inutil?*" Monte's echoing words and tone startle me.

Before I can say anything to appease my academic host, José Juan's voice reverberates through the cavern. "Ay dios mio!"

Within minutes, Monte, Frank, and I locate his call. It comes from the other end of a tunnel about three feet in circumference. An offshoot of the cavern's main chamber.

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. "This could be the tomb Bradly described," I say.

"After you, mademoiselle." Frank holds out his arm guiding my way. Always considering me first. Such a gentleman, my teddy bear.

I crawl through the narrow passage for about twenty-feet and enter an offshoot chamber. José Juan is holding up his lantern illuminating my way.

When I look up and scan the chamber, I don't see any treasure or artifacts on the floor or glyphs and dancing kings on the walls. Jose points out a niche carved into the limestone wall. I see a piece of woven cloth atop a jumble of bones. That's all. There's no mysterious codex on

top of a skeleton as Bradly described. In fact, so far, none of what's in Bradly's diary seems to be in this entire cavern. My spirits crumble yet again like the bones before me.

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 myself? 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. Maybe even 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."

I'm too frozen in disappointment to speak.

As if reading my thoughts, Frank steps up and exclaims to Monte, "Why are you giving orders? This is Hillary's expedition. 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'm overwhelmed with emotion. What Frank just did is the kind of thing my father Sheldon would have done for me or for my mother. Frank 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 leaves the cavern and swims back to the field camp. Frank and I follow. The grad students begin setting up their camera equipment for the solar crossing. They plan to take pictures from waybil to see if an alignment exists with the solar zenith. The rest of us want to record the event at the cenote's opposite shore.

By 11:15 AM, Frank, Monte and I are sitting around the camp table drinking coffee quietly awaiting the zenith sun to strike Lake Turtle Macaw.

"Perhaps another offshoot exists that hides the real tomb and treasures," I suggest as optimistically as possibly. "We didn't have enough time to thoroughly explore the entire cavern. Perhaps we'll find something worthwhile this afternoon."

"I hope you're right," Monte remarks and says nothing more.

At 11:30, Frank and I leave the campsite and head to the cenote.

At the water's edge Frank takes me in his arms. "No one's around. Let's swim in the lake when the sun reaches zenith."

"Really, like this?" I indicate my clothes.

“No. Let’s skinny dip like we did at Choo-Ha cenote in Coba. We’ll absorb the itz k’uh of Lord Sun meeting the rainbow goddess Ix Chel.”

“You mean, making love to her?”

“Naturallement.”

“No one was around at Choo-ha. We can’t skinny dip here. The others will show up. And what about Jose and Pedro over there with their cameras set up. Are we to be part of their scientific study? In the nude?”

“Yes, little sparrow. Be daring. Shock them. Especially you’re Mr. Vasquez.”

“We haven’t the time now,” I say as Frank begins stripping. “And I want to take pictures.”

“There’ll be plenty of pictures from Juan and Jose. Come. Allez vite. I dare you little sparro.” Frank dives in buck naked.

Again, my teddy bear stirs me with his magic. I want to be daring like him. I want to absorb the spiritual powers of the event like he says. I undress to my underwear and dive in rationalizing that the others will see us but I’ll be in the water where I’ll stay until after they leave the lake shore.

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 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 in the middle of the lake, treading water and splashing each other in play. He puts down his camera with a look of disgust. Obviously, we’ve ruined his picture.

Frank laughs. “See. We showed him who’s boss.”

Monte remains at the cenote edge despite our presence in the lake. He doesn’t want to miss the solar zenith.

At precisely noon, the tropical sun seems to stops directly overhead on its passage across the bright sky.

“Regarder. Lord Sun’s white light vertically falls on you and me,” Frank declares as we swim. “A pillar from heaven is anointing us. When the sun hits the water Ix Chel reveals her rainbow of colors!”

“I feel the warmth of Lord Sun. The embrace of Ix Chel,” I say and slash Frank. “I have never felt so energized in my life.”

“Yes, little sparrow. The gods bless us. We’re destined to find the lost codex of your ancient queen. I’ll become who I want to be! With you.”

Before I can respond, Monte yells, “This is a hoax, an embarrassment. I’m leaving today.” I glance at the lake shore where Monte is standing as if waiting for me to reply, as if to draw me from the water. As if he wants to see me unclothed. But I remain silently swimming in the middle of the lake.

“I don’t believe there *is* a codex. Doctor Jacobs,” he continues, staring at me.

“Quitter,” Frank utters as he treads water.

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

I stay in the lake and wait for Monte to leave so I can shake off and dress without him seeing me in my underclothes. My vigor drains from me into the lake. “I’m humiliated.” I say to Frank. He’s still splashing me in fun “How can I possibly convince my academic host to stay?”

“Do you even want him to stay. He’s just showed his true colors.”

“No, I guess you’re right. He’s not a man of stamina. Like you teddy bear.”

“And like you, my little sparrow.”

After dinner that evening, 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. After the solar passage, my team and I returned to the cave but no one discovered anything more. I’m deflated once again but summon the nerve to remain positive.

“Is there anything I can do to make amends?” I look up from my notes at Monte. I feel a little awkward around him, perhaps I’m just embarrassed by my bold and daring display during the zenith passage. At the time, I felt so empowered by the event, by Frank, but now I’m seeing my behavior through the lens of my mentor. I can feel myself plunging in his estimation of me.

“Not really,” he says and continues looking through his digital pictures.

“Please Monte. Stay a few more days to search the area. I know something’s out there. We simply haven’t found the tomb.”

Monte looks at me like he’s looking at a naughty child. “Hillary. The expedition has failed. 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 long ago. I’m afraid your ruling Maya queen is only a legend.”

“I have more than Bradly’s diary. I have his actual Kodak Brownie pictures of the codex. The ancient book of Jaguar Blood Moon. It mentions an unknown Classic Maya city. At the museum, I wasn’t just studying the ancient Maya glyphs from Bradly’s diary or studying glyphs

in general for my postdoc. I was secretly deciphering the text from the Kodak pictures. The name of her city was Bone Dog. Bak Tz'ul. She was daughter of Pakal."

"Brownie pictures? 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."

"This is all a scam. You showed me diary files you composed under the name of Bradly 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 and continues looking at his pictures to cut me off.

I can't believe his words. He must really hate me now. Maybe he had fallen for me, like I suspected, and when he saw me frolicking with Frank, he lost it. Jealousy consumes him. But no, I think to myself, he's just disappointed my little expedition, that I made into a grandiose thing, has turned up nothing. "Dr. Vasquez, you make me sound megalomaniacal," I say as the sharp screech of a bird or a monkey or maybe even a ghost comes from the dark jungle. "I've never misled you," I continue my defense. "I've always been sincere and honest with you. You're my mentor, I look up to you. I never intended to let you down."

"I apologize, Dr. Jacobs. Hillary," Monte says as if trying to reign 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'll examine these Brownie pictures you claim to have. I can tell a forgery when I see one, even in pictures."

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

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

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

Later in the evening, Frank sits across from me eating corn fritters and guacamole. “I heard you last night.”

“What?” I ask, dreading his answer. I’m afraid I already know what he heard.

“Your discussion with Vasquez. About letting that *connard* read Bradly’s diary. You never told me of this. Another secret you’ve keep. Why him and not me?”

“Frank. Teddy. Are you upset with me?”

“Maybe. No, not really angry. Just frustrated with you and your lack of trust in me.”

“I showed you the old Kodak pictures. I never told Monte about them until last night. You must have heard this as well. Besides, what about your secret life, Frank?

“This isn’t a tit for tat discussion. We’re talking about this expedition I’ve devoted myself to. Just as I’ve devoted myself to being your spiritual guide and training you to be a lineage shaman. I’ve shown you my secret side, taken you into the Maya heart and spirit. We’re lovers. Are you lovers with Monte as well?”

“Frank! That’s absurd.”

“Then why don’t you trust me by now? We need to break this shell once and for all and truly become each other’s naguals.”

“We made it to the tomb and found nothing. No treasures, no codex, no Jaguar Blood Moon. Frank. I’m so sorry. I’m crushed. I feel like I’ve tragically lost Mom and Daddy all over again.” Frank takes my hand like he thinks I’m on the brink of losing my mind. Maybe I am.

“Everything you say is true,” I continue. “I lost nearly everything except for you. You’ve become everything to me.”

“And you’re everything to me, sparrow. Now’s the time to let me read the diary. No more secrets.”

“As soon as were back in Todo Santos I’ll hook up my laptop at the Proyecto and show you everything.”

“I wish you had trusted me sooner.”

“Frank. I know. Please let me explain. When I spread my parents’ ashes in the Seine, I promised them I’d keep quiet about the contents of Bradly’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; he squeezes mine. Which is a good sign. What I’m telling him is only partly true. I’m not really sure why I didn’t let him read the diary sooner. 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 diary secret for selfish reasons. “I’m not sure of anything anymore,” I say.

“I’m still here with you. But I think you trust your Monte more than me.”

“No, Frank. I promise that’s not true. It’s just that he’s my academic advisor for my scholarship.”

“Never mind,” Frank says decisively. “We’ll keep looking for the codex on our own. We don’t need Fulbright or Monte Vasquez or anyone else. Just you and me, Little Sparrow. Together we’ll make great discoveries and achieve great things. Together we’ll become what we are meant to be.”

“I love you Frank. You need to know this. You’re telling me what I needed to hear.”

"Wajb'ila ti'ja I love you, too. Now let's eat Zak Cook's tasty dinner and get a good night's rest. Tomorrow we'll keep exploring the cave and the vicinity. Tonight, we sleep together and dream of your queen's spirit at this lake. All her holdings, her jewels, treasures, her thoughts and pursuits. Tonight, you'll dream of Jaguar Blood Moon leading us to her final resting place.



Chapter 32: **Jaguar Blood Moon,** *7 Chikchan 3 Muwan*

When we return to Bone Dog with captive lords and lieutenants, the citizens cheer for our victorious military campaign. At the palace, I celebrate having Jade Moon 1 Rabbit back in my arms and by my side. Once again, we're inseparable although now Jade Moon always has with her Precious Soft Paw, her pet jaguar from Kan Xul. I resume teaching my daughter the proper way to live as a royal Jaguar princess and tell her that one day she'll be guardian of many royal bloodlines and lineage trees.

In the receiving hall, while seated on my double-headed jaguar throne, I inform my brother Kan Xul about the Venus transit, the wars I waged, and the many vassal cities now loyal to our father Pakal. I don't tell him what my butz chan revealed about his capture and death for the same reasons I didn't tell King Nuun about his.

Before Kan Xul returns to Abundant Waters, Bone Dog holds a victory game in the ballcourt. Jade Moon and Kan Xul sit with me on the northern platform. Tul Til had informed me, through a herald, that he wasn't attending. I feel too jubilant to address any issues concerning my son. Lord Sun **has twice journeyed north to south** during my entrada and now my son is nearly a man whom I don't know, trust or even like.

At the ballcourt, Second Son declares to the gathered citizens, "Your queen is daughter of Holy King Pakal. Her bloodline has bought our alliance many victories."

The crowds cheer with elation for me, their warrior queen. The men whistle and holler war cries and shout, "*Lady K'awiil Warrior Queen."*

My troops play against the enemy captives who choose death over joining my alliance with Abundant Waters, Ux Witik, and Yax Mutul. My batabs behead the Kaan nacoms and lieutenants. I decide which enemy warrior to set free to inform Yuknoom of my victories.

Before each man bravely dies in the ballcourt, I shout the names of my gods and say, "You're a sacrifice. You're a warrior killed in battle and your death is the harvest of your bravery."

At the end of the victory celebrations my brother Kan Xul returns to Abundant Waters with half of his scar dog troops. I settle back into palace life but quickly discover a rift in my kingdom. My healer Ol Nitt confides that she heard many rumors among courtiers and citizens concerning my son. "While you were away," she says. "I fear Tul Til has conspired against you."

“I’m sure my brother Kan Xul kept the b’aah ch’ok constrained and maintained order in the palace,” I insist although I’ve noticed, since my return, that whenever I meet with Tul Til he’s more disrespectful. He refuses to acknowledge me at formal occasions. He refuses to hear about my battle victories or attend my battle games at the ballcourt. He doesn’t want to speak to me or be in my presence.

“The b’aah ch’ok is a cunning boy, a man really, now that he’s seated twelve stones,” Ol Nitt warns. “He plays one man against another, like my brother did. He keeps voices silent. Your son took Kan Xul unaware because he’s as tricky as a hornet. He wants to take the mat and rule without his mother.”

The words of Ol Nitt fill me with dread. Now I must contemplate a plan of action regarding my contemptuous son. He has power in allies and could easily unseat me. It’s a delicate matter. I can’t plot against him. The citizens of Bone Dog uphold my son as heir of the patriline established when Lake Turtle Macaw installed Foliated Fire Cloud as first king. Tul Til hides his cunning and deceitful ways from public view. People believe he’s strong and righteous.

After much contemplation, I hold a public rally to recount my victories and reassure my people that their b’aah ch’ok will co-rule with me after he fights a few battles.

In less than a lunation, the situation grows hostile. Tul Til demands the crown, his lords tell me. “I forbid his ascension until he seats fifteen stones,” I warn them.

My son retaliates by hurling hateful words at Jade Moon 1 Rabbit like his father had at me when I was a young naive bride. I avoid my son, whenever possible, and so does Jade Moon because she’s always at my side.

Bit by bit, Tul Til takes over the kingdom. He cuts down the forest and clears the land, so to speak, and persuades lords and nobles to take his side, the side of the true heir to the kingdom.

“A woman’s rule taints the patriline of Foliated Fire Cloud,” he tells them. “This false warrior queen betrayed my father King Hummingbird Sun. I must take the mat and restore his alliance with the Kaan.”

As the kins pass, sentries find some of my Xux Ek warriors with their throats severed and flint knives lodged in their chests. But I refuse to surrender the throne and allow my son to break the alliance with Pakal. I care about my adopted city and my citizens and know my son would rule with a corrupt and greedy heart. Because of the nacom and batobs who vow their lives to me, I’m able to maintain my rule.

The struggle with my son continues for **two solar cycles** after my return. During this time, I receive news from Pakal that his queen entered the rainbow road of no return. I also learn that King Nuun and his warriors have defeated the Kaan infiltrators and now fully rule Yax **Mutul,** as predicted in my butz chan.

To reinvigorate my power and gain support, I share the good news with my citizens and Xux Ek warriors who’ve remained in the city. “The victory of King Nuun ripples from our military campaigns.”

“We are all victorious!” the people cheer. “Because of our queen, the daughter of Pakal.”

Soon after the seating of my son’s fourteenth stone, I’m in the palace receiving hall where vassal lords from cities I conquered are paying their annual tribute. One by one, an envoy approaches the throne platform where I sit with my daughter. Tul Til isn’t present. He never attends my events and I have no avenue to speak frankly with him. He has no love for me, like his father had none. He bears only the cruelty spawned by Hummingbird Sun.

A vassal lord of Sky Cave City presents me with a live scarlet macaw. Before I can reach to pet the sacred bird and name him Red Fire Macaw**, Kaan warriors burst into the** receiving hall **with my son. The b'aah ch'ok is wearing the jade and shell insignia of a Kaan king and carrying the shield of the Sun Bellied Jaguar.**

"I have restored my father's patriline," he declares. "I've **reestablished alliance with the Great Yuknoom.**

"My b'ayal. My son. My first born," I say. "How can you betray your mother?"

"I terminate your rule, Mother queen. I sever our lineage ties. I am not your b'ayal. Already Kaan warriors have infiltrated the city and murdered many of your Xux Ek warriors and guards. Our holy overlord Yuknoom will make me a great king along the southern trade route."

Amid the vast confusion, I grab my daughter's hand and attempt to flee. Tul Til orders Kaan warriors to apprehend me and Jade Moon and confine us to my chamber.

In the days to follow, with great ceremony and pomp, my son takes the mat under the regnal name of his grandfather, Fiery Jaguar Paw. He keeps Jade Moon and I locked away except when he needs me as regent. He faces some opposition from those who want me to remain queen because of my power to conjure many royal bloodlines.

I soon learn that some of my Xux Ek warriors have escaped to Pakal's city with the news of my son's betrayal. A few have chosen to join my son under the Kaan.

I fear for my life and that of my daughter and repeatedly beg my b'ayal to allow me and Jade Moon to peacefully return to Abundant Waters.

“You cannot leave and diminish my powers,” he tells me one day in my bed chamber. “You must keep your loyal citizens and lords from rallying against me. The Great Yuknoom requires you to conjure your gods and bloodlines and give power to his empire.”

“Not even you, my son, will receive my bloodline powers,” I curse. “Only my daughter will inherit my lineage tree. I renounce you as my b’ayal.”

With wide eyes of fury and hate, the young king gazes at Jade Moon 1 Rabbit sitting on the bed platform cuddling Precious Soft Paw. I sit beside her and hold her to protect her from her brother.

The king looks at me. “I know Jade Moon’s true father is Pakal’s nacom Yax K’uh. Star Flower told me this, Mother queen.”

“How? My attendant doesn’t know anything. She’s a liar,” **I say while thinking about the care I took to keep Star Flower from learning about the night I conceived Jade Moon. I told no one about my meeting with Yax K’uh. My life-servant knew only about the medicine that made the king peacefully sleep. I’m certain Star Flower has merely guessed about my liaison with the nacom. Unless my trusted kuleboob has betrayed me.**

“Star Flower understands nothing,” I further protest. “She’s always been jealous of me because she has no husband or child. She has no lover, no beloved but me.”

“Star Flower is my lover,” the king proclaims to deliberately taunt me. His devious laughter echoes as he departs the room with his stewards. I suddenly understand. Since my return from Yax Mutul, I have rarely seen Star Flower except when she was with Tul Til as his healer. I surmise she seduced the b’aah ch’ok while I was away, maybe even helped him accomplish his nefarious goals with her black magic. If I could, I would order her exiled or beheaded. But it

seems that my life-servant now has more power than I do. She's under the protection of the king and my daughter and I are under his spiteful whim.

Fearing for my daughter's safety more than my own, I secretly dispatch Pakal through one of my loyal aids and ask for his help. **Within a lunation, Pakal's secret messenger instructs me to take Jade Moon to the lake below the western mountains between the two cities King Lake Turtle Macaw established. The same lake where Hummingbird Sun forced me to undertake a purity test.**



Chapter 33: Hillary,

Frank and I remain at Lake Turtle M**acaw. When I promise to triple their salary, Luis, his wife and the muleteer 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 to Todos Santos with Luis guiding our way.

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. "Ask the ancient shaman to lead you on your quest for this ancient book," he tells us.

"You know where his grave is?" I ask, astonished with myself for having failed to ask Antonio this question. Or had I? I'm suddenly confused and wonder if this is just another ruse.

The long hike and terrible disappointment over our failed expedition have completely exhausted me 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. "Tell your master we must dig up the gravesite."

Frank scowls at me. "You're being disrespectful to my old master," he says as if he's being polite. But his politeness is merely a ploy, I realize, because he then turns back to Antonio and asks about digging up the grave of Grandfather Thunder.

Antonio stops what he's doing and says in Mam, "This is an ill omen. You can't disturb the old shaman's grave."

"Frank," I plead. "I'm sorry I kept the diary from you. At least I showed you the codex pictures. 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."

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 race, for his milpas, and for his daughter's doweries if they should ever marry.

Antonio hesitates one final time before he agrees. "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 saints."

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

Within the hour, Antonio and Rita escort 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 Horse and brings along 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 we take pictures of the ceremony.

The grave turns out to be a mound overgrown with grass and weeds. On top are three crosses just as Mam Consuela had described. We had simply confused the directions on the map we tried to make.

Etched on a stone against one of the pine crosses is the name Mam Ah Peku in the Latin script. **“**In the 1600s,” I say. “The Spanish banned the use of the ancient glyphs and forced the Maya to use the Spanish alphabet.”

“Je sais, Cherie. Self-righteous zealots set fire to most Maya scripts. To destroy what they saw as sacrilegious.”

“Pity how ignorant and destructive this world can be.”

“Bien sûr, sparrow. Let’s get this ceremony started. I can feel it in my bones. We’re about to uncover the lost codex of your ancestor queen. Enfin. To be to become. Soon we enter the Ek’ way-nal portal of transformation.”

“I know teddy. Another spiritual induction awaits us both.”

At one end of the grave mound, 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 the complaining caged rooster beside the mesa.

“Poor thing is doomed to bleed to death during this rite,” I can’t help but say.

“It’s a way of life. C'est un mode de vie.”

I’m not sure if Frank’s joking or serious. I’m reminded of my night in Antigua although I haven’t decided how much of that night really happened. Especially the bloodletting with syringes. I’ve pushed it to the back of my mind and now I’m too eager to dig up the grave to really care.

Antonio lights a small fire in his pichacha, swallows aguardiente, and sprays the 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. Its blood flows onto the burning copal in his pichacha. “Caballeros, the blood moves, the blood speaks.”

“Is this what you mean Frank? About it’s a way of life?”

Frank merely chuckles and removes rocks and clumps of vegetation from the grave. From the sacred fire, the aroma of copal and the metallic scent of the rooster’s blood wafts around Frank and I as we work at the grave. After we clear it, Frank begins digging. About three feet down, his shovel hits something hard. He digs a little further

“Careful,” I say. “Whatever it is it’s at least 100 years old.”

“Oui oui bien sûr, sparrow.” Franks heaves from the soil a copper case.

The shaman’s chanting and the copal smoke intensify.

Frank places the case beside the mesa then begins reburying the graves. At the same time, I cut open the lock on the case and put on latex gloves before looking inside. It takes me back to when I first discovered Bradly’s trunk in the attic under the Mansard roof. This now seems a century ago.

Inside the copper case, among dry crumbled corn leaves, I find a thick leather-bound diary fastened with a rusty lock. “This has to be Bradly’s diary,” I say to Frank. “It’s identical to the one I have back in Tucson.”

“Keep going, sparrow.” Frank huffs and toils at replacing the rocks and three crosses.

I look deeper into the case and finds a package of Brownie pictures wrapped with boot strings. The old sepia photos show the sites Bradly had visited and the treasures he described inside the tomb of Jaguar Blood Moon.

“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. Frank’s engrossed with his task and Rita is busy helping her father conduct his ritual. I look further beneath the corn leaves and uncover an aged and worn jaguar pelt. As the shaman’s prayers grow forceful, I slowly pull it from the case.

Beneath the pelt, lies the codex. “Frank. Grandfather Thunder has blessed me. Blessed us. What we behold is 1400 years old. This, *mon amour*, is the codex of Jaguar Blood Moon.”

“Careful sparrow. It’s priceless and fragile.”

“I know that. I’m removing it like it’s a newborn calf.” I open the accordion book on a blanket I’ve placed on the ground. “It’s aged and reddened but amazingly well preserved,”

Frank drops what he’s doing and stands beside me. I unfold ten sheets of glyphs in red, black, blue, and yellow and make measurements. “The book is twelve inches wide and long. It has the dimensions Bradly recorded in his first diary.” I gaze at the spread. “I already know each ancient picture and glyph by heart. From the Brownie pictures.”

“Formidable. I already feel it. To be to become. We are here,” Frank says as he peers over my shoulder. “Alons enfont de la patrie,” Frank sings. “Let’s carefully put the codex back

in the case and finish the reburial so we can get going. We've a lot of work to do. A lot's in store for us. For you, sparrow, madam discoverer." He hugs me then holds me at arm's length to view my face. "At this moment you and I enter Ek' way-nal." We tightly embrace.

I'm soiled, sweaty, exhausted, and elated and want to hold my teddy forever but the sun's position indicates it's time to leave. Antonio 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; not because of fleas or the smell of urine. I've become Coyolxauhqui and no longer worry about anything. Not Monte. Not the failed expedition and the mysterious bones in the cavern. The excitement of discovery consumes my every thought. I didn't fail in my quest after all. I've found the codex.

It rests in the copper case beside my pillow against the adobe brick wall. I assure myself over and over that my treasure 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. He's out of the picture. It's only Frank and me. I must consider my own wishes first, then maybe Fulbright's and Frank's. My find, Bradly's discovery, is important to science. I must preserve its historic significance. Have experts authenticate it. Make sure I completely understand its meaning before holding a press release. I'll report my findings to Morales and the government of Guatemala. Then I'll prove to the world that there actually was a treasure **and a warrior queen named Jaguar Blood Moon.** My parents, wherever they might be, are looking over me right now and feeling very proud. **I've as good as won a Nobel Prize.**



Chapter 34: Jaguar Blood Moon, ***Roaring Sky Dance receives Jade Moon***

Pakal's messenger relays that the king of Stone Mountain City Where All Gods Unite, Roaring Sky Dance, will receive Jade Moon, keep her safe and marry her when she seats fifteen stones. Jade Moon will bring a new bloodline to his mountain city which the Kaan has never touched. Even if Yuknoom knows about the Jaguar dynasty outpost, he has no ambition to sack cities hidden in the mountains far from the river trade routes or jade mines.

After Jade Moon 1 Rabbit seats ten stones and I've been the king's figurehead co-regent for six lunations, an opportunity presents itself to me. My son leaves on a campaign with Kaan warriors and I arrange a secret trek to Lake Turtle Macaw with the help of my most loyal servants. I convince the guards at my chamber door that I want to provide my daughter with her menarche transformation ceremony at the Usumacinta River. "She must undergo rite before your king can offer her as a bride in a political alliance. He may even give her to Yuknoom himself," I tell them. I then dispatch a messenger to king Roaring Sky Dance of Stone Mountain City and request his warriors meet me and Jade Moon at Lake Turtle Macaw **during the next Fang Moon.**

My plan unfolds and on the evening before the crescent moon rises, my daughter and I are sitting beside Lake Turtle Macaw. Precious Soft Paw lies between us. An elite team of

warriors from Stone Mountain City stand vigil around the encampment. They will escort my daughter to her new kingdom.

I give Jade Moon the jaguar canine necklace from Pakal and the celestial stone and calendar from Yax K'uh, her father. "These are treasures of your heritage to keep you safe in your new mountain home."

At dusk, we watch bats leave the cave across the lake and I tell Jade Moon about Hummingbird Sun's purity test sixteen stones before. "My cruel old husband made me endure bats swarming from the cave in the evening sky. Back then, I cursed this lake. Now, here with you, my precious daughter, I see this lake as the most beautiful place on Earth. It's where I would have my tomb."

"Holy Mother. Hummingbird Sun tainted this lake," my daughter says.

"Yes. And we must cleanse it of his diseased spirits and curse those who would enter my tomb with sorcerous intentions."

"How will we do this, beloved mother queen?"

"Through my healing and purity spells and curses. Ones I learned long ago during my own menarche rite at the Usumacinta River."

"Spells and curses?"

"My personal healer Lady Ja' Naj taught them to me. I will teach them to you during our few hours together." I hold my daughter tightly; Prescious Soft Paw rests her head on our laps. "I will miss you each day we are apart and will think about you as Lord Sun circles the sky and travels the underworld waters of darkness."

"I will miss you more, mother queen."

“You are guardian of my lineage tree, the tree of many great queens. You have broken the tainted bloodline of Tul Til 5 Caiman because you are the harvest of Yax K’uh, Precious Owl, descendant of King Lake Turtle Macaw. When you marry in five years, you’ll bring a new bloodline to Stone Mountain City Where All Gods Unite.”

The next day, elite warriors of King Roaring Sky Dance escort Jade Moon 1 Rabbit up the mountain to her new city. I return to Bone Dog fearing in my heart that I’ll never see my daughter again. I would join her but as queen of Bone Dog, I’m dutybound to my loyal subjects. If I fail to return, I fear my son will slaughter the men, women, and children who even utter my name.

Before the rainy season, my son King Fiery Jaguar Paw II returns from his campaign and meets me in my private chamber. “Where’s my half-sister?” he demands. “The daughter of your lover?”

“I sent her to live with Pakal for protection from the Kaan. **He’ll make her a princess of Abundant Waters.”**

“You can’t do that!” the king screams with poisonous spittle flung from his words. “Jade Moon is my princess to trade with the Kaan. Dispatch Pakal immediately. Demand her return.”

“I refuse.”

“Then I’ll send you away in a marriage alliance to a vassal of Yuknoom. Maybe the great king himself will accept you as a servant bride.” My son laughs like his wicked father when he mocked me and tried to shame me.

To keep my son pacified and from causing myself great harm I say, “I promise to dispatch Pakal and request that Kan Xul escort Jade Moon back to Bone Dog.”

What I tell my son isn't true. I need time to develop a strategy for my own escape to live with my daughter away from my treacherous son. Stone Mountain City is a journey of perhaps a half winal and I need an escort to take me there. I must also bring with me as many loyal subjects along as I can, to save their lives. There are no remaining Xux Ek warriors in Bone Dog. My son executed those who didn't flee or join his Kaan troops. A few lords, guards, and attendants have remained secretly loyal to me, but I can't rely on anyone with my life. Not anymore. It seems everyone has fallen under the spell of my son.

One stone after Tul Til's ascension to the throne, he allows me to wander the palace and city with his Kaan guards. To placate his demands that my daughter return to Bone Dog, **I tell him Pakal betrothed her to a lord in Yax Mutul.** He's furious and continues his threats of marrying me to a lord of the Kaan.

To keep my mind at peace in my precarious situation, I grow medicinal herbs and flowers in the palace gardens and keep a small hive of royal bees to pollinate my plants. It's a task I enjoy as much as weaving at my handheld loom or writing glyphs in paper books.

One morning, while Red Chac Xib Chaac is upholding the eastern sky and I'm watering my morning glory and yam vines, a messenger from my son interrupts my tranquility. "My lady," he says. "Our holy king summons you to the Temple of Directions. He's planning a royal hunting trip at the river lodge."

"What does he require of me? To attend the throne while he's away?"

"No. Our king wants you to conjure your royal bloodlines to assure him a bountiful expedition. Go to the temple. You son awaits you there."

I set down my water vessel. I don't trust the king but must assure him of my devotion to his rule until I can find a means of escape with my loyal subjects. I return to my chamber hoping my son's hunting trip will that opportunity. As I prepare myself to meet the king, I summon Ol Nitt to my chamber.

"I'm meeting with the king at the Temple of Directions and want you to finish watering my garden."

Ol Nitt takes my hand and says with concern, "Don't go to the temple. Send a message that you're ill. I don't trust my brother's son. He plays with ill intension."

"I have no choice, dear healer. I must go or the king will send me off in a marriage alliance."

"I fear for you. In your garden I'll pray Lady Royal Bee protects you."

I kiss my healer and leave for the temple **with the prophecy of Sak K'uk in mind; the prophecy of my death at the hands of my son, the conniving caiman Lady Ja' Naj saw in my menarche dream a lifetime ago.** I never told anyone about this prophecy, not Star Flower, my daughter, or even my healer Ol Nitt. For the same reason I didn't tell King Nuun or Second Son about their prophesized demise. Once the prophecy is spoken, it's as good as written in stone.

As I near the temple, I pray I've **convinced the king that he needs me at his side to pacify his citizens and conjure my powerful bloodline in support of his kingship.**

The Kaan guards leave me at the temple door. The king isn't yet present. I sit alone on the center bench and wait for him to arrive. Copal burns in the four corners of the stone room.

Shortly, while I'm staring at the gods painted on the walls and contemplating my fate and that of my daughter and her lineage for generations to come, my son enters the temple in his full regalia. His jade and copper pendants clink as he sits beside me smoking a potent cigar.

"B'ayal. Do you know the Maize God Reborn?" I ask, looking straight ahead at the paintings and glyphs that dance before me like wayob dreams.

"Yes, Mother. I am that god as well as Chac Xib Chaac. I want your help with my rule. **I'm not going on a hunting trip. In truth, I will lead my men into battle against vassals loyal to the king of Yax Mutul. I need your influence over the cities you forced to ally with Pakal. I need your conjuring powers to help me and the Kaan defeat King Nuun for the last time.** Do you hear me?"

"Yes, B'ayal. Holy King."

My son blows smoke from his cigar, looks at the art on the walls, and says, "I have a special treat for you, Mother."

"What could it be? I need nothing except my freedom and dignity."

"Now now. Queen mother. I said a special treat. Not something you require."

"What is it then, Holy King, Corn God Reborn?"

"A surprise visit from your dear old friend."

Star Flower enters the temple room of paintings. She's carrying a royal drinking vessel with the name *Itz Balham U*. It's a familiar cup because royal artists made it for me when I became queen and took the power of K'awiil.

"Star Flower? I'm surprised. How is this visit a treat for me? I haven't seen her since I returned from Lake Turtle Macaw. She's always with you avoiding my company."

“Yes, Queen Mother. Star Flower devotes herself entirely to me. She even accompanies me on my travels. She’s my personal healer, you know.”

“*A win a ke na*.” Star Flower speaks for the first time. Even her voice sounds different, older, deeper like she’s transformed herself into a spirit of mischief.

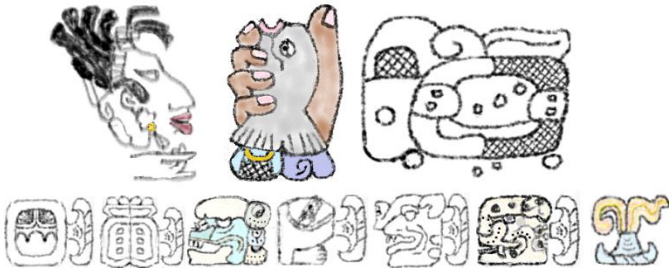
“You’ve betrayed me many times,” I say to my former attendant. “You’ve never been my life-companion. Since my menarche rite nearly one katun past, you’ve practiced sorcery. You told king Hummingbird Sun that my daughter was not his. You told him Yax K’uh and I were lovers. That’s why the king ordered him beheaded.”

“My lord protects me,” Star Flower quips. “And I protect him. My magic brings him power. You rejected me. My lady. You refused to let me care for Jade Moon when you led your warriors to Yax Mutul. This is no matter. Not now. Not anymore. Look. I have prepared for you a special brew that will bring wayob dancers to your mind as vividly as your menarche dreams.” She offers me the drinking vessel. “See, I bring it in your own drinking cup.”

“You’re nothing but the sorcerous of my husband’s bad seed. You aren’t worthy of even a curse. You’ve betrayed me with my son. And now you betray me with my life?”

“Be quiet, Mother, and peacefully drink.” The king practically forces me to swallow the cacao brew. I stop him and freely take the cup in my hands and drink.

“Watch you spirits dance. Serve my father in the other world. Do penance with your fiery spear and flint knife,” my ba’yal says as he takes Star Flower’s hand and leads her from the temple’s eastern door.



Chapter 35: Hillary, *Curse of a Warrior Queen*

At gallo's first call, I jolt awake fearing someone has stolen the codex. It's a dream, I reassure myself and reach for the copper case beside my pillow. It appears intact and unmolested.

In the dim morning light, I quietly open the case and find only the diary among the crumbled corn leaves. The Brownie pictures are gone and so is the ancient codex!

In the chill and mist I rush to the neighboring house calling for Frank.

The only one around is the old grandmother. She'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 what's happened. Frank, my one and only lover, my spiritual guide, my family, has duped me. Betrayed 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 Bradly's diaries are now all I possess. I have no treasure. No glory. No fame.

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 my Frenchman 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.

"What about the brownie pictures I told you about?" I ask in a halfhearted attempt to return to the museum a while longer. I want to wrap up my work before going to my prospective job at ASU.

"I don't believe you have such pictures," Monte says over the phone. "I think you're a fraud like your Frenchman. In fact, I believe you both hoodwinked me."

"I'm not a fraud," I say and hang up before Monte can slander me more. I didn't plan for failure. I didn't contrive a scheme. For what? It makes no sense and I can't believe Monte thinks so little of me. A Fulbright scholar. Does he think I scammed Fulbright as well? As if my whole life is fake. Just a game of cards or a ballcourt tournament with a hard rubber ball.

In Phoenix, I learn ASU isn't hiring me. It seems Monte has me blacklisted. Maybe Fulbright has as well because I failed to fulfill their requirements. Or, I can't help but think, I'm suffering from the curse of an ancient queen by wrongly entering her tomb. Perhaps Frank failed to say the right words at the waybil lineage shrine. Maybe I'm not her true descendant. Maybe I was never properly initiated as the queen's Ta Ochle and had no right to enter the tomb as I did. Who knows how far a curse stretches? Whatever the case, I close up my Tucson condo and return to my childhood home in Chestnut Hill.

Even though I'm disheartened, devastated once again, betrayed, misled, **wallowing in self-pity**, I work on putting together a book about my expedition, the codex as I've deciphered it, and the many revelations from Bradly's diaries. Maybe I'm doing this just for me and me alone.

Who knows what lies ahead? At least my focus on this work provides me with much needed therapy and peace of mind. I've always done well when working on monumental projects and setting intensive goals. I inherited this work ethic from Daddy which goes to show that heritage isn't always a matter of bloodline lineage. It's spiritual and intellectual as well. A matter of excellent parental guidance.

Bradly's second diary reveals what happened to my great-great-grandmother Ix Chel. It turns out that Joseph Corazón, my great-grandfather, became sick with a fever, diarrhea, and vomiting. Bradly tried to heal him with his medical skills. Perhaps bloodletting. With chants and prayers, Grandfather Thunder sought to cure his grandson and his wife, Mim Itzamatul, Grace of the Skies gave the child teas and infusions. But the boy remained sick with fever.

In a desperate attempt to save their son, Bradly and Ix Chel trekked to Lake Turtle Macaw on a date other than the solar zenith passage. They performed a ceremony at the waybil and called upon the ancient queen to cure their son.

On their return to the village, Ix Chel avoided a mound of leaf-cutting ants and stepped on a black, red, and yellow coral snake. The snake bit her ankle. It seems the queen's curse took hold. Perhaps they had entered her tomb and Xiquiripat, Flying Scab, and Cuchumaquic, flew from the maws of Xibalba and killed my great-great-grandmother by snake venom.

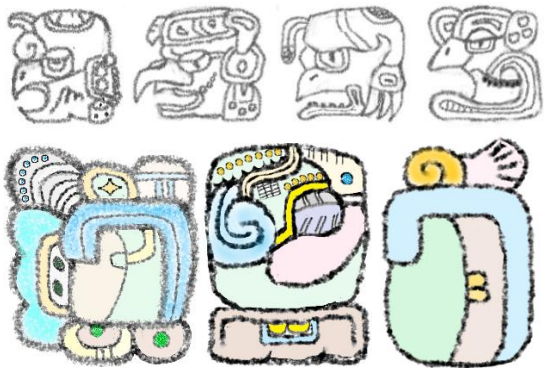
Bradly carried his wife back to the ancient queen's tomb, placed Ix Chel beside the queen's bones, and prayed for his wife's revival. But she died. One hundred years later we found her bones in the cave instead of those of Jaguar Blood Moon. The whereabouts of the ancient Maya queen remains a mystery. Did she even exist? I can't help but wonder. Then I tell myself, I saw pictures of the treasures and held the codex in my hands before Frank stole it and fled.

Bradly decided his son required medical attention in America. Maybe Grandfather Thunder wouldn't allow Bradly to depart with the child, his only heir now that Ix Chel was gone. Bradly doesn't mention what he told Grandfather Thunder about Ix Chel, **but it appears Bradly left the codex, his diary, and the Brownie pictures of the queen's treasures with Grandfather Thunder. Perhaps this was Bradly's bargaining chip that he'd return with** the last lineage heir of Jaguar Blood Moon**.**

My great-grandfather, Joseph Corazón, was born to lead a rite at the ancient queen's tomb on the sacred day that commemorates her entombment. But Joseph had a different destiny. In 1904 Bradly returned to Philadelphia with his son and perhaps a vast treasure. He never explains when or how, or even if, he smuggled the treasures to Philadelphia where he must have used the bounty to provide a legacy for his son and for me, a distant unknown descendant. His posterity.

Within a year of returning to Philly, Bradly died and his sister Myriam and her husband Isaiah Waldman adopted Joseph or perhaps merely took him as their son. The boy became Jewish and never returned to the village of his mother to continue the bloodline tradition.

I think Myriam loved the boy as her own but probably never accepted his Maya heritage. Joseph became so religious under the Waldman name that his God prevented him from returning to Guatemala. Did Joseph even know he was half Maya and that Myriam and Isaiah adopted him? Did Bradly and Ix Chel die because of the queen's curse? Did Jaguar Blood Moon curse Joseph to never become Guardian of her tomb? Am I cursed? Or was I born to become the guardian of her sacred lineage? Am I her Ta Ochle? Some days I'm so confounded I want to bury my head under a ballcourt plaque.

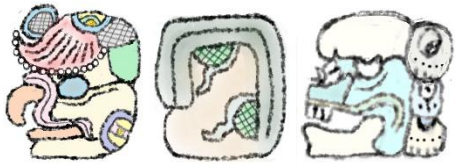


Chapter 36: The Codex of Jaguar Blood Moon

written by Jade Moon 1 Rabbit and transcribed by Hillary JoAnne Jacobs



I have many naguals. I was born when Blood Moon covered the face of Lord Sun. I'm daughter of Jaguar Blood Moon and guardian of her lineage Tree. Wherever I go the tree appears. I'm the axis of Kan, Kab, and Xibalba. Heaven, Earth, and Hell.



Section One:
SI-ji-ya Yol Tan K'ak-nab
She came to Earth



On a Blood Moon night in the season of rain, 9.9.0.14.19 Long Count, Tzolkin and Haab (March 2, 649 AD), she came to Earth from the heart of the universe in Primordial Sea of Fire, K'ak-Nab. Her mother was Ix Tunsel, Lady Star of Creation (Rigel). Her father was Ajaw

K’inich Janaab Pakal of the Jaguar Kingdom of Ajaw Quetzal Jaguar. Her father was the greatest king who ever lived.

When our Holy Lady touched Earth, the roar of Waterlily Jaguar shook the world with a vision of the road to the highest branches of the Maya Tree. The road beyond the rainbow bridge and through Ek’ way-nal where Itzam-yeh sings of all knowledge and wisdom that is, that was, that ever will be.

Section Two:
She ties the headband and takes the throne



On the seating of her 15th stone, our Great Holy Lady wed Ajaw Tz’unun K’inich (Hummingbird Sun) of Bak Tz’ul (Bone Dog), vassal to her father Lord Shield (Pakal). She provided her king with his b’aah ch’ok Tul Til 5 Caiman and gave him the power of her two bloodlines.

At the seating of her first katun, our Great Holy Lady gave the world a daughter named Jade Moon 1 Rabbit whose father was Yax K’uh (Precious Owl), nacom of King Pakal. Yax K’uh led the siege on Bone Dog. Kaan warriors took him captive and Hummingbird Sun sacrificed him in the ballcourt. Yax K’uh entered the rainbow bridge one winal after our Holy Lady gave harvest to his daughter. I am Jade Moon 1 Rabbit. I write these words about my beloved mother, a fierce and powerful warrior queen.

When Hummingbird Sun traveled the dark road of no return, my mother tied the three head bands of Bone Dog and took her regnal name Jaguar Blood Moon. 9.11.16.9.1 Baktun, Katun, Tun, Winal, K’in. Tzolkin 12 Imix. Haab 9 Kayab. (June 14, 669 AD). She became

seated on the double-headed jaguar throne as vassal of her father King Pakal. Then did she scatter drops of her blood and draw upon K'awiil and the power of her bloodlines. **My Great and Holy Mother placed Hummingbird Sun on the road to Xibalba.**

Section Three:
Entrada to Yax Mutul
The meeting of Red Fire Macaw and Lord Sun
The conjuring of Une Balam Lady Yok'in



On the date 9 baktun 11 katun 16 tun 15 uinal 2 kin (15 May 669 AD) my Holy Mother led an entrada to Yax Mutul for the meeting of Red Fire Macaw and Lord Sun. In a snake vision, she conjured the ancestral queens Lady Unen Balam and Lady Yok'in. They directed my mother to pick up the flint, wear the shell helmet of Tlaloc with the blood and power of Spearthrower Owl, and wage war against the Kaan.

My mother returned to Bone Dog victorious. Her image was a fiery spear as she danced the bee dance with her Xux Ek (Wasp Star) banner. She conjured K'awiil and saw to the sacrifice of captive lords, kings, and diplomats.

Section Four:
K'a-yi u sak nik ik'-li
Our Holy Lady enters the rainbow road



Jaguar Blood Moon ruled five stones (669 AD to 673 AD) until the son of her harvest took the throne with the regnal name Kakal Ichak Mol, Fiery Jaguar Paw. My mother severed the bloodline with her son when he allied with the Kaan. Fiery Jaguar Paw II, my mother's b'ayal terminated her resplendent flowery spirit on Earth.

Under the thirteenth moon, 9 baktun 12 katun 8 tun 0 uinal 0 k'in. Tzolk'in 4 Ajaw. Haab 8 Sek (May 15, 680 AD), Second Son of King Pakal and I, Jade Moon 1 Rabbit, saw to the entombment of our Holy queen. She entered the rainbow road with her flint shield raised, Itzam-yeh (the Celestial Bird) broke clear of the eastern sky to frame the brightest section of the Maya Tree, Waterlily Jaguar danced on lily pads and Ix Chel left the caverns of Earth to have union with her brother the Sun.

Word quickly reached King Pakal that my brother Tul Til 5 Caiman murdered my mother Jaguar Blood Moon because she severed Hummingbird Sun's alliance with King Yuknoom.

When the wayob spirit Manik was the sixth Lord of Night, Kan Xul sacked Bone Dog. Scar dog warriors upturned monuments, hollowed the temples and **captured the king**. Kan Xul slit the throat of sorceress Star Flower and embedded a flint blade in her heart.

In the tomb of Hummingbird Sun, Kan Xul found my mother beside the king's **sarcophagus**. He wrapped her bones in a jaguar pelt and brought her to Lake Turtle Macaw at the bottom the western mountains.

On the day Lord Sun cast no shadow, Roaring Sky Dance and I saw to my mother's entombment. Kan Xul placed my Holy Mother in a wall niche and placed treasures on the floor from the tomb of Hummingbird Sun and the city Bone Dog. Scribes engraved **a curse against those who are not Ta Ochle of my mother's lineage tree and who dare enter her tomb on a day Lord Sun casts a midday shadow.**

“Queen Jaguar Blood Moon,” I sang. “You are founder of those sprouted from your tree. You are first lady of the world. **I am your daughter. Through my harvest I establish your lineage. Each year on the date of your entombment, Ta Ochle will worship at your waybil to cast away demons and conjure good spirits. To receive bounty from ‘She who sustains the world and rules where the Maize God is reborn.’”**

Kan Xul and his scar dog warriors will return to Abundant Waters to play a great game in the ballcourt. Our Holy King Pakal will erect a plaque in the center of the ballcourt to mark the date and place where scar dog and Xux Ek warriors behead Tul Til 5 Caiman.

Section Five:
B’a ch’o-ko
Keepers of the Queen’s Eternal Tomb



Lady Jaguar Blood Moon stands at the axis of Kan, Kab, and Xibalba. She is First Mother of her dynastic tree. Wherever she goes the tree appears. Her descendants are her harvest, the sprouts of her Tree. Through them she continues to live and rule. K’awiil Smoking Axe initiates Ta Ochle, the bloodline heirs who “enter the tree.”

I, Jade Moon 1 Rabbit, am first guardian. Each year on the date of her entombment, Ta Ochle worship at her waybil. We cast away demons of Hummingbird Sun and conjure good spirits from She who Sustains Our World in the place where Maize God is reborn.

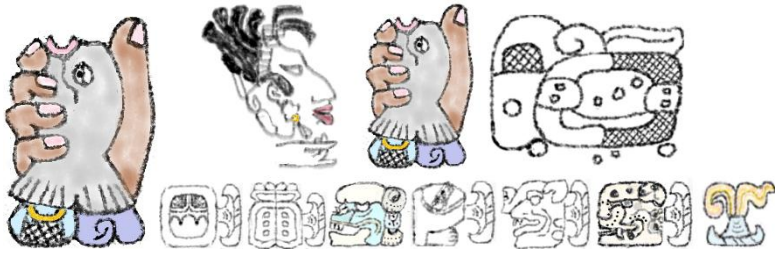
Heart and Soul words to Ta Ochle:
Ol and K’uh Ch’am K’awiil la
From Jaguar Blood Moon



- Ch’ok Te’na, Sprout the Tree upon which you live
- Do penance (pierce the heart) and sacrifice blood in tribute to itz k’uh, the essence of life
- Unburden the spirit of impurities
- Receive K’awiil and pray these words

Lord Sky Kawiil, divine keeper of the sacred lineage, guardian of the scepter and bloodline, awaken revelations, the source of itz k’uh

Section Six:
Curse of the Maya Queen



To those unholy who have not “entered the tree” but dare enter her tomb on a day the zenith sun casts its shadow on Earth, I lay this curse upon you. Bats, wasps, and demons, the Twelve Lords of Death and Destruction, shall fly from the maws of my tomb and bring sickness, starvation, pain, and death upon you and your progeny. I shall call upon Camazotz, the death bat monster, Hum Hau, death god, Cizin, death god. Zipacna. Vucub caquix (7 macaw). B’a Ajaw, head lord of hell, Hun Came, One Death. Flying Scab and Cuchumaquic, father of Blood Moon, to poison you and your harvest. Ahal puh, Puss Demon and Ahalgana, Jaundice Demon will make your body swell and rot into a pile of bones. Demons will find you and cause you to cough blood no matter what road you travel.



Chapter 37: Hillary, *Mesa Community College*

After a month of useless glum at my Victorian in Chestnut Hill, I apply for astronomy professorships at U. Denver, U. New Mexico, and Penn State. I'm always shorted-listed and never hired until Mesa Community College takes me on as an academic advisor and associate professor in astronomy. It's a satisfactory position that suits my present disposition. At least I love the desert and night skies of Arizona.

Now I'm sitting in the crowded student union at MCC and mentoring a student having trouble with calculations. I've pulled back my hair in a clip and am wearing a blazer so I don't appear too petite. Normally, I encourage my students to seek help from the tutors but this young strapping student insisted on a private session with me. Together, we're burying our heads in azimuth measurements on the student's laptop.

To let my eyes rest a moment, I scan the large cafeteria hall. Beyond noisy students at dozens of tables, I notice a large blond woman drinking a soda at the food counter. She stands out. The strange woman is wearing a turquoise sweater and black skirt. Around her neck and over her shoulders is a red diaphanous scarf.

"Excuse me," I say to my student and abruptly leave the table. I walk toward Frank, shaking with outrage.

When I reach him, I grab the soda from his hand, slap his face, and say, *"Travesti de la nuit. Voleur. Putain."*

My fury released, I cool off, catch my breath, and stand back. I'm causing a scene, a farce out of Shakespeare. Some of the onlookers are my students. I grab Françoise by the hand and take her to my office. He/she sits across from me with my desk between us. Her fragrance invades the otherwise stuffy room. White Diamonds by Elizabeth Taylor. We drink sodas and talk.

"I never stole the codex and abandoned you at the homestead," Frank claims. "The Guatemalan police apprehended me and took the ancient book. I swear. Sur mon coeur. They held me prisoner." He lights a Gauloises then quickly stamps it out on the side of his chair. He knows I hate cigarette smoke.

"Then why didn't they arrest me?" I ask. My hands are folded on the desk. "Why not take the entire copper case? Your story doesn't fit together. Madame-Monsieur."

"The National Police wanted me. They interrogated Antonio and he confessed there was an ancient Maya text. They forced me to steal it from you. I believed they were going to kill me."

"This sounds so unlikely." My thumbs are twitching, circling each other. "Such a flimsy concoction."

"You don't know the Guatemalan police! They have a vendetta against me. It's all true, Little Sparrow. *C'est ma parole*. They wanted me."

"Why did you leave the diary?"

"The police left it. Not me. They didn't want it. Just the codex. They took the Kodak pictures as evidence against me for stealing antiquities. They peg me as a looter of their heritage."

"Why didn't they apprehend me? I had the codex! And why the stealth in stealing it from the copper case?"

He looks at me and relights his cigarette. "Do you mind?"

"*S'il vous plait.* Go ahead," I say sarcastically.

"Look, Little Sparrow," he drags on his smoke. "I'm not always a good guy. In fact, I'm a crook. I deal in contraband. That's how I make money. That's why I'm rich. I tell you these things because I want to marry you. What we had was fantastique. Formidable. And I can't stop thinking about you. **We are wayob companions**. We *are* each other's naguals. Only together can we become what we are meant to fully be."

I lean on my chair and wonder *Is he deceiving me? Again? Or does he confess the beating of his heart? My heart? Am I the air he breathes? Is he mine? I'm breathless.* **Since he left me in the mountains of Guatemala, ten months earlier, I *have* felt lonely and despondent. I started grieving for my parents again, as if the shock of their tragic deaths occurred only the day before. A deep void consumed my heart. Then I would start missing Frank.**

"Regarder." Frank shows me a sepia photo of the queen's jade funeral mask. I reach over the desk and take it. "I have the rest of Bradly's pictures at my apartment in Antigua."

"You pilfered them from me!" I stand from my chair. "You liar!"

"No, from the police. Back in Guatemala City. I bribed them and they let me go. As I was leaving the jailhouse, I retrieved the envelop of photos sitting on an officer's desk. Child's play. C'est du gâteau. But the police had locked away the codex."

I want to believe him because I'm drawn to him, magnetically, gravitationally, quantumly, even now as he sits before me dressed like a clown wearing makeup and red heels. A

wig. Painted nails. Carrying a purse. Françoise looks like an old cougar on the prowl for a young man. Once again, like the morning I awoke in Antigua in Frank's bed, he/she confounds me. A part of me knows he's a lunatic and I need to keep away from him. He's no good for me. But a larger part of my spirt, perhaps the part that makes my heart beat, wants him in my life to celebrate and dance and make music together. My head spins "Why are you here dressed as a woman? I finally ask. "It's pure travesty."

"Transvesty?"

I chuckle at his joke and question, in my mind, whether Frank really did abandon me in Todos Santos and steal the treasures of my heritage. Maybe the police *had* abducted him. I almost desperately want to believe this.

"Entonces, Doctor," Frank says to me. "I have a new Land Rover Range Rover. From DF, we can drive to Coba for the penumbral lunar eclipse on March 14. We'll watch it from the top of Nohoch Mul. We'll drink wine, eat brie and camembert, and have a wedding on top of the pyramid, before all the gods. Only you can help me in my quest to transform. Only I can help you." His feminine voice grows louder. "I want to absorb your essence, your itz k'uh. I want you to absorb mine."

His words are like the sound of turtle shell drums. I'm listening but can't quite absorb the possibility of what he's saying. At the same time, I can't imagine a more romantic marriage to a more attractive and intriguing man. Once again, I'm perplexed like a child given too many choices.

"Spring break is next week," Frank continues, his amber eyes gleam like stellar orbs. Or do they twinkle like the cleft in his chin? "You can manage a week of spiritual revival away from

your little college. I know this isn't what you want, Cherie. You want to transform into something powerful and complete. Avec moi."

"And what's a penumbra?" I playfully ask, taking on my role as teacher and advisor probing the mind of my student.

"During a lunar eclipse the Earth casts its shadow on the Moon," he says in a feminine way.

"Exacto. The umbra is the darkest part of the shadow. The fuzzy edges are the penumbra."

"It's the opposite of a solar eclipse when the moon casts its shadow on Earth. Right professor?"

"Good job," I reply, remembering one reason I've been missing Frank. He makes me feel passionate about what I truly love. Astronomy and the Maya civilization. Ancient Astronomy. I stare at him for a moment, smile, and slightly shake my head knowing I'll go on this trip despite Frank's current frivolity. I don't like him this way. As a woman. It seems pure nonsense. But I accept him because I've never stopped loving his spirit, intellect, maturity, and looks. Even his mysterious background and lifestyle have always intrigued me. And now, his feminine side?

Yes, he betrayed me. Stole my inheritance**.** Perhaps? Played me for a fool and destroyed my dreams. Perhaps? **But at this moment, I'm overjoyed he's returned to ask me to join him for a spectacular lunar wedding on top of the Coba pyramid in the land of our Maya ancestors. Besides, I am convinced that only Frank can restore my heart and spirit and end the dreadful curse of the ancient Maya queen.**



Chapter 38: Hillary, ***A Penumbral Lunar Eclipse***

Frank meets me at Mexico City's International Airport. I'm relieved he's dressed as the man he is and not as a Madame. It's midnight when we leave DF and drive for twenty hours through Puebla, Veracruz, Tabasco, and Campeche to Coba, Quintana Roo. We stay at the Club Med Coba, the hotel where we first made love, and have a room service dinner of beef empanadas with a bottle of Casa Madero Shirez.

Frank is romantic. He pours my wine, makes toasts and says sweet things, words from Edith Pilaf songs. We talk about spiritual awakenings and the Mesoamerican gods. He doesn't say what he plans to do for our "transformational wedding rite" on top of Nohoch Mul. This makes me wonder if he's going to cross-dress. Make a fool of himself, of me. Does he tease his own gods? Will this become a travesty atop a long pyramid? And will we make love tonight? I'm not sure. After the long drive, I'm exhausted.

In the morning we walk around the grounds of Coba Archaeological Park. I'm wearing a J. Crew T-shirt and jeans and Frank's wearing jeans and a white tailored European cut shirt, unbuttoned. His smooth chest displays his gold St Christopher pendant. His graying hair is in a pony tail and one ear sports his gold hoop with an Aztec eagle. He has traces of red polish on his nails and signs of plucked eyebrows.

By late afternoon we're sitting at a table by a taco stand near the park entrance waiting for the 5 o'clock closing. Frank's smoking and reading *l'Officiel*. I'm reading *Airframe,* a

Michael Crichton novel. Frank has bribed the park ranger, claiming he and I are from Stanford and want to take pictures of the eclipse from the top of Nohoch Mul. I have the feeling Frank already knows the ranger and has had prior dealing with him. But I don't say anything. I'm reluctant to fall back into our old habit of prodding each other to reveal secrets.

Frank buys a taco for a thin yellow lab that's sitting beside our picnic table. "That dog is my nagual," he suggests, setting aside his periodical. "Like you. For my becoming. He's waiting to lead me through Ek' way-nal and see to my return. With you, Sparrow."

"Frank, are you trying to become a woman tonight?" I finally ask the question that's been on my mind since he first mentioned this marriage rite. "Is that what you want? To be a she in order to become what? God? And do you expect me to be a man? Become a man? I have to tell you right now, I'm comfortable in my own skin. Frank! We made love last night. You as a man and me as a woman. It was our fourth or fifth time and that's all right with me. As long as you want me. Do you want me? As a woman?"

"I want our spirits to entwine and reach the highest level of the cosmos where the Almighty is both man and woman."

"I want you as a sexy man with graying hair, the man you now are," I touch his hand on the table**.**

"Then you'll never fully have me," Frank suggests and resumes reading his periodical. I return to my novel deciding to let happen what will and not worry about it. After all, being back together with Frank, even with all his craziness, has restored my painfully empty heart. I'm able to put my parents to rest and feel happy to be with a man who captivates me and fills me with possibilities and spiritual love. An intriguing love. The kind of love that saturates and fills dark

matter. It's the kind of love I can't explain, like Schrödinger's cat. If I explain it, it doesn't exist. Or it dies.

When the last tourist leaves the park, Frank throws his taco to the dog and a security guard allows us to enter the park. The yellow dog follows us inside the compound.

"Another friend of yours?" I ask Frank about the guard.

"Possibly," he says with a wink to the man and we head straight for Nohoch Mul.

In the dwindling light and thick tropical swelter, I climb one-hundred-twenty steps up the long pyramid, pacing myself ahead of Frank. He carries a hefty backpack for our marriage rite and picknick.

On the top platform, as encroaching darkness surrounds us, Frank spreads out a serape blanket and sets out a bottle of wine, Dixie cups, cheese, crackers, a pichacha, and an obsidian knife with an intricate face of Chaac. "It's a relic from the Copan jungles," he tells me.

"What's it for?" I ask. "Are you actually planning to blood-let? I haven't forgotten that night in Antigua."

"You'll see as the eclipse unfolds." Frank places on the serape a page of glyphs which he holds down with his Ometeotl statue.

I recognize the list of god names from a page in the codex of Jaguar Blood Moon. However, this page of glyphs is not copied from the sepia Brownie pictures. "That's a picture of the original codex!" I exclaim. "You did steal it from me. Before my very eyes."

"No, no. There were copies of the codex on the policeman's desk when I nipped the Brownie pictures of the relics. These are copies of those copies, for our ceremony."

"You expect me to believe that?"

“Comme vous voulez,” He says without concern and pours me a cup of wine and makes a toast, presumably to change the topic. “To us becoming one under the lunar eclipse. To you, my little sparrow, and to me, your teddy bear.”

I smile and click my cup against his, wanting to believe him, once again. To trust him enough to give him all of myself. And to experience the spirit of Earth hiding the Moon from the Sun.

Frank takes from his knapsack prayer beads and a small baggie of cocaine. He lights copal incense in his pichacha.

“I won’t take any drugs. I’m already feeling woozy from the wine. You know I’m petite and unable to drink much alcohol.”

Frank says nothing. He’s heard me say this before.

I eat a cracker with brie, sit back, inhale the moist fragrance of the jungle and Frank’s Versace cologne. I loosen up and start telling Frank the family secret my mother revealed at my bat mitzvah. “I’ve never spoken about this since that night on February 26, 1991.”

“Dites-moi, s'il vous plait.”

“My world slipped from under my feet that year. I lost my granddaddy, my father, and my God. Even my mother. After she revealed the secret, things changed between us. We both were more careful about what we said to each other.”

“But you had a mama who loved you.”

“Always and forever. I thought the whole matter had died along with my parents but now I want to reveal all my secrets before we marry. Mom told me that the man I idolized, my daddy, wasn’t really my father. Biologically. I don’t know and never will know my biological father. I’m only half known.”

"But you have Maya blood. You're umpteenth great-granddaughter of a ruling Maya queen. A warrior queen."

He holds up his mother's beads and silently prays, moving his lips. When he lowers his beads, he says, "I've spent my life controlling and manipulating others for money and treasures and drugs. I've even met El Chapo. All the while I've been seeking revenge for my mother's murder when I was five."

"Murder? Oh Frank. Really? That's worse than my tragic story. At least my parents died together, probably hand in hand. Their love was eternal. So was their love for me. It didn't even matter to Daddy that I wasn't his biological child. Even if I was, he couldn't have loved me more than he did."

"I believe you sparrow. I know my mother loved me though I barely knew her. I spent most of my childhood as an orphan on the streets of Paris among the cross-dressers of *Rue le Blanche. Transvesti*, they called us. I grew up pimping myself and playing games on the streets."

"How'd you end up such a man of the world?"

"I pulled myself from the gutters and used the tricks of the trade to establish a global empire."

I take his hand. "Tell me about your mother's murder. I want to hear it."

Frank inhales a line of the cocaine then lights a cigarette. He sits back, relaxes and at last opens up to me.

"It was during the Fourth Republic," he says. "Maman was on the bed of a dingy hotel room. She had no place to keep me, her little son. In a corner of the room, I was playing with tiny green soldiers, reenacting the battles of my war hero father. Maman told me Papa was a Pied-Noir killed in the Guerre d'Indochine."

“Wow. Frank. You have quite a history.”

“N'est-ce pas, la vérité ?”

“Go on.”

“In my shirt pocket I kept Maman’s picture. I still have it. *Mon petite*, she always told me. *You must carry my photo in case you get lost.* In my pants pocket I carried these very prayer beads. Maman taught me to hold when praying to the Virgin. She knew our time together was short.”

“Who killed her? Your mamam?”

“A micheton. He’d been with Maman many times before. From the bed, she asked him for two hundred francs. He was drunk and high on smack. Maman’s request angered him. Maybe he thought she was his girlfriend.”

“What’d he do? This micheton?”

“He took the bottle of Chartreuse he brought Maman and hit her over the head. Again, again, and again. Blood splattered on the walls, my face, my little blue shirt and on my tiny green soldiers.”

“Oh Frank. That’s horrible. Your poor mother.”

“Yes yes. I screamed *Maman Maman* as the micheton pummeled her head. When he finally stopped, he grabbed the collar of my little blue shirt and pulled me to the street where he left me completely alone.”

“This is beyond tragic. No wonder you kept your boyhood from me. I’m sorry to make you bring it up.”

“Au contraire. To reveal our deepest secrets is healing, sparrow. It cleanses our spirits before we become together tonight. Before we transform and enter Ek’ way-nal.”

“How’d you survive on the streets of Paris? I can’t help but think of that little boy I met in Antigua, the gaffilo as you called him. Pablo was his name. He reminds me of you.”

“Yes. I was a little gamin des rue. During the war with Algeria, under President Charles de Gaulle, **I wandered to Place Blanche. Ladies of the night took care of me. People called them les amis de Place Blanche.** They were beautiful, lustful ladies who wore costume jewelry, makeup, heels, and elegant dresses. Their perfumes--Soir de Paris, Rive Gauche, and Tabu--exuded their femininity although they really were men.”

“I’m beginning to understand you, teddy. You relive your childhood when you’re Françoise.”

“Peut-être. But that sounds too simple.” He spreads brie on a cracker and hands it to me and pours us both more wine. “Every day,” he continues. “Les amis de Place Blanche taught me to hustle. I sold myself to men and women alike. I cheated tourists with the shell game Bonneteau. With the money I made I bought food and intoxicants—things that made the world a better place, at least in my mind.”

“You survived.”

“Survival became an art for me and the enduring times made me durable.”

“Ah Frank. Teddy. Your secret is deeper than mine. Impossible to understand such a world of cruelty. Mom and Daddy and Granddad had loved me so completely. Saw to my wants and needs, shaped my mind, my perspectives. They directed me in a positive way. You were alone in the world. My heart aches for you. For that little boy in your life. How did you end up in Mexico?”

“By the time I was fifteen I was entertaining rich American women who traveled to Paris looking for romance. When I approached them at sidewalk cafes or at tourist sites, they found

my amber eyes and the cleft in my chin irresistible. In 1975 I met Madeline Steward and escorted her on a cruise to Mexico. Madeline was sixty-two and knew what she wanted like a cougar of the night. At the port of Cozumel, I stole her money and jewelry and made my way to DF where I learned my present trade. Now I live by the motto *Success is the sweetest revenge*. My charisma and good looks have propelled me from the streets of Paris to the man I am today, *un homme du monde, un bon escroc*, a world-class crook with finesse."

"I'm astonished by what you're revealing, Monsieur Guillemont. You're far more mysterious than I ever imagined. Far more intriguing, in many ways. Far more connected with me."

"We both have amazing secrets to share." Frank makes another toast. "To sharing secrets of the heart. The knowledge kept at the highest branches of the maya tree. The secret itzam-yeh sings for all the world to hear. To be is to become."

"Look, Frank," I point to the moon. "The Earth's penumbral shadow completely shades the full moon."

Frank tenderly touches my face in the dim light. He takes my hand. "God is the top line, mon amour, the bottom line is cash. This is the truth about me. I too, can only speculate about my biological father. I don't have Maya blood but Ometeotl calls on me tonight to unite with you under the eclipse moon."

"What do you mean you don't have Maya blood?"

"It's just another fable. Like a lot of things. Seven months have passed since I nabbed the codex and Brownie pictures as you snored in your sleep."

"Why'd you leave the diary?"

“It was the least I could do for my delicate little sparrow. But I required the codex, the treasure I’ve always been after. I saw it as my destiny. My raison d’etre.”

“What happened to it?”

“In Paris, experts deciphered it from a set of pictures I took. I didn’t want to show anyone the real treasure.”

“I’ve already told you what the sepia pictures revealed about the codex. I already translated it.”

“Hillary, mon amore, you only hinted at what it said. A few names and dates. You didn’t tell me about the curse nor the prophecy of Jaguar Blood Moon. You didn’t tell me about the queen’s daughter who wrote the book. Why?”

“I didn’t think it was relevant. Did you find what you were looking for?”

“The ancient glyphs don’t hold secrets about becoming a god of duality, as I had hoped. Your “lost codex” failed to cure the pain I’ve suffered since Maman’s brutal murder. It didn’t complete me, in mind, body, and spirit.”

“Where’s the codex now? Frank. Is it lost forever?”

“C’est ne fait rien, Cherie**.** You see, lately I’ve grown restless, irritable, and dissatisfied. I searched for you on the Internet because I needed you back in my life. You, not the codex, brought me legitimacy and credibility, attributes I’ve rarely experienced. Peut-être jamais. My previous women have always been whores and you’re anything but that. I missed my little sparrow, your intelligence, clumsiness, your very manner of being. You give me the sort of praise that crooks never give one another.”

“Is this your way of confessing you love me?”

“Oui. And oui encore. The gods chose you as guardian of an ancient queen’s bloodline. And when I initiated you into the Maya spirit, you took part of my own. Though I didn’t realize this at the time. It’s you, not the codex, who possesses the power to help me in my ultimate transformation.”

I sip my wine, awed by Frank. “I **believe you’ll actually open the door beyond the stars. And I’ll change forever. This scares me, Teddy. The truth is, I don’t want to change. I like myself. Who I now am? I love my background, my family, my accomplishments and pursuits, despite the failures and tragedies.”**

Frank picks up the flint knife of Chaac. He turns it in his hands, examining it closely, like a connoisseur of antiquities. Like an art dealer.

“What do you intend to do? Who are you trying to become–God himself? Or the Goddess Coatlique? The Sun or the Moon. K’ninch or Ix Chel?”

Instead of answering me, he scoops up some cocaine with the knife, snorts it, again and again. Then he clears the serape blanket.

“Lie down, sparrow,” he says. “We make love.”

“You’re too wound up, too high,” I exclaim with concern as Frank undresses. “Tumbling around on top of a pyramid is reckless.”

“Atop a pyramid under a penumbral eclipse. This is the perfect place to unite and become.”

With hefty gasps, he takes me quickly then rests beside me, catching his breath. All the while I smell his strong breath, his sweaty fervor, and feel his heart loudly pumping. I’m thinking to myself, *why do I love this unhinged man? What is this unexplainable passion?*

Frank suddenly pulls from my embrace and stands. I fear he'll fall off the platform. He faces the moon, stark naked, and appears to me as Ajaw Mah K'ina, Great Lord Sun performing a rite to Jaguar Blood Moon. I imagine him wearing jade armlets, ear studs, a quetzal feather headdress with shells and jade beads, a leopard skin loin cloth, and a white cape embroidered with jaguar canine teeth, rattlesnake rattles, and harpy eagle feathers.

Frank raises his arms above his head, spreads his fingers, and shouts to the Moon, "I'm ready to enter Ek' way-nal. Hear me, Ometeotl. Teotl. By teotl. From teotl. The spirit constantly transforms. Reward my life's quest and see me to the place of duality. Take me, take me." Frank glances at me as I'm putting on my shoes. "Take us together!" He picks up the obsidian knife.

"What are you planning to do?" I ask with a rush of concern. Until now I haven't thought of Frank as a mad-man who could murder me and commit suicide. He did confess his mother was murdered. Maybe this affected him more deeply than I thought. He appears crazed from drugs and capable of doing anything.

"Trust me," Frank says. "I know your fears." Without warning, he nicks his tongue with the obsidian knife and catches the blood drops on the Xeroxed page of glyphs. He then hands me the knife. "Nick your tongue, Little Sparrow."

"No. I don't want to." I back from him.

"Just a nick, for the ceremony. Enough to mix our blood together on the picture of gods."

"No Frank. I can't."

"Then let me." He takes the knife and pricks my tongue. He smears my blood on the glyphs of gods with his blood, then raises the obsidian knife to the moon.

"Repeat after me," he says. **"I have many naguals because I was born when Blood Moon covered the face of Lord Sun. I'm daughter of Jaguar Blood Moon and guardian of**

her lineage Tree. Wherever I go the tree appears because I'm the axis of Kan, Kab, and Xibalba. Heaven, Earth, and Hell."

"These are words are from the codex. I know them by heart."

"Repeat them."

His words makes me shudder. I surrender myself to him and trust him to lead me to the place beyond the five senses. I repeat the words from the codex.

"That's it. Sparrow." Frank places the blood splattered page of god glyphs on his pichacha. "The essence of itz k'uh and teotl unite us." He lights the paper with a lit cigarette. "Together I burn our blood on the faces of many gods."

Before the paper ignites, a sudden breeze swoops the page into the air. It flutters away like a bird.

"Oh no," I say. "Our ceremony is ruined."

"No no, sparrow. Chaac himself takes our offering. He rewards me for my efforts." Frank reaches toward the moon wielding his flint blade. "I have become that what I am, from one to another I become."

The night jungle seems to fall silent as if to honor our marriage union. As if to bless it as a sacred rite. I close my eyes in meditation to the spirit of the Maya. My ancestors. Their gods. The universe. Our existence.

A loud thump startles me. I open my eyes. Frank is pounding his chest.

"I hear the voice of God," he yells and gazes at me. "**Because you're a woman. You have become the chosen guardian**."

His eyes roll back. He holds his chest as if in agony. Or ecstasy. I can't tell. He then drops to his knees and grabs my arm to stop his collapse, ripping my T-shirt collar.

I can't keep him from falling backward.

Helplessly, I watch the man I love, my shaman guide, my nagual, my everything tumble down the steps of the steep and long pyramid.

I jump to my feet in shock. "Frank," I scream and carefully descend the incongruous steps lit by the penumbral moon and artificial lights.

I stop halfway down Nohoch Mul where Frank lies naked and contorted. Not a man or a woman. His eyes are wide open, his expression somber. *Is he seeing God?* is my only thought.

After coming to my senses, I feel his carotid artery. He's dead.

I panic and freeze for a moment. Then I crouch down and tenderly touch his face. He already feels cold as if all his warm blood is gone. I close his eyes, climb back to the top of Nohoch Mul and gather Frank's paraphernalia. I don't want to leave behind evidence of drugs or looted artifacts or anything that would tie me to this total fiasco. I have this much presence of mind. I haven't lost all ration and fallen into manic confusion.

As I slowly descend the long pyramid, counting each one-hundred-twenty steps, my thoughts are in the hazy penumbral shadows. *Am I committing a crime?* I ask myself. Abandoning a body? Will police find some kind of evidence that will tie me to a murder?

Confounded about where to go, Antigua comes to mind. Old Guatemala is a pleasant city to reason out what I must do. And besides, I want to retrieve Bradly's Brownie pictures so I have proof that there was a treasure in the queen's tomb; that I'm not a fraud or a crazed pipe dreamer. Perhaps, if I'm lucky, I'll find the codex itself hidden in Frank's apartment. Maybe he kept it. He had a colored photo of the god glyphs from the original Maya text. And Frank's story about pilfering the pictures from a police desk on his way out of the station doesn't add up. Nor does

his story about the police abducting him at Antonio's homestead in Todos Santos. It's all simply too preposterous. Anything could be possible.

I grab my luggage from Club Med and franticly drive Frank's Land Rover over 700 miles to Antigua, zig zagging through Belize and into Guatemala. Frank's car has all the necessary border permits and a GPS devise. I don't encounter any problems reaching Frank's apartment.

After a twenty-hour drive, I'm in such a dither that I don't bother to shower or change my clothes. Instead, I scramble through the apartment until I locate the Brownie pictures in a desk drawer I pry open along with colored pictures of the codex glyphs. But I can't find the codex or any food or coffee. And I desperately need a cup of coffee.

I toss on a gray cardigan sweater from Frank's wardrobe closet to cover my blood splattered shirt and drive around the city looking for coffee and something to eat. As I pass by the central park, I notice the little gaffilo boy Pablo playing in the mermaid fountain. Cooling off from the day's heatwave. I instantly want to feed him too.

I park along the curb and buy tacos and sodas for Pablo and myself. I then return to Frank's apartment with the boy so he can clean up and have a safe, good night's sleep on the sofa and not in a dumpster. It's a risk, I realize. Pablo is a street urchin and might steal my money and camera while I'm sleeping upstairs. But I adore the child, especially now. He makes me think about Frank in a good way.

On the upstairs bed, Frank's bed, I plop down for a nap while feeling exhausted and still in shock over Frank's sudden death-collapse down Nohoch Mul. My head is spinning over what happened. I doze off and dream about Frank tumbling down the pyramid. I see his dead eyes staring at the universe above.

After a few hours of dreadful sleep, I peer downstairs from the top of the spiral steps and see Pablo under a blanket on the sofa. He's watching a telenovela. Knowing that he's warm, safe, clean, and his belly is full makes me happy. I almost forget about the trauma I've recently endured.

Suddenly, someone pounds on the front door. I nearly stumble down the stairs.

"*Policia Nationale. Abre la Puerta*," a man yells. The door bursts open and five national policemen storm-in. They're clad in light blue uniforms, navy-blue caps, and bullet proof vests. Each has a badge hanging around his neck.

*"Donde esta el frances?"*one of them shouts.

In my torn T-shirt with blood splatter under the cardigan sweater, I stand by the banister speechless as Pablo leaps from the sofa, runs out the front door, and escapes onto the streets in the darkness of night. Within minutes, a policeman cuffs me while the others ransack the apartment.



Chapter 39: Hillary, *Wrath of the Sun Stela*

The Sun Stela has had its wrath
You know,
Casting shadows far below,
The torpid hills
Where we once lay,
Beyond the voices of Today.

But now–

My love–
The rains have come
And lonely nights
Have finally won.

When *gallo* makes its fifth call, I sit cross-legged on the steel cot. The sun is flickering into the dank prison cell. Exhaust fumes are sparring with toilet vapors. It reeks of hell. Of Xibalba. In neighboring cells, women are snoring. Outside the prison, firecrackers snap in rapid succession. Someone is marking a birthday or some kind of special event.

Under the gray cardigan, I'm still wearing my torn J. Crew T-shirt spotted with Frank's blood. My blood. Five days have passed since our rite on Nohoch Mul during the penumbral lunar eclipse. My tongue still itches from the piercing.

I lean against the cracked concrete wall scribbled with dates, Guatemalan names, obscenities in Spanish, and wonder how long I'll be lingering in this Prison de Mujeres. Will they send me back to Mexico to face murder charges? Although, it doesn't matter what they do to me. I have no family to miss me. No friends. Frank is dead. Mom and Daddy are long gone. Monte hates me. No one waits for me outside my dank prison cell, except for Pablo. **If I could, I would take him home with me and protect him.**

Late last night, through the bars at the window above my cot, Pablo handed me a mango, a notepad, and a gold Cross pen that he stole from a careless tourist. He claimed I looked well. *Muy bonita, Señorita* he said. But I doubt this. My eyes are certainly swollen and red.

I think about Frank on the steps of Nohoch Mul, of him wanting to transform into the god of duality. What a concept. Did Frank become a god or a Xibalban in the ballcourt of Hell? Or did he die a noble death of sacrifice? And what of his body? When I fled Nohoch Mul, the

yellow Labrador dog was nowhere in sight. Did Frank's nagual fulfill its mission and lead him through Ek' way-nal to Heaven or Hell? Both places exist on earth. I know this now.

I stand from the cot and pace the cell. Images of Frank flicker in my mind like butterflies on La Ruta Puuc. Like a PowerPoint slide show.

"The nagual of Quetzalcoatl is a coyote!" I shout as if to wake up the world. Or maybe myself. "Tezcatlipoca is a son of Ometeotl. He protects the nagual. I have many naguals because I was born when Blood Moon covered the face of Lord Sun."

"*Callate Perra Puta*!" a woman angrily yells from a neighboring cell. "*Vete al inferno!"*

Silence sweeps across my dank prison cell until my stomach growls from hunger. I bite into the bruised but sweet mango and eat it unwashed and unpeeled. A week before I wasn't so careless. Cholera, dysentery, and giardia meant something back then. Now I'm grateful to eat anything other than what a trustee brings me once a day--pureed black beans on cold rice with tiny weevils.

I place my notepad on the steel cot and begin to write.

Not long ago I held an unbelievable treasure from an ancient warrior queen. Now I have nothing. I write these words by the will of the god who is both man and woman.

My mind explodes with unrestrained thought. I shake the gold Cross pen and consider what to write. What I'm now writing is forever etched in stone. Everything I think and do bears sacred significance, now that I'm the chosen guardian.

I'm Ta Ochle, a direct descendant of Jaguar Blood Moon and guardian of her sacred Tree of Life. Wherever I am, the tree appears. Its roots plunge through Xibalba's six houses of doom. Its branches reach beyond the misty stars of the Milky Way to the farthest reaches of the cosmos. Infinity. Eternity. Where the god of duality reigns. Where Itzam-yeh perches in

the topmost branches and sings of all secrets known to Heaven, Earth, and Hell from all time before and after the present sun. I believe the present world changes. The Sun Stela will unleash his wrath on this world. I am Ta Ochle. The gods chose me to pass on the secrets of Itzam-yeh.

Footsteps echo in the corridor. I hide my pen and paper under the cot. No one must know what I'm writing in this dank prison cell.

A guard arrives. He cuffs me and takes me down the corridor into a courtroom. A creaking metal door slams shut behind me.

In my tattered and blood splattered clothes, I stand before el Juez, an ominous older man with graying black hair and a full moustache. In his black robe, he looms behind a desk podium. He is the Sun Stela bearing his wrath upon me. I'm no longer cursed. I'm doomed.

My body shakes. I think about my plight. I don't have a lawyer to represent me and don't know what kind of justice I'll receive. I've never concerned myself with international law except for the permits needed for an expedition that failed. Why would I? I'm hardly a criminal. Or am I? Have I committed murder?

I look at the alluring face of el Juez. The Sun Stela. His brass nameplate says *Jorge Fuentes Cabrera*. Or is it Fuego Cabrea? A bailiff sits at a lower desk beside his podium. A guard stands at the door.

The Magistrate, el Juez, asks me in Spanish, "What do you know about Señor Franco Guillemont? El frances?"

"Nothing." The word tumbles from my mouth. My mind is numb. Or is it my spirit? I can't tell anymore. I can't separate my mind from my spirit or from my worn and tired body. I

feel the wrath of the Sun Stela bearing down on me. Little me. I'm so small. Petite. I'm not in vogue. No. Not at all.

El Juez glares at me. His eminence humbles me, further wears me down. What's happened to me? What have I become? Am I violated? Do I or don't I keep the secrets of this world?

He raps his gavel. "*Por fa vor. Señorita. El frances?"* His deep voice booms across the room and echoes in my ears like I'm hollow inside. Without a core. A foundation.

I awaken from my stupor. "He left me at Coba Village," I say in reaction. "He left me without saying good-bye!"

The National Coat of Arms behind the judge appears in my focus. I see two bay laurel branches, a quetzal bird, crossed swords and rifles, the words *victory, liberty, defense, and honor* and a scroll with the date of Guatemala's independence from Spain. September 15, 1824. My head erupts with facts. Will I remember the story I just contrived or the story of an ancient ruling queen?

"You were in his apartment?" Juez Cabrera interrupts my thoughts.

"Yes, your Honor," I say, certain now that the police apprehended me for the murder of Frank. "*Por favor*. Let me explain. Frank and I struggled with supernatural forces on top of Nohoch Mul."

"Nohoch Mul?" The judge asks.

"Yes. He ordained me Guardian of the Fifth Sun as we transformed ourselves. Then he died of a heart attack."

The judge looks closely at me. "You have perplexing blue eyes." His voice is commanding. "Have the guards slipped you drugs for a few quetzales?"

“I’m sorry, your honor. What do you mean?”

“I’ve been on the bench twenty-five years. I’ve sentenced many gringos. Please don’t waste my time. Where did you get the drugas?”

“Drugs?” I ask, searching my mind for an explanation.

“The police found cocaina in your bag.”

I watch a black ant creep up the judge’s podium and think to say, “Frank used it for his ceremony to live in the highest branches of the Maya Tree and fully become both a man and a woman.”

“Ay, ay, ay. You aren’t going anywhere gringa unless you cooperate!” Señor Cabrera grabs my attention. The Sun Stela is angry with me.

“*Si, si.* Your Honor.” I nod. My neck is sweating. “Why don’t you get on with the extradition proceedings?” I ask. “If this is what’s going on. I’m an innocent victim, a woman in love, not a criminal. I live in a confusing world with a lot of confused people in it. It doesn’t matter where I go or what’s done to me. I’ve no choice in my destiny nor did my ancestors since the time of Jaguar Blood Moon.”

“Who?”

“Jaguar Blood Moon, the warrior queen. Frank knew this all along. Not until he died, did **I understand that the ancients prophesized our entangled fates. Their gods chose me to guard the secrets of life until the end of the long count cycle. If I betray what they’ve ordained, the gods will destroy this creation with a tremendous explosion, a black hole more powerful than a thousand Hiroshima bombs.”**

The judge raps his gavel but I can't hear his words. My head is bursting with uncontrolled swirling snake visions. But one thought stands steady. "I still love Frank," I tell the judge.

"El frances?"

"Yes. El frances. He was a man who soared high in life, despite or because of the tragic pain of his childhood. His mother was murdered. He grew up on the streets with prostitutes and cross-dressers. Did I give him what he really wanted in the end? Was it eternity as a female? Or was it wholeness for all of his broken parts? These are questions I've been asking myself over and over again since I left him on Nohoch Mul. Since I've been lingering in your prison cell."

Juez Jorge raps his gavel again and bellows, "Our police know Señor Guillemont and notice when he's gone. Lately, he's away. Police have his apartment under surveillance for smuggling antiquities and other sordid crimes. Yes. Prostitution as well. When informers report a woman arrives at his apartment, with a Guatemalan boy, our police investigate."

"Did Frank double-cross you, your honor? He double-crossed me. Are we all cross-dressers? I can't disparage Frank. H**e** was my lover and guide to the spiritual world."

El Juez clears his throat and tells the guard to uncuff me. "Señorita, you are free to go. There is no probable cause to hold you for smuggling a child. We found no child. However, police found cocaina in your bag with an obsidian knife showing traces of blood. The knife is a relic of Guatemala. Why do you carry it? We have stiff penalties for looters of our heritage."

"Am I being charged with murder?"

"Murder?"

"Of Frank Guillemont. In Coba. On the night of the penumbral lunar eclipse."

"Señorita, I don't know what you're talking about but since you have no lawyer, I recommend you keep silent about murders." He raps his gavel. "The court fines you 300 dollars for the drugas. 300 dollars for possession of a stolen relic."

After the Magistrate **frees me from the Prison de Mujeres**, my mind seems to unclick. Or click back. I suddenly feel unencumbered, freed from a spell. Had some spirit possessed me? I wonder. Had the grotesqueness of Frank's death-fall rattled my mind? **Like my mother had become when granddad died?**

I no longer see myself as a "special chosen one" but simply as a woman transformed by a man. A woman who now must move on with her life after a difficult trauma. Something I've done before. At least I have pictures of the codex glyphs on my laptop and Bradly Nolan's two diaries. It's my heritage. I'm still guardian of my family tree.

I return to Frank's apartment in Antigua to recover, rest, take hot baths in Frank's spa tub and use his sauna. Where else can I go? It's too late to show up at Mesa Community College. How can I explain that I left a dead man on a pyramid and ended up in a Guatemalan prison during spring break?

I read on the Internet about the mysterious death of a man on the Coba pyramid. The post says no one has claimed the body and it lies in a morgue in Mexico City. I contemplate claiming Frank as my husband and envision spreading his ashes on *Rue le Blanche* in Paris like I spread my parents' ashes in the Seine under a Venus transit. But I don't think Frank's beginning was the best part of his life. It was simply where he set off on his quest. A better place to spread his ashes would be in the ocean waves moving from shore in all directions. It's an enticing thought, but I'll

never claim his body. The Mexican authorities have certainly set a trap to locate suspects in an open murder case.

I consider going to the Anthropology Museum in Mexico City to show Monte my pictures of the codex and treasures. To ask him for a job. But that would be too humbling and I'm certain now that Monte blackballed me after the failed expedition.

In the end, I decide to return to Bradly's Yellow Victorian in Chestnut Hill. Before leaving Guatemala, I donate money to a Catholic mission and register Pablo as one of the mission's orphans. At a law firm, I investigate how I can adopt the five-year-old boy.

"It will take about a year," the abogado informs me. "It's a difficult process. Some Guatemalans resent foreigners for stealing their children. Recently, a mob in Todos Santos killed a Japanese man. They believed he wanted to take children for their vital organs."

Undeterred, I start the adoption process then fly to Sky Harbor to collect my things at my Mesa apartment and put my Tucson condo on the market.

Back in Philly, an American adoption lawyer arranges for a home study to prove my financial worth and the quality of home I can provide a child. After several months, I return to Antigua to sign papers and wait for the court to rule on the adoption. In a matter of weeks, they tell me I can take Pablo home to el Norte.

My burgeoning career in archaeoastronomy lies in cinders because my prospects for academic jobs are few. A Nobel Prize? Forget it. At least not in science. I've concluded that Philly is a nice enough city to raise my son. The yellow Victorian is in a good neighborhood with excellent schools. The legacy of Bradly Nolan will support Pablo and me throughout our lives.

My plan is to work from home as an author, beginning with a novel based on the diaries, the codex, and all the data I've compiled and collated. I decide to call it, *Guardian of the Maya*

Tree or maybe *Keepsake box of Secrets*. I'm not sure. My main focus is on raising Pablo with nurturing instruction that will guide him to a promising future. I will take my son wherever he needs to go. And I will love him, like me parents loved me--beyond the stars into the highest branches of the Maya Tree.