

Guardian of the Maya Tree

a novel by Teri Ekland



Chapter One: Hillary Jacobs

1979-2003

A Yellow Victorian in Chestnut Hill

On my birthdays Daddy liked re-telling the story of how I was born under a solar eclipse on February 26, 1979. He had arranged a visiting professorship at Portland State University and when the forecast called for rain, he chartered a Cessna to take him above the clouds. But my father never saw the eclipse because he had to rush Mom to Bess Kaiser Hospital where I entered the world as their blue-eyed daughter with dark brown hair. They named me Hillary JoAnne. Daddy was thirty-eight at the time and Mom was only nineteen. Six months earlier they had married at Temple Beth Zion in my hometown Philadelphia. I had often wondered why they rushed their wedding until the night of my bat mitzva when Mom revealed a secret that shook my world. That was twelve years ago in 1991, the worst year of my life.

Otherwise, I had a wonderful childhood growing up in the affluent neighborhoods of Chestnut Hill. I loved our yellow Victorian with its white-trimmed gables, bay windows, and steep mansard roof. My granddad lived with us until he passed away in 1991, the year god pulled the rug from under my feet. Granddad Ephraim was my only living grandparent. I enjoyed

listening to him mingle Yiddish with English when he said the Sabbath prayers or told stories about our family history. “My great-grandparents left Ukraine to work in the Pennsylvania coal mines,” he would say. “Their son Isaiah Waldman purchased the Victorian at the turn of the century and established Waldman Pawn Brokers on Philly’s Jewelry Row.” From what Granddad told me, Isaiah left the house and business to his son Joseph who in turn left everything to my granddad who, until his passing, had managed the Waldman business together with his son Burt, my mother’s only sibling.

Mom never complained about quitting college to marry my father, at least not to me. She tended to look on the bright side of things and Daddy treated her royally. I think she relished being the wife of a distinguished professor and dressing me in stylish clothes that I didn’t like wearing. She also loved describing the spectacular wedding she would throw me one day. Mom regretted that her own wedding had been a quick, private affair that didn’t include her mother who had died when Mom was only sixteen. I don’t think Mom ever fully recovered from Grandma Ruth’s sudden death even though Granddad became her Rock of Gibraltar. Mom was a brilliant and beautiful woman who became emotional and sentimental over unimportant matters. But she rarely uttered a sharp word to me or Daddy because she was an exceptional mother and wife.

I didn’t inherit Mom’s disposition or beauty. My emotions have always been steady perhaps because I didn’t have siblings arguing with me. My childhood involved Mom, Daddy, and Granddad and they made me feel talented and smart. Before I started school, the only children I played with were my cousins Fletcher and Floyd, Burt’s sons, who sat with me at a card table during holiday and birthday meals while the adults sat at the dining room table.

Daddy was only two inches taller than Mom and had green eyes and balding red hair turning grey. He believed in the Almighty but didn't pray aloud like Granddad did except when Mom asked him to. "Your intellect is your ticket to the world," Daddy liked telling me. Before I even went to school he was taking me to the Rittenhouse Astronomical Society's meetings at the Franklin Institute and to his lectures in Astrophysics at Temple University where I quietly drew pictures at the back of the auditorium. Over the years Daddy and I watched meteor showers, lunar and solar eclipses, and NASA events on TV beginning with the 1981 Columbia launch that initiated the Space Shuttle program. When Daddy first told me about Nobel Prize winners, I believed that one day he would receive the award. Or that I would do so and honor my parents. I loved Granddad and Mom beyond reason, and I withstood Mom's constant primping, but I idolized my father and aimed to please him more than anyone else.

When I turned five my parents enrolled me at the Spring Side Elementary Academy, an elite private school for girls. I quickly outshined the other students but my world drastically shifted. For the first time I faced ridicule. My classmates called me "half-pint" and "bookworm" and when Daddy drop me off at school they teased that he was my grandfather. I confided in my parents like I always did and they encouraged me to ignore these taunts and be proud of my abilities. Mom even suggested that being petite was a fashion statement. I began standing up to my classmates and making claims that my father was a brilliant physicist who would one day win a Nobel Prize. The other girls didn't even know about this coveted international honor and that made me feel emboldened.

Granddad's passing on New Year's Day, 1991 devastated me and my parents, especially Mom. But she graciously arranged the funeral with the help of Uncle Bert. After the traditional seven-day period of mourning, Mom became manic-depressive and needed something big to

plan for or she'd sink into depression. In early February she decided to throw me a large bat mitzvah reception for my twelfth birthday and invite my entire eighth grade class, everyone she knew at the Beth Zion Temple, all our neighbors, and everyone Daddy knew at the university.

I immediately rejected the idea and explained, "I don't want to be the center of so much attention." When that didn't work, I argued that certain Jewish sects forbid girls from touching the holy scriptures and that mitzvah rites for girls didn't start until the 1920's whereas boys have had bar mitzvahs since the beginning of time. "Why should I celebrate a bat mitzvah when it's so unfair to girls?" I had asked. But my arguments got me nowhere and Mom fell back on the words she often used, "It's what Granddad would have wanted." In the end I agreed to the reception because Mom needed the distraction from her grief.

After a spectacular party at the Marriott, my parents and I relaxed in the front room of the old Victorian before going to bed. I sat on the floor at the marble coffee table placing my gifts and cards in a large wooden keepsake box with butterflies fluttering around the Tree of Life on its top. It originally belonged to my grandmother Ruth and Mom had passed it down to me for the occasion.

Mom was sitting on the plastic-covered sofa, sipping a glass of Manischewitz, and Daddy was reclining in his armchair, enjoying a Bailey's nightcap. They had been drinking since mid-afternoon and were acting slightly off. But I didn't mind. I was happy they were proud of me and that Mom had escaped her sorrow for the day. She promised to help me with my thank-you notes and Daddy retold the story of my birth then cleared his throat and added, "I have a wonderful surprise for my two best girls. This summer we are going to see the July 11th solar eclipse in Mexico and this time I'm sure the skies won't cloud up like they did in Portland. After the eclipse, we'll tour the Maya ruins. I've already cleared my schedule for the trip."

I was overjoyed with the news of yet another great surprise from my wonderful father. But Mom began arguing that Daddy had failed to warn her about his lofty plans. She became so agitated that she stood up and exclaimed, "I refuse to travel on the year of my father's passing. It's not proper. It's a sin against the Almighty."

"Audrey," Daddy said. "You must go on this trip. For our daughter's sake!"

My mother's face reddened and she lashed out at Daddy because by now she was totally drunk. "I won't go to Mexico, Professor Jacobs!" she declared. "You can't make me go and you can't take my daughter. She's not even yours!"

The living room instantly fell silent. I could hardly breathe and my chest felt heavy and crushed. Daddy set his tumbler aside and glared at his wife of twelve years. He was dumbfounded and also quite drunk. For a moment he said nothing and then he stood from his armchair and yelled, "You drunken whore." He stormed from the room.

I had never heard Daddy talk like that before. In fact, I had never seen my parents drunk and yelling at each other and what had just happened left me so stunned that I rearranged, in the keepsake box, my gold necklace with my name in Hebrew, a Hamsa pendant, a Star of David, and cards, cash, and checks. All the while I kept thinking about my parents' rushed marriage and my birth. I didn't resemble my father nor did I even favor Audrey except for her blue eyes. I glanced at Mom who was now quietly nibbling a piece of mandelbread. She had no tears. No expression. She probably didn't even remember what she had said to Daddy or what he had said to her.

"Is Daddy my father?" I finally asked, staring at my mother's pretty blue eyes.

She snapped to attention and said, "Yes, of course. Sheldon's your father. Why would you ask such a stupid question? Bat mitzvah."

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

My mother sighed, sipped her grape wine, then told me a story that shook me even more than the passing of Granddad. “I was eighteen,” she said. “In college and rebellious. 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!” Her words were becoming toxic. I didn’t know if I could withstand learning anything more.

“I was scared, Hill. I didn’t want your Granddad to know I was pregnant. Rabbi Goldman introduced me to Professor Sheldon Jacobs and 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.”

“Who *is* my daddy?” I whispered so my father wouldn’t hear me in case he was eavesdropping. I felt so confused at the time. I was normally calm and rational because that’s how my life had always been, until the year of Granddad’s passing.

“Sheldon is your daddy. That’s all you need to know.” Mom reached over and brushed back my hair.

I slapped away her hand, glared at her, and asked, “Who is my daddy?”

Mom took my hand and kept me from pulling away. “I don’t know,” she finally 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.” She paused for a moment, looked at me, and sternly said, “Hillary JoAnne! Sheldon Jacobs is your father! That’s

all you need to know. Promise me you'll never tell Sheldon you learned this secret. It would break his heart. And I truly love your daddy. He is my Rock of Gibraltar."

I looked at Mom through my own tears and saw a broken woman redeemed by a good man. In that instant, I realized that Daddy *was* Mom's complete support now that Granddad was gone. For a moment, I remained speechless and felt like someone had filled my body with nonvaccine. Then I reached over and hugged Audrey because it was my duty to keep the mitzvah of honoring my father and mother. Suddenly, I thought to say, "Daddy heard you tell me I'm not his daughter."

"Don't worry about that," Mom replied. "I'll explain that I told you I was just being mean. He'll believe me." She took another sip of her wine then reclined on the crackling sofa and fell asleep.

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

I didn't say anything more about it to Mom; the matter easily distressed her like a lot of things did during that year. And I couldn't speak to my father about what troubled me because he was involved. Fortunately, Daddy seemed oblivious to what Mom had revealed and neither of my parents said anything about my sudden aloofness from their religion. Mom knew the reason and Daddy wasn't concerned. He was happy with Audrey performing the Friday night ritual while he said the prayers. But a wall had gone up between me and their god because the man I idolized wasn't related to me and I'd probably never know my real father. It didn't take long, however, to decide that Sheldon was and always would be my father. He gave me my name,

loved me as his own, and shared the universe with me. That summer, in fact, when Daddy took me to watch the solar eclipse from the Sun Pyramid and to the Maya ruins, he encouraged me to combine my interests in archaeology and astronomy. Even though I had high school between me and college, I was as ambitious as my father and planned to graduate in three years so I could start working on a degree in archaeoastronomy.

Soon after we returned home from Mexico, I began classes at William Penn Charter. This brought another drastic change to my life—competing with boys for top grades. My small stature and plain looks made me feel awkward around them. I was always smarter than everyone else and I quickly learned that boys do not like this trait in a girl. But I didn't really pay attention to the other students, boys or girls, because I was too busy working toward my goal of attending college in three years.

At sixteen, however, I went out on my first date with a boy named Darrin but students at Penn Charter called him Derwood because of the TV show *Bewitched* where Endora called her son-in-law Darrin, Derwood. I met Darrin in physics class and we enjoyed discussing our science projects. He had a good sense of humor and seemed to like me as much as I liked him. One afternoon I invited him to study at my house. He came over a few more times and even met my parents. They liked him and agreed he could take me to *Braveheart* as long as he brought me directly home. I was happy with my first date and assumed Darrin was too because he invited me to join him on a daytrip skiing on Shawnee Mountain. I asked my parents for permission and Daddy said it was up to Mom like he generally suggested. 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 and Mom suddenly started talking about my grandmother Ruth who had taken up skiing just after WWII. She then agreed I could go for the day if I used my grandmother’s old skis.

“Darrin says I can rent skis at the lodge,” I said, but Mom had already sent Daddy to fetch the skis from the attic.

“Your grandmother was an excellent skier,” Mom said. “This will connect you with her spirit. She’ll be watching over you on the slopes.”

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

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

I attempted to use the T-bar but kept falling and blocking everyone behind me. Finally, a kind soul showed me how to use the pulley device. I made it to the top of the slope but one of my antique skis came loose and slid down the hill. Another kind soul 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 but I literally stopped her from dialing the phone. Then she and Daddy

encouraged me not to worry about boys until I became a doctor of science in 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.”

After that second date, I avoided Durwood in physics class and in the halls of Penn Charter and he avoided me. I kept to my pursuits and rarely even talks to boys and whenever I did it strictly concerned academic matters.

During my third and last year, Daddy helped me apply to MIT, Harvard, Stanford, and Temple. Each university immediately accepted me and 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: Archaeoastronomy in the Desert SW*. The pictures of SW archaeological sites and Arizona’s unrivaled night skies enticed me like the Maya ruins had. I wanted to study my chosen field in Arizona. Just prior to the deadline, I applied to the University of Arizona and they immediately accepted my application.

My parents gave me a titanium Taurus and together we drove to my dormitory on the UA campus in Tucson then my parents 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. And they often joined me on my trips to the SW sites and I flew home every holiday break.

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 Survey of Native American Astronomy in the Desert SW: A Path from the Ancestral Puebloans to their Modern*

Descendants. For two years I met with Zuni, Hopi, and Navajo natives to learn their lore and traditions. Several times I traveled to Chaco Canyon, Mesa Verde, Montezuma's Castle, the Casa Grande Ruins, and other SW archaeological sites. At the university I taught both astronomy and anthropology classes to undergraduates. I was as happy as I had been when Sheldon showed me the night sky and took me to Mexico. "You fell into the right niche," Daddy often exclaimed.

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

One month before my scheduled reception the Space Shuttle Columbia exploded over Texas. I felt like the tragedy jinxed 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 because on the morning of my big event, god once again intervened. My parents' charter flight from Philadelphia crashed landed at Sky Harbor Airport and a massive inferno instantly killed everyone on board. I could not even give Mom and Daddy an open casket funeral to honor their religious tradition.

March 2003, in the present

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 crushes me and I wonder

how I will ever survive without Mom and Daddy. But I endure and declare my life a tribute to my parents and vow to one day win some kind of Nobel Prize in their honor.

I place their brass urns on the fireplace mantle in the front room then sort through the house to take my mind off my grief. I box up Sheldon's awards and accolades, donate my parents' clothes to Goodwill, and put most of Mom's gold jewelry into my keepsake box with the Tree of Life and butterflies carved on top. In the basement, I toss away rat-shredded magazines, bills, receipts, and old newspapers.

The last place I attack is the attic under the mansard roof. My parents never allowed me "up there" and I never disobeyed them because they 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 that terrible secret that ripped apart my heart.

In the poorly insulated attic, my breath is frosty as the early morning sunlight enters the east gable window and strikes cobwebs, scattered boxes, and furniture that no one wanted to toss away. After a few hours 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 before during a cold February spring break.

I had been sitting with my parents in the snug breakfast nook as the morning light streamed through the bay windows onto the polished oak table. We were talking about the riots going on at the Mardi Gras celebrations on South Street when I brought up the '91 trip to see the solar eclipse and Maya ruins, although I knew Mom didn't like hearing about the year Granddad had passed. Anything about that year reminded her of the devastating secret she had revealed to me. Long before I had forgiven her but something had changed between us. We were more

cautious about what we said to each other and sometimes overly considerate. But I had to tell my parents my thoughts about pursuing a postdoctoral fellowship in ancient Maya astronomy.

When I did, Mom surprised me by saying, “You had a great-great-great-uncle who explored the Maya ruins before WWI. His name was Bradly Nolan. He was a dentist from Philly like your friend Doc Holliday in Tucson.”

“Is Nolan even a Jewish name?” I remember asking. After Mom’s revelation on my bat mitzvah, I was leery about anything she had to say concerning family history. But she assured me that Bradly’s parents were Jews from the Ukraine.

“Lots of immigrants changed their names in the 1800’s,” Mom said. “Bradly Nolan was a brother to your great-great-grandmother Myriam, Isaiah’s wife.”

“Why do you wait until now to tell me this?” I had asked although I was more elated by the connection than disappointed in learning about it so late in my life. Bradly Nolan seemed like a gift of heritage and I instantly knew that I was on the right track to study ancient Maya astronomy. “Perhaps I’ll resume the trail of this Bradly Nolan,” I had said and then asked Mom if he had left any records of his explorations.

“Such a long time ago. Ten years before WWI . . .”

I remember my mother’s words as I touch the brass nameplate. Although at the time Mom was taking medication for her anxiety, she still had a way of circumventing issues she didn’t care to discuss. I wonder now if she was hiding yet another big secret. Or if she even knew about this trunk? This is possible because Mom never went up to the attic.

My heart is palpitating as I yank the black, rusty lock under the nameplate. It appears that no one has opened the trunk since Bradly locked it one hundred years before. Was no one

curious? I ask myself. What about Granddad Ephraim? Didn't Myriam tell her grandson about her brother's adventures into Mesoamerica? I have such confusing ancestry.

I search through nearby boxes for a key to the lock and find a deed to the Victorian. I then discover 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. I find that interesting because I've always believed Isaiah Waldman had bought the house. It's what Granddad had told me. Had Bradly established the business as well? Is this why his trunk remains untouched in the attic?

I use a hacksaw and crowbar to pry open the lock. At the top rests a safari helmet, a machete in a leather sheath, a compass, and an antique Brownie camera that Bradly must have bought just after Eastman Kodak placed it on the market. He probably used his own chemicals to develop his 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 1840's, surveyed Copan, Palenque, Uxmal, Chichen Itza, and Tulum, most of the places my father took me to on our 1991 trip.

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 Maya glyphs that Bradly probably copied from the ruins. I don't know their meaning because I haven't studied the ancient script and I doubt that Bradly understood the glyphs that he drew. During his time, archaeologists had deciphered only Maya numbers and a few astronomical symbols whereas today, 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 containing surgical pliers, cutters, and other bloodletting tools from a bygone era, and a tin box with sepia pictures

of Maya glyphs on what looks like parchment paper. I can't judge how old the glyphs might be but my mind spins with possibilities. I may have discovered evidence of an ancient Maya codex, the greatest treasure I've ever beheld, the Torah of my bat mitzvah. Every disappointment in my life suddenly fades away--my mother's secrets, my paternity, my inability to find a boyfriend. Even the deaths of my parents suddenly seem less severe because their airplane crash was necessary for the trunk to become mine at this moment in my life. In my hands I hold the contents of something powerful and magnificent. The very purpose of my life.

I decide to keep Bradley's yellow Victorian, as I now call my childhood home, and fly back to Tucson carrying my father's old leather briefcase containing the books by Stephens, the Brownie pictures of the Maya glyphs, and the leather-bound diary of Bradley Nolan. During the next several weeks, I hide away in my condo reading and rereading the diary and scanning the Kodak pictures onto my laptop and comparing them to Bradley's drawings. I read the books by John Lloyd Stephens and research his story. After exploring and writing about Egypt, Petra, Greece, and Turkey, Stephens went to Mesoamerica where he teamed up with artist Frederick Catherwood to create etchings of the ruins. Only Alexander von Humboldt from Prussia and Colonel Juan Galindo from Britain had previously explored the Maya region. Stephens and Catherwood brought Mesoamerica to the world's attention sixty years before Bradley Nolan's journey and I'm sure their books inspired my distant relative to explore the ruins himself.

Chapter Two: Hillary

2003-2004

Bradley Nolan's Diary

At the edge of my swivel chair, while high on Starbucks dark roast, I surf the internet and create the beginnings of a book I have in mind about my retracing Bradley's journey into the Maya region. Two things stand out as peculiar. Why are there no pictures of Bradley or the Mexican sites he explored? I imagine him as a rugged, virile, and daring individualist during the era of Victoria, Empress of India and queen of the world. When she died 1-22-1901, Bradley must have paid homage to her as the entire world mourned.

In the process of reading the diary, the following revelations have come to me. Foremost, Bradley M. Nolan is not my great-great-great uncle. He's not a distant twig on my family tree. He is my great-great-granddad, father of Joseph and grandfather of Ephraim. Joseph is not Myriam's son with husband Isaiah Waldman. I'm not a Waldman. Mom wasn't even a Waldman! Bradley is my direct ancestor and Joseph is Bradley's son. Bradley's wife Ix Chel, mother of Joseph, is the daughter of a Guatemalan shaman and my great-great-grandmother. This means I have Maya blood and am a direct descendant of a ruling Maya queen. As daughter of Audrey, granddaughter of Ephraim, and great-granddaughter of Joseph, I'm the designated heir to a sacred bloodline. From the glyphs in the Brownie pictures, I've learned that the queen's name was Jaguar Blood Moon and she was born in 643 AD. I don't believe Bradley or the shaman and his daughter knew the queen's name because they couldn't decipher the glyphs and Bradley never mentions her by name.

Excerpts from Bradley's diary:

"In 1859 I was born in Philadelphia to Mary and John Nolan. At age thirty-five, I caught a steamer from New York to Havana then took a freighter to Veracruz. From 1894 to 1900 I lived in Mexico City and celebrated the beginning of the twentieth century at the house of *El Presidente* Porfirio Diaz.

“While in Philadelphia, I became a certified surgeon of bloodletting as a strategy for living in Mexico City and exploring the Maya region. It proved to be a brilliant plan. The people of Mexico trust my skills as a gringo “medico” who cures their ailments by balancing the body, heart, and mind through the wonders of releasing blood.

“From 1900 to 1904 I ventured to the sites previously explored by Stephens and Catherwood and while residing near the famous Palenque ruins, the Lacandon Indians spoke of an ancient queen’s tomb in Guatemala. Driven by the promise of treasures, I journeyed by mule and Indian guide to the village of Todos Santos high in the Cuchumatán Mountains of Guatemala. The Lacandon claimed that the mountain village was connected to the queen’s tomb.

“In Todos Santos, I established my practice and asked the villagers about the queen’s tomb. A shaman named Grandfather Thunder told me that what I sought was in the jungle at the bottom of the mountains in a cavern at a lake called Turtle Macaw. Grandfather Thunder claimed to be a direct descendant and lineage shaman of this ancient queen. His only child is a daughter named Ix Chel and at the time of my arrival in the mountain village she was the last initiated shaman of the queen’s sacred bloodline. Ix Chel and Grandfather Thunder still honor the queen at Lake Turtle Macaw.

“I offered Grandfather Thunder silver coins and Guatemalan pesos to take me to the ancient queen’s tomb. He warned me that only the initiated of his lineage could enter the tomb on the days of the solar zenith passage which occurred when they entombed the queen. The shaman said that the ancients had placed a curse on anyone who was not a lineage shaman and entered the tomb on any other day. He agreed to escort me to the tomb on three conditions: that I become his apprentice, marry his daughter, and produce an heir to carry on the sacred lineage. He believed that the gods had led me to his village for this purpose.

“I married Ix Chel and from June 1901 to April 1902 Grandfather Thunder taught me new healing methods and ways to cast and deflect curses that are nothing but “fixations of the mind.” During my apprenticeship, Ix Chel gave birth to our son whom I have named Joseph Corazón because of a heart-shaped birthmark on his shoulder. When Joseph was two months old, Grandfather Thunder and Ix Chel left the baby with the shaman’s wife and led me to Lake Turtle Macaw in time for the zenith passage of the sun.

“With mules carrying our food and equipment, we trekked down the mountain and through the jungle until we arrived a lake hidden in the dense foliage. On May 17, 1901, the day the sun cast no shadow at zenith, the three of us stood before a cave’s entrance and the old shaman performed his ceremony at a lineage shrine called a waybill. After the rite, Grandfather Thunder allowed Ix Chel to escort me into the cavern by torchlight. On the western wall, beyond stalactites and stalagmites, colorful frescos of ancient figures appeared performing ritual dances. I wondered if they were noblemen, wisemen, or kings. I did not notice any war scenes such as those in Egyptian art and therefore conclude that these ancient people were peaceful and civilized like the villagers of Todos Santos.

“My wife led me deep into the dark and dank cavern where bats hanging from the ceiling stirred from the torchlight we carried. We cleared debris and crawled through a tunnel to reach the queen’s tomb in a small chamber with more bats on the ceiling and scattered jewelry, pottery, jade figures, and bags of Spanish gold and silver coins on the chamber floor. I suspect pirates from the Dulce River stashed these looted coins but before they could return the ancient curse led them to their demise. They did not know when to enter the cave and I doubt shamans of the sacred bloodline had initiated them.

“The eastern wall contained 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 that I hoisted up the cliff to photograph the message inside. Like the codices newly discovered in Dresden, Paris, and Madrid, this book is made of bark paper and is twelve inches wide and long. On both sides are pictures and hieroglyphs. As I had promised Grandfather Thunder, I returned the ancient text to its place under the queen’s arms before we departed on our trek back to the village of Todos Santos.”

After thoroughly reading my great-great-granddad’s diary, I am left with more questions than answers. For one thing, it seems that Grandfather Thunder either gave his son-in-law the Spanish coins or Bradley took them. I wonder if he had 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? Bradley doesn’t say. And why did Bradley bring his son to Philly and leave behind his Maya wife?

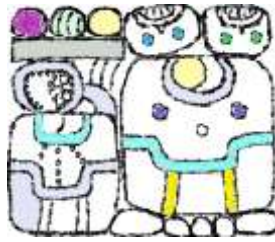
A mean truth suddenly occurs to me. Was Bradley Nolan an early looter of Maya heritage? One way or another, he amassed a fortune from the burial cave, returned to Philly, and bought the Victorian house for his sister and son and the pawn business for his sister’s husband Isaiah Waldman. Bradley, not Isaiah, established the Waldman legacy. I believe Bradley took only what he needed to provide a life for his son and for the descendants of the queen. But maybe I’m only trying to put a positive spin on my ancestry.

On Google Earth, I pinpoint the most likely lake at the bottom of the Cuchumatanes near Najab, Quiche that matches the co-ordinate Bradley recorded in his diary. I should have no problem re-locating the tomb, I’m convinced. Meanwhile, I’m determined to keep this

information as secret as possible. I decide not to publish the diary or reveal the existence of the Brownie glyphs until after I 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 prestigious postdoc fellowship would enhance my curriculum vitae for a future professorship in archaeoastronomy at Harvard, Berkeley, MIT, or some other prestigious university. I intend to make my parents proud, wherever their spirits might be. By the end of 2003, Fulbright awards me a fellowship based on my proposal, publications, sponsors, and the fact that in 1963 my father Sheldon Jacobs was a Fulbright Scholar at the National Center of Scientific Research in Paris.

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 for this Venus transit with Mom and me. When the planet reaches its maximum transit, I empty my parents' ashes into the Seine to feel as close as I can to Mom and Daddy. I miss them both beyond reason and feel like I am somehow tying us all together for eternity in the City of Light and Eternal Love. My parents loved me as much as I loved them--beyond the stars--and they found each other when Sheldon needed a wife and Audrey needed a husband because I was in her womb.



Chapter Three: Frank Guillemont

July 13, 2004

Pitzl Player from the Ballcourt of Xibalba

Afternoon rains are splashing onto the city's heavy traffic. Pedestrians under door-well awnings are waiting for the quick summer storm to pass. Some chilangos are braving the downpour with umbrellas and challenging the onrush of traffic to hail yellow Volkswagen taxis.

From my apartment balcony off Paseo de la Reforma, I gaze at the Monument to the Revolution commemorating Poncho Villa and Zapata, rebels I admire. I'm sitting on a cushioned wrought-iron chair smoking a Camel nonfilter. In Paris, I smoke Gauloises. A laptop, two cellphones, a notepad, and a few pens are on the table beside me. I'm reading an article in *Arquelogia Mexicana* by a Fulbright scholar who has recently arrived at the Anthropology Museum. She's planning an expedition next spring, starting in Todos Santos de Cuchumatán, Guatemala. I'm intrigued and underline *Todos Santos* and *archaeoastronomer*. I Google the author's name, Hillary Jacobs, and read her website mymesoamericanblog.edu. I find no pictures of her and conclude she must be a brilliant woman.

For thirty years I've lived in Mexico City. These days I reside with a beautiful twenty-year-old mestiza. Anita has just left to buy tacos al pastor, elotes, tamales, and tostadas, my favorites. Lately, my woman agitates me. If I'm not preoccupied with a periodical, a phone call, or typing on my laptop, Anita complains. My long absences make her lonely. *Ay Papi. Estoy caliente*. Anita wants a baby, something I cannot give her. Untreated childhood diseases have

made me sterile. But Anita doesn't know this because I'm careful and concise in my dealings and never tell anyone what I don't wish to reveal. 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 grows overly anxious, 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 business associates. Why not? My mother worked the streets of Paris during WWII. Pimping and being pimped out is the name of the game in the great ballcourt of life. Yes, at times Anita bothers me but she is my *petite amie pour le present*. I've had many before and hope to have many more. And I prefer a woman to a man. Women are easier to mark 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, personal effects, and liquor. Versace colognes. Cartons of cigarettes. 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 a carry-on attaché and buy whatever I need wherever I happen to be. In DF, I attend operas at the Palace de Belas Arts, take daily walks in Chapultepec Park, and often visit the Frida Kahlo Museum and the Murals of Diego Rivera. I appreciate historic art as much as I do antiquities.

It's been a while since my last significant haul and recently I've grown restless and ready to resume my trade. My situation isn't dire. I have money in different offshore accounts.

However, I am a big spender with refined tastes. My investments merely 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 business ventures I prefer the lucrative worldwide market for antiquities, especially to customers in Europe, Dubai, Asia, and the US. Even El Chapo's Sinaloa Cartel swaps drugs for my antiquities. These days my business is stable but the heyday of antiquities smuggling occurred before the internet, cell phones, and laptop computers. Those were remarkable times. Talk about lucrative. During the Guatemalan Civil War in the 1980's, I often helped myself to the 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 to speak different Mayan tongues and I became an apprentice to a shaman in Oaxaca. Over the years I've developed a profound interest in Aztec and Maya spirituality, both ancient and modern. It's as if the antiquities have crept into my bloodstream and guide me toward my ultimate goal in life. I want to achieve power and wholeness as both male and female and have revenge on a world that stole my childhood. **Even today my mother's brutal death haunts my dreams and sometimes I cannot stop thinking about her . . .**

It's during the Fourth Republic of France. **Maman** is on the bed in a dingy hotel room. She has no place to keep me, her little son. In a corner of the room, I am playing with green toy soldiers and reenacting the battles of my war hero father. Maman tells me I was born in 1950 and my papa was a Pied-Noir Frenchman killed in the Guerre d'Indochine.

In my shirt pocket I keep Maman's picture. "Mon petite," she tells me. "You must always carry my photo in case you get lost." Pauvre Maman, she is but a castaway whore of the

Germans, the Americans, and the French. In my pants pocket I carry the beads she instructs me to use when praying to the Virgin. Maman knows our time together is short.

The micheton has been with Maman many times before. He calls me “mon beau garçon,” pats my head, and brings me gifts like the toy soldiers. From where she lies in bed, Maman requests two hundred francs. The micheton grows angry. He is drunk and high on smack when he takes the bottle of Chartreuse that he brought Maman and hits her over the head. Again, again, and again. Blood splatters across the room onto the walls, my face, and my little blue shirt.

I scream, “Maman! Maman!” but the micheton continues to pummel her head until he suddenly stops, looks around the room, and then at me. He grabs me by the collar of my little blue shirt and pulls me onto the street where he leaves me completely alone and without anywhere to go.

During the war with Algeria, under President Charles de Gaulle, I spent my childhood in Paris with *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 femininity although they really were men.

Every day of my childhood I hustled to survive. I was a thief, a pick-pocket, and on occasion I sold myself to men and to women. From other street hustlers I learned to cheat tourists with the shell game Bonneteau. With the money I bought food, clothes, and pleasurable things like cigarettes, candy, and intoxicants. I quickly spent my money then resurrected my hustle. Survival became an art to me and the enduring times made me durable.

At fifteen I was entertaining rich American women who traveled to Paris looking for romance. When I approached them at sidewalk cafes and tourist sites, they found my amber eyes

and the cleft in my chin irresistible. In 1975 I escorted Madeline Steward 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 went to DF where **my charisma and good looks propelled me into the man I am today, *un homme du monde, un bon escroc*, a world-class crook who lives** by the motto *Success is the sweetest revenge* . . .

The downpour continues to ease the city's smog but nothing subdues the traffic noise and blaring horns. On the museum's website I find an interview with the newly arrived Fulbright scholar. "Dr. Hillary Jacobs is in Mexico City to research her Maya heritage." On my notepad I jot down *heritage* with a question mark then read a quote from Dr. Jacobs. "My great-great-grandfather was an early Mayanist who left a diary filled with Maya glyphs which he may have copied from an ancient queen's codex. From what I've deciphered, I may be descended from this ancient queen whose name was Jaguar Blood Moon."

I leap from my chair and shout above the traffic noise, "Mon dieu. C'est incroyable. C'est fantastique." My mind dances quicksteps as I imagine an ancient book that could prophesize the end of this world or hold revelations about transforming into the god of duality. The god who is both man and woman.

"To be and to become," I sing aloud and sit to continue scanning the site. Tomorrow night at the museum, Dr. Jacobs is holding a public lecture titled *Highlights of Mesoamerica*. I must attend that lecture because Hillary Jacobs may be the nagual guide to my transformation. Or to my next fortune. A Maya codex would be worth millions to the right buyer.

I retreat into my office and shuffle through my desk for business cards and curriculum vitae of my personas as an art dealer, a linguist, an archaeologist, a professor, and a diplomat. I

find the papers I seek and remove from a lacquer folk-art box my only picture of Maman, her prayer beads, and a stone figurine of a squatting Aztec god with a broad nose, slanted eyes, flattened forehead, and a Milky Way star dragon headdress. Ten years earlier I found this idol of Ometeotl near Teotihuacan. He is the god of duality in the form of Lord Fate and the god I aspire to become. Or at least, emulate.

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 aloud. "In the name of *pauvre* Maman, bring me the bounty that's rightfully mine. Lead me to the source of all being, to this codex, and give me back what the devil took away."

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

Chapter Four: Hillary

2004

From Paris I fly directly to Mexico City where Dr. Vasquez has arranged for my ninth-floor studio apartment with a balcony overlooking the Palace de Belas Arts. Dr. Vasquez is one of two academic sponsors I arranged for my Fulbright post doc. My sponsor from Guatemala is Doctor Carlos Morales, Directing Professor of Indigenous Studies at the University of San Carlos. In Mexico City Dr. Monte Vasquez is head curator of the Maya exhibit at the Anthropology Museum and a professor emeritus at UNAM, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, one of Latin America's oldest universities founded in 1551. He has agreed to join my expedition team and he invited me to work at the museum while I study Maya glyphs before we trek into the jungles of Guatemala.

At the Anthropology Museum, I immediately begin my work in the back laboratory for Maya exhibits. When I'm not deciphering the glyphs in the Brownie pictures, I'm helping Monte Vasquez catalog artifacts. Meanwhile, I quickly fall in love with Mexico City, DF. Every turn offers me a taste of history, culture, and delicious food. The main square of the city has an interesting history. It's called the Zocalo and was the central plaza of the Aztec city Tenochtitlan. Last century, during subway construction near this bustling square, workers uncovered the Templo Mayor of the Quetzalcoatl pyramid where Aztecs sacrificed humans to the equinox sun. On top of the demolished temple, the Spaniards built the Metropolitan Cathedral, the largest cathedral in the Americas. The 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 from 1846 until 1848. During WWI, five years after Bradley returned to Philadelphia, Zapata and Pancho Villa led the Mexican Revolution that forced Porfirio Diaz from power after seven decades.

I enjoy working for Monte. He speaks English with a deep flowing accent like *El Presidente* Vicente Fox. He's forty-five, about 5'5", has a wife and children, and a Harvard Ph.D. along with a number of scholarships and awards. Monte raises intriguing questions like my father used to do. I haven't revealed to him that I have pictures of an ancient codex but I emailed him a copy of Bradley's diary. Monte is a brilliant man who can help me decipher the glyphs and provide me with insights about what Bradley recorded. Monte has invited me to give a lecture series on the native cultures of the SW US and his first assignment to me is to hold a public lecture in the museum's library on the highlights of ancient Mesoamerica. It's a task I am thrilled to take.

In the museum's auditorium a crowd of chilangos and tourists are sitting before me. I'm dressed in a brown tweed blazer, black slacks, and flat shoes. I've pinned a microphone to the lapel of my floral blouse. "Welcome to the world of Mesoamerica," I say. "Step back in time while stepping up and down stone mountain pyramids." I click through my PowerPoint presentation to the solar eclipse from the Pyramid of the Sun that I took thirteen years before.

"Thirty-thousand years ago," I say to the audience, "Hunters and gatherers from Siberia crossed the frozen Bering Strait into the Americas. Between 6500 and 1500 BC, early Mesoamericans developed settlements near water sources and they cultivated maize, beans, squash, cotton, chilis, and avocados, and domesticated turkeys, dogs, and bees. Their trade networks transformed villages into city-state kingdoms where these early people worshipped their kings as gods. 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 became sacrificial victims to gods who demanded human blood. Atop pyramids, priests stretched the victims over stone altars and cut out their beating hearts. They tossed the corpses down the steps where priests donned human skin in a worship dance to Xipe Totec, the god of fertility."

"Today we know the sun rises because of Earth's orbit due to the force of gravity. We know the Earth is not flat. We know about the atom and DNA. Because of the internet, information explodes in a moment of time and we live in a world my great-great-granddad could never have imagined. So why do people still perpetuate the existence of a god? 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 already answered these questions in their collective mind."

I turn on the auditorium lights, stand beside the projected image of the Aztec calendar, adjust my eyes, and ask the audience if they have any questions.

“We are citizens of the Fifth Sun,” I hear the deep voice of a man with a French accent. I scan the crowd but do not see him. The voice returns, “Today’s sun first appeared on the morning of August 13, 3114 BC.”

I am always hoping my audience will ask scientific questions but I’m never surprised to hear New Age opinions, especially from tourists confusing astrology with astronomy. “Yes,” I say, 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 cycle will end. Ometeotl will destroy this world with an earthquake ten billion times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb.”

I squint to see who is speaking and spot a fairly tall man in a green pullover standing at an aisle seat among Mexicans and gringos. He looks to be in his fifties and is ruggedly attractive with broad, full lips and a dark, slightly graying ponytail. He looks like Bradly Nolan must have looked, I’m thinking 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. But I’m more interested in June 6, 2012 when Venus makes its last solar transit this century.” The participants chuckle. Some clap. I have 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. "But the date is an end to a recorded cycle. No more. No less. The Maya had many calendars just as the universe has more than one orbiting planet."

The man smiles, gives me a two-finger salute, and exits the hall. The audience asks a few more questions and I do my best to answer but I am eager to call it a night.

Chapter Five: Frank

The next day I find my little Fulbright scholar in a research laboratory at the back of the museum's 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 books and floppy disks, it appears as if she is transcribing glyphs. Her work is consuming her and she fails to notice me at the door, casually dressed in jeans, a long-sleeved shirt, and a colorful, diagonally striped serape tie that I selected just for this meeting. My old leather attaché resembles the one beside her desk. For a moment, I inhale her essence. I consider myself an expert at judging people, especially women. It's easy, really, if you know how to do it.

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 is *une fleur delicate*.

"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 says and then quickly closes the file of glyphs on the screen, presumably to keep me from seeing her work.

“Bien,” I smile, hoping my Versace cologne reaches her. “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.

She smiles. An invite. Women cannot resist my dimples and amber brown eyes. “May I sit down?” I know my accent captivates her. But she says nothing. I pull a chair beside her desk, hold out my hand, and introduce myself. She offers her hand and knocks a stack of floppies onto 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’ve 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 and copies of diplomas.

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

“Dr. Jacobs,” I say authoritatively. “I am 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 would be the perfect man to guide you on your expedition in the spring.” I pause to assess her reaction. She looks interested, but cautious, and I know I will fully possess her one day if I am careful about what I say and how I say it.

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

“Paris,” I say.

“I was recently there to see the Venus transit.”

“C’est merveilleux, Mademoiselle Professor.”

She looks at my CV for a moment then says, “It’s impressive but the museum provides me with translators and guides. I am sorry Mr. Guillemont but I have no choice in the matter. Nor any means to pay you.” She hands back my papers.

“Mais non,” I say and gently touch her hand, refusing the documents. “You keep them. Maybe you’ll reconsider,” I pause, “if circumstances change.” I smile and 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 I hold her in a trance until 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. Her embarrassment entices me. “Ah, but you must be quite alone in this big city, Professor.” I sense how she is feeling in my presence. A woman as preoccupied as this little sparrow couldn’t have much of a social life. And every woman I’ve ever known has a side aching to blossom. *Meme, avec mes amis de la rue.*

“What?” She looks at me, blushing.

“*Vraiment*. I can see you’re very involved in your work. Have you had time to visit Teotihuacan and Tula? Have you seen Tenochtitlan? Teocalli, the Aztec twin temples of Quetzalcoatl and his brother Tezcatlipoca? Sons of Ometeotl?”

“Not on this visit. I’ve been to the university, of course.” She looks impressed with my knowledge of the city and the Aztec gods. “Fall semester I’m teaching a course on the SW Native Americans.”

“*Por supuesto*.” I lean forward so that my cologne possesses her. Then I glance at my watch and say, “I tell you what, Dr. Jacobs. It’s 11:30. You must break for lunch. Be my guest at Adonis. It’s not far from here and the food is excellent. Do you like Lebanese cuisine?”

“Actually,” she leans back and her chair scoots out an inch, “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 Aztecs and the Mayas. 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?”

“No problem.” I stand and firmly shake her hand while wondering if she intends to check my references. It’s a slight risk and I doubt she’ll discover anything terrible in such a short time. I have no criminal record. I’m too crafty for that. And I do have many contacts to support my

academic claims. “It’s entirely my pleasure to meet such an esteemed scholar such as yourself,” I say, “A Fulbright archaeoastronomer.”

Pulling her hand from my grip, she nods and says, “In ten minutes, *entonces?*”

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

Adonis Lebanese Restaurant is on Avenida Homero in Polanco, a neighborhood I know well because of its expensive shops, restaurants, hotels, and the embassies of France, India, Canada, and Spain. Inside the popular restaurant, elite chilangos are dining at nearly every white clothed table and the 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. As I speak English, I use French words and idioms because women find that as alluring as my accent, dimples, and dark amber eyes.

“Ometeotl created himself and the universe,” I say. “His four sons are the Teczalipocas. White Teczalipoca is Quetzalcoal, God of Light. His nagual is a coyote.” I sip my coffee then ask, “Do you know your dream nagual?”

“I doubt I have a nagual,” she admits. “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 but instead of saying anything, she nibbles on a spicy carrot from a condiment bowl of olives and hot pickled chilies, onions, zucchini, and garlic.

“When I read that your expedition will start in Todos Santos,” I say, “I knew you could use me on your team. In 1994, during the civil war, I spent a year in Todos Santos learning Mam while apprenticing under a Mam shaman who 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. I had changed my CV to reflect what I’m telling her now.

“What a coincidence,” Hillary says, gazing at me as if wondering whether to hire me. “Todos Santos is where my ancestor started his trek to the cenote cave one hundred years ago.”

“I read that you have Maya blood,” I suggest, encouraging her to reveal more about herself. “The truth is, Professor, 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.”

“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 then asks me about my childhood in Paris.

“I grew up in Paris but have lived in Mexico for thirty years.” I say nothing more because I never discuss my difficult life on the streets of Paris and besides, I want her to view me as the son of a prominent family, rather 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. She is vulnerable now because her parents have recently died. I see many possibilities with this little American princess.

The waiter places before her a plate of falafel, tabouli, and baba ganoush. “Do you ever go back to Paris?” she asks.

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

“*Un homme du monde!* And you’ve never settled down?” It seems she’s summoned the courage to ask me 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 exactly what you mean. Other than my coffee breaks with Monte and my private Spanish lessons, I’m mostly alone making phone calls, sending emails, and updating my website.”

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

She smiles, takes a bite of her food, and says, “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 disclosed too much.

I sit back to finish my broiled lamb. Momentarily, I say with compassion, "I know what it's like to be alone in the world. You see, both my parents had died by the time I was ten."

"Really?" She seems astonished as she dips a pickled zucchini into her baba ganoush.

"I don't like to admit this," I say. "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 so intelligent. I'm surprised you're not married."

She ponders my remark and says, "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 are 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. When you let one attribute overrule, you lose your balance and Ometeotl will destroy you."

Hillary looks at me, 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." Frank laughs and I ask, "What's so funny? I'm perfectly serious."

"Why you, Professor. I find you refreshing and wise." I take her hand and feel her body tremble as if I'm filling her with concern. Or maybe she's thinking about *itz k'uh*. I run my

fingers over her palm and say, “Such soft little hands. I’m searching your lifeline for a sign that you will find your center.”

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

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

“Fascinating. What does yours say?” Hillary sips her water.

“Something I cannot reveal. But I feel very good about today, having met you. You’re a very attractive woman with charming blue eyes.”

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

At the museum entrance at Chapultepec Park, I promise to call on her and show her the sights of La Ciudad. She appears relieved that I don’t mention her expedition. I’m a perfect fit. She would be thrilled to work with me but she’s not ready to decide because we’ve only just met. First, she will check my credentials and references because she’s a cautious scholarly woman. Quite unlike most women I’ve known. It’s obvious that no man has ever penetrated her shell of femininity. But that will all change now that we’ve met. Her very essence is unraveling and she doesn’t know whether I’m a friend, a stranger, a prospective colleague, or if I will become her first lover.



Chapter Six: Hillary

Coatlíque

Nearly a week passes before Alfredo the museum guard says that a Frenchman awaits me in the front lobby. My heart pounds as I shuffle through papers on my desk. I've already checked on two of Frank's references, verifying that he had obtained a degree from the University of Mexico, as specified on his CV. I wanted to talk to Dr. Vasquez about hiring Frank for the expedition but after Frank failed to immediately contact me, I let the notion slide. I thought about calling him but hesitated because he said he'd call me. I felt like he should take the initiative or I'd come across as too eager. And I didn't want to make a fool of myself because of my strong attraction to him. Now, as I walk down the corridor to the front lobby, my interest in the Frenchman resurfaces. In fact, unfamiliar emotions about him are consuming me.

In the museum's front lobby, Frank is standing beside the 2.7-meter stone statue of Coatlicue, the Aztec Mother Goddess. Two serpents form her head and she wears a skirt of dangling snakes and a necklace of hands, hearts, and skulls. The statue is a feature of the museum and has an interesting history. In the 1700's workers uncovered her near the Aztec Sun

Stone in the Zocalo but people found her so repulsive that they reburied the statue then later dug it up again.

As I approach the striking man dressed in a suit and tie, his graying hair tied in a pony tail, I can hear Coatlique saying *My 400 sons and daughter--who speaks to spiders, centipedes, and snakes--tried to kill me but I gave birth to the sun Huitzilopochtli and he slayed his brothers and tossed their remains into the circumpolar stars. Then he decapitated my daughter and threw her head to the moon.*

“Frank, I thought you’d forgotten about me,” I halfheartedly tease.

He firmly grips my hand with both of his and I smell the sharp woody scent of his cologne. His smile fills me with manna as if a sudden warm breeze from Chapultepec Park blows through the museum and enshrouds me. Or is it the aura of Coatlique? Why am I so confounded? Has Coatlique’s spider moon daughter cast a spell over me? Frank makes me forget myself, who I am or what I want.

“Mademoiselle Professor,” Frank says and stirs me from my misty thoughts. “I could never forget our most stimulating conversation at Adonis. This past week, I’ve been extremely busy with my new job.”

“Job?” I suddenly feel deflated, as if Frank had considered me for a job and then hired someone else.

“Si. Avec the National Institute of Anthropology and History. We leave for Chiapas in a week.”

“Really?” I’m at a loss for words and suddenly feel determined to hire him for my expedition, using my own money if necessary. We have so much in common. 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 say at last, after pulling my thoughts together. “I’m glad you stopped by, Monsieur.”

He releases his grip and looks at me. His amber brown eyes glisten. “Ma chere Professor. I had every intention of seeing you before my departure. 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 in Palenque with the glyphs on the Copan stairwell. But for now, I’ve come here to invite you for a walk in the park. Are you free?”

I pause in thought, searching for the right words. I don’t want to seem disappointed that he’s no longer available to work for me. “Yes, I’d love to go for a walk. I’m just sorry that 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 lie.

“*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 Spanish and the Mayan languages. Whether or not he eventually joins my expedition team, I want to keep seeing him during my stay in Mexico City and so I quickly agree to his offer.

Later, back at the museum, I tell Monte that 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. We can’t dismiss them, *no es possible.*”

“I know, but Mr. Guillemont has an excellent background and would 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 are sitting 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 Spanish lesson.

“That’s wonderful,” I declare then discuss how Frank can help me and how together we can come up with words for the ceremony at the waybil shrine before the team enters the queen’s tomb at Lake Turtle Macaw.

I watch Frank quietly sit back, absorb my enthusiasm, and inhale the pleasant atmosphere of the park. He seems satisfied that I have agreed to take him on my expedition.

“I love the Bosque de Chapultepec,” Frank says as I sip my lime and aloe juice. “You know the Aztecs originally planted these trees?” **I smile, nod, and enjoy the peaceful setting.** **In a moment Frank adds, “Chapultepec is like le Bois de Boulogne in Paris. A place where I can fill my lungs with oxygen and not the smog-filled air of La Ciudad.”**

“It reminds me of Central Park in New York City,” I suggest and tell him about my fifth birthday trip to New York City with my parents and grandfather. “We had dined in the Windows on the World restaurant seventeen years before 9-11.”

Frank leans back, listens to my story, and eats his hot cheese tlacoyo. He seems to enjoy giving me my lessons in the park. “*Entonces, que ofrece el cielo el proximo mes?*” he finally says and begins my Spanish lesson.

“What does the sky offer next month?” I repeat. “In August?”

“En español,” Frank corrects.

As best I can, I explain in Spanish but am too enthusiastic about the event to fumble with Spanish. “The shower will occur during a waning crescent. It’ll be a perfect night sky for counting up to ninety shooting stars each hour.”

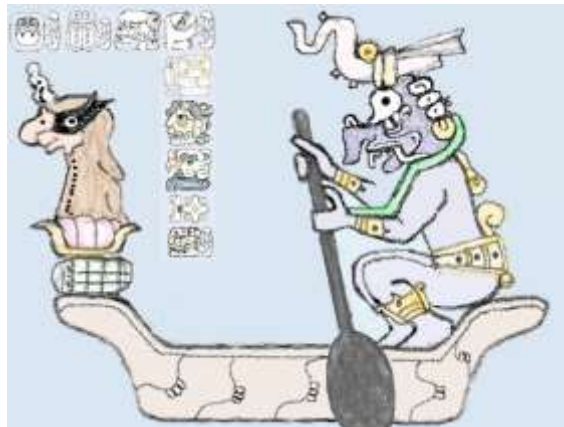
“*Estrellas fugaces, en español,*” Frank tells me.

“*Estrellas fugaces,*” I repeat. “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 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. I really loved my father. He showed me the world of outer space.” I set aside my juice. “Wouldn’t it be magnificent to watch the Perseids from the Pyramid of Kulkulkan in Chichen Itza?”

Frank extinguishes his cigarette and says, “I have a suggestion, dear Professor. Next month, why don’t we tour the Yucatan for the meteor shower. I’m free now to be your guide to the Maya ruins. No need to toil in a back office at the museum until the expedition in May. I’ll help you discover a new way to interpret your glyphs, apart from all your scientific facts.” 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.”

“I do need to explore the ancient sites as part of my Fulbright research,” I say. “And I’d love for you to guide me into the ancient Maya spirit. It’s perfect timing. My classes at UNAM don’t begin until September and I’m already prepared. My lectures are based on my Ph.D. dissertation.”

“Excellent,” Frank says and I notice a twinkle in his eye and can’t help but wonder what he’s really thinking. I hope it’s all about him liking me for who I am.



Chapter Seven: Frank

August 1, 2004

I offer to drive Hillary to Palenque then around the Peninsula but she wants to retrace her ‘91 trip with her father which entails flying from Mexico City to Cancun then driving a rented

VW bug around the Yucatan to Campeche and lastly to Chiapas. With this in mind, we fly one-way to Cancun for \$50 each and stay at the Sheridan in Hotel Zona. To economize, I suggest we share a room and that I sleep on the sofa.

Throughout the night the rain clashes on the Maya Riviera but by early morning the sun rises over the long narrow beach. With the hotel's white robe over her flannel pajamas, Hillary stands at the arcadian doors to watch the sunrise across the channel toward Cuba, the Gulf of Mexico meets the Caribbean Sea. I think about Red Chac Xib Chaac upholding the eastern sky so the sun can enter the world and circle the day before descending into the jaguar night.

Hillary looks back at me snoring on the sofa but I'm aware of her glance. I told her I was happy to begin our travels in Cancun, a town I've watched 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. I wonder about Hillary. 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, I'm thinking as I continue to snore. Hers is a difficult façade to penetrate. But far from impossible. It's not that I find her unattractive. I love all manner of women and men. But I have no interest in rushing the inevitable with a virgin unaccustomed to *l'art de l'amore*. She's so unlike *les amis de rue* who are sexual creatures out to enhance their physical pleasure. I think about Anita living in La Ciudad, waiting for me. She's a wild cat in bed. So different from Hillary. If I move with control, I'll know when to pluck the flower and pin her on my lapel. Ix Chel, open your womb-jar to me. I know you desire the Sun.

After a breakfast buffet Hillary and I walk barefoot along the beach where few people are around. I am sporting my ray-bans and my unbuttoned long-sleeved shirt reveals a cleanshaven chest and a gold chain with a St. Christopher pendant. Hillary is wearing a floppy hat, shorts, a J. Crew T-shirt, and her transgressive tortoise shell glasses. A cool sea breeze touches us on the white sands. Pelicans fly overhead. Royal terns chase hermit crabs along the surf splashing ashore.

We discuss things in simple Spanish. Hillary complains that Mexican food gives her dyspepsia then she talks about a trip to Europe with her parents and when they saw Stonehenge. We sit on a driftwood log and listen to the surf and to laughing seagulls and I tell her about my travels to India, Africa, and China. High above frigate birds with two-meter wingspans are riding the updrafts. “The ancient Mayas knew the frigate signaled an approaching storm,” I say.

After a moment of quiet contemplation, Hillary admits that she’s had only one relationship before, one that didn’t last, one without sex. I stir the sand with a stick and say, “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. I don’t know what to say except that these past few weeks have been some of the best days in my life. Like the star parties I attended with my father. They were magical nights of gazing at planets, searching for Messier objects or watching meteor showers. I miss my father but you are filling the emptiness in my heart. I’m grateful you’ve appeared in my life.”

“I hope I don’t embarrass you,” I say. “You’re the first woman I’ve met who is so intelligent, so inquisitive. I admire you and your work.” I gently touch her shoulder. “We’ve

much to do now. We'll know when the time is right. For now, listen to the music of the wind and sea and feel the itz k'uh surrounding us. Breathe in the aroma. When you commune with your ancestors, the ancient Maya, you'll understand the true meaning behind the glyphs."

We sit quietly for a moment. Hillary deeply inhales the setting seemingly trying to absorb the itz k'uh when she suddenly stands and tells me she feels energized and eager to continue with our travels. "Let's go to Tulum." She takes my hand to help me rise. "I went there with my father. Bradly also traveled there, and so did Stephens and Catherwood. Perhaps in Tulum you can begin teaching me about Maya spirituality. I'm ready to discover what you have in mind."

We rent a yellow Volkswagen bug like the one Hillary's father drove thirteen years before. It smells the same, she tells me as we drive ninety miles south along the coastal highway to Tulum.

For three nights we stay at a beach front villa one mile from the ruins. From early morning until sunset, Hillary and I walk among the toppled structures that stand like a fortress on a green slope overlooking the turquoise Caribbean Sea. **From 1200 AD until the Spanish conquest, Tulum served as a trading outpost for seafaring merchants and was possibly under Aztec control.**

Iguanas bask under the hot sun on stones interspersed with yellow and purple flowers and red hibiscus plants. By eleven o'clock each day, busloads of tourists arrive from cruise ships docked in Cancun and Tulum becomes a revived populous center. But these days the people who wander the site are loud obnoxious tourists with little regard for the ancient spirit of the port city the ancients called "the City of Dawn." The tourists constantly take pictures of themselves before

the ruins where the ancient Maya once bartered jadeite, obsidian, cacao beans, copper bells, salt, shells, and idols.

At the Temple of Frescoes, a solar observatory in the 1400s, I standby holding her equipment as Hillary takes digital photos of the Ix Chel frescoes. “I feel a sense of kinship to the goddess of fertility,” she tells me at one point. **“Not because I want to ask her for a good husband and many sons, like the ancient women probably did, but because of my great-great-grandmother whose name was Ix Chel and because of Jaguar Blood Moon who probably prayed to the goddess.”** Hillary snaps picture after picture hoping to use one on the cover of the book she intend to write. I have no camera and am not taking any notes but I am equally enthralled with the site even though I’ve been here many times before.

During our last morning in Tulum, Hillary is sitting on a rough and mossy stone wall near the House of Columns; she seems to be absorbing the scene. Black ants trail among the stones like the tourists and a nearby iguana sucks-in air as if trying to breathe or maybe to absorb itz k’uh. I chuckle to myself.

I am standing beside Hillary holding her camera bag and enjoying the warm morning sun and a refreshing breeze drifting ashore from the expansive sea where a few cirrus clouds are floating in the blue sky. “I can hear the ancients speaking,” I declare, breaking the silent moment between us.

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

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

"I'm sorry," she says. "But 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 blood ancestors. I can only imagine what this site was like six-hundred years ago," she pauses and looks at me with her pretty and inquisitive blue eyes. "Spirituality must come naturally to you."

"Let your spirit guide awaken the divine itz k'uh within you and call to the four corners of space," I say and see the puzzled look in her eyes. **I can't help but think HOW CLOSE I AM NOW TO ALL HER TREASURES and THE MAYA CODEX.** "Red Chaac of the east brings rain," I continue. "White Chaac of the North sends in the shivering cold. From the south Yellow Chaac blow the wind your way. But beware," I again take both of her hands and deeply looks into 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. Have you no faith in the divine?"

Her hair is blowing in a breeze scented with my L'homme Yves Saint Laurent. I know I beguile her with my spiritual perspectives about both modern and ancient Maya cultures. *Maybe tonight she will ask me to become her first lover* I'm thinking when she suddenly says, "I rejected religion when I was twelve. At my bat mitzvah."

"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?" Frank asks.

"If boys have bar mitzvahs, I felt like I should have one too."

"You were a determined child."

She smiles, flattered. “I was. But I resented the discrepancies between boys and girls based on religious traditions.” She aims her camera at the Great Palace. I sense she’s revealed too much about herself and feels susceptible to my mystical whims. She wants to fully control herself when I lead her on the spiritual path into the ancient Mayan religion.

“What are you thinking?” I ask

“I was just imagining the ancient priests tracking the sun from the Temple of Frescos and making their calculations over the centuries.”

“Religion lies at the heart of a woman’s turmoil,” I say. “Over the centuries people of the world lost the feminine side of god. Not the Mesoamericans. They retained the power of duality.” From behind her, I gently massages her shoulders. “BEFORE WE HEAD ON TO COBA, I WANT YOU TO RELAX AND ALLOW THE SPIRIT OF THE SEA, THE ITZ K’UH TAKE YOU BACK TO OUR MAYA ANCESTORS, TO THE PLACE OF ABUNDANT WATERS. 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 JAGUAR BLOOD MOON.



Chapter Eight: Yol Tan

9.10.10.2.14

King Pakal of Abundant Waters

I've always been close my elder brother Pakal, Holy King of the Jaguar dynasty in Abundant Waters. My brother is the divine sapling of the gods, the Maize God Reborn, and Red Chac Xib Chaac—the god who upholds the sunrise. His political allies are Yax Mutul in the **Petén Rainforest** and Ux Witik in the far southeast corner of our world. His enemies are the Kaan snake kings of Three Stone City in the far north.

One moon cycle after our father Precious Macaw Jaguar had entered the waters, my brother marked the seating of the half katun by dedicating new palace steps memorializing his parents. Three solar cycles had passed since his mother 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 this seating was like any other day, my brother has told me. Sacred mist was rising from the forests surrounding Abundant Waters. Fires were burning around the

central plaza as Lord Sun peered upon the citizens gathered for the seating ceremony. Yellow Chaac exhaled his winds upon them. **Dogs barked and turkeys gobbled in the nearby yards of wood and thatched houses at the terraced milpas growing maize, squash, beans, tobacco, chilis, and avocado trees.**

On a wood platform beside the newly constructed steps to the Red Palace, my brother of two katuns sat on a double-headed jaguar throne made of mahogany wood. High nobles flanked him and priests tossed copal resin into the sacred fire that had been burning since the founder Quetzal Jaguar seated the ninth baktun.

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

Queen Tz'akbu sat beside my brother holding the heir apparent, the b'aah ch'ok of eight stones. Seventeen tuuns had passed since Pakal had wedded the queen and the citizens revered her as their Queen Mother because she had produced for them the b'aah ch'ok. Citizens depended on her during important ceremonies when she sacrificed her own blood on their behalf and called upon the powers of her two elite bloodlines. The citizens were unaware, however, that a rift existed between my brother and his queen because he had waited half a katun for her to produce a patriline heir. During that time, the queen had brought forth three daughters with spirits of illness and death. Although my brother respected Tz'akbu as his kingdom's Queen Mother, he has confessed to me that he's never **felt passion for her** and he rarely took to heart her counsel concerning political matters or the training of his son. In truth, I know my brother resented his queen for not giving him a viable daughter.

Sitting beside the Queen Mother on the ceremonial platform was Pakal's step-mother and my mother Lady Rigel, second wife to our father Precious Jaguar Macaw. She wore a cotton blouse and skirt woven with shells and feathers and embroidered with four-petal sunflower glyphs. I was a six-month-old fetus in her womb. Her father had named her for the third hearth star of creation because Orion had been hovering at the horizon on the evening she entered the world. Lady Rigel was born the year my brother married Queen Tz'abku.

Six lunar cycles before his father entered the waters, my brother had traveled to Bone Dog City to make war. The king of Bone Dog surrendered, swore his allegiance to Abundant Waters and the Jaguar Dynasty, and he gifted a princess bride for Pakal's father. Lady Rigel would bring 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 his new wife quickly conceived. But a day spirit took my father from Earth before I arrived.

As my brother the king danced before his throne, priests chanted to his divine parents. Musicians beat turtle shell drums and shook calabash rattles. The sun made the king's face shine as he entered the dark road of underground waters for this seating ceremony. Priests had given him brews and enema mixtures made of water lily, morning glory seeds, Ololiuqui, mushrooms, and honey.

"I conjure **the bolt lightning snake of the living K'awiil**," my brother declared in his trance. "I turn the stone at the seating of the New Lord of Time in the middle of his baktun. Sak K'uk was wife of Precious Jaguar Macaw. I am their son, the eleventh king of the Jaguar Dynasty. I touched Earth the year the Kaan king Scroll Serpent sacked our city, a year before Lady Yohl entered the rainbow road of no return. When I took the scepter of K'awiil at twelve

tuuns, I resurrected the Jaguar bloodline and 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!"

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 *blood let dish of King Pakal--chok-wa ch'aji. His blood releases the flower soul.*

The burning paper emitted smoke with the king's holy itz k'uh and the hot breath of Lord Sun exhaled jade beads and four-petal sunflowers into the air. 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--God of Thunder who hurls Obsidian Flints to Earth. The vision said to my brother the king, "Before the seating of the ninth baktun, the king of Yax Mutul, grandson of Spearthrower Owl, installed me as King. I seated the stone spirit for the ninth baktun. The sixth king of my dynasty, Lake Turtle Macaw II, established Stone Mountain City Where All Gods Unite in the southern highlands and Bone Dog City up the Usumacinta River. Because the queens of Lake Turtle Macaw II could not produce a patriline heir, his sister took the K'awiil scepter and the regnal name Lady Yohl. She reigned for one katun. During the seating of the ninth katun, the Kaan 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 Kaan had defeated 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," Sak K'uk said to my brother causing him to hesitate in his dance. His mother's words contradicted what priests had maintained before our father had

entered the waters. They had assured Precious Jaguar Macaw that Lady Rigel would bring forth a son who would become a great ball player, an artist-scribe, and a great warrior of the Jaguar Dynastic Tree. My brother looked back to the burning paper in the bowl and implored the gods for another prophecy, one that he could tell the gathered citizens and important lords at the ceremony. He did not want to reveal his mother's revelation and cause his people to lose faith in their priests. He would wait until my birth. If Lady Rigel produced a son, he would rejoice for his father's flowery spirit. If the child was a girl, as his mother's apparition predicted, Pakal decided he would hold a festival for his citizens. In his heart of hearts, my brother has told me, he wanted Lady Rigel to bear him a viable daughter.

When I was born on the day 14 Ocelot, the humid rains of Chaac trample the Earth. Ten katuns had passed since the ninth baktun after the day of creation. Six winals had passed since Pakal's seating of the half-katun. Priests had declared that the meeting of day spirits was auspicious.

But 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 and with a flint knife severed my umbilical cord and placed it in a pot with the placenta. Priests later buried the pot in a sacred cave to protect me from harmful spirits. Lady Ja' Naj handed me to my brother the Holy King and he carried me to the front palace steps where citizens had gathered to learn about my royal birth.

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

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

My brother knew that his citizens would fear that my gender 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 did not die because of a false prediction. The high priests are correct. My father's child will become a great queen. She will produce many designated heirs for the Jaguar dynasty. I declare her name Yol Tan for she comes from the essence of heaven and touches Earth in the place of the Primordial Sea of Fire on a day that 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 creators of the Fourth Sun who make the rains before the harvest."

By late afternoon on the day of my birth, the rains had 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. 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 had to be lovely and brilliant, pitz and sas, 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 wrist bands and necklaces, intertwined her hair with iridescent quetzal feathers, and anointed her with the essence of purple orchids found high in mahogany trees. To keep her calm and 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 that my mother sang in quiet

whispers to the gods of Bone Dog City and she sang praises to the Maize God Reborn for my birth and for her own re-birth on the rainbow road of no return. In her heart, however, I know my mother wanted to hold me. I know she wanted to live and not die.

At the darkest hour on the night of my birth, 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 my mother who sat weak and lightheaded in her litter. Priests were beating turtle shell drums, rattling gourds, and carrying vessels burning fragrant copal resin.

Under a stone estate on a hillside near the back courtyard of the Red Palace, my father rested in his tomb, his muknul. Priests had left it unsealed until his second wife, my mother Lady Rigel, bore her child. She belonged to her husband in life and in death and the gods required that she lie at his side to serve him in the world beyond ours and give him the son he desired.

Mortar and stone lined the vaulted muknul and 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 Sak K'uk but didn't record my mother's name or birth so she wouldn't replace his great wife Sak K'uk. The body of Precious Jaguar Macaw lay swathed in cotton reddened from cinnabar powder. His jade mask represented the Maize God Reborn. On his forehead was his name glyph. In his mouth was a jade bead. He wore a beaded necklace with a crocodile pendant.

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

Pakal watched my mother deeply inhale and finish the rich brew the color of blood then he and his nobles departed so my mother could face the Death Lords alone. I know in my heart that she feared the priests would return and cut out her heart and cast her blood on the stone floor of her husband's tomb before she **entered the rainbow road with no return.**

Chapter Nine: Hillary

August 6-7, 2004

Coba

On the drive to Coba we pass huts with thatched roofs, bamboo walls, and front yards animated with pigs, dogs, and native Mayas in their colorful traditional clothes. All of them are under five feet and I wonder if I'm petite because of my Mayan heritage.

We check into Club Med Coba and the next morning, in the thick, musty heat, Frank and I explore the **monuments and stelae at the archaeological park.** John Lloyd Stephens never made it here but he had heard rumblings about Coba and wrote that *it would be hard to get to from Tuloom . . . As our time was necessarily to be much prolonged, we are not advised to go see these ruins.* Bradley also did not make it to Coba but my father brought me here. **The site had very few tourists back then and not too many more these days.**

In Mayan, Coba means *water stirred by the south winds of Yellow Chaac.* About 100 AD, the Mayas founded the city near four fresh water sources they called d'zonotes or sacred wells. During the classic period, Coba reigned as a large kingdom with alliances to both major powers Tikal and Calakmul. After 600 AD, Chichen Itza dominated the Maya region and Coba's power and influence dwindled. People abandoned the city after the Spanish arrived.

Many of the stelae in Coba **display women with the Kaloomte title of a ruling monarch. One stela portrays a ruling queen named Kaloomte K'awiil who reigned from 642 to 681 AD. She is standing on captives which is highly unusual for a female ruler and suggests that she must have been a powerful warrior queen.**

Frank and I climb the tall awkward steps to the top of Coba's main pyramid Nohoch Mul or *Great Mound in Rippling Waters*. Stretching out from its base are fifty white roads called scabes. In ancient times these roads led to other city-states. On the top stone platform, I sit, deeply inhale the hot and humid air, view the surrounding jungle dotted with cenotes, and think about Frank guiding me into the Maya spirit world. **It's something I look forward to with great expectations but I wonder if he really can shake up my rational mind with whimsical notions not based on the observable world. I'm my father's daughter and grew up learning to question whatever hasn't been scientifically proven. Sure, mother and granddad tried to fill my head with religious notions but I never took them as seriously as my father. And when my parents died, any concept I ever had about God died with them.**

Frank **is trailing behind me on his climb up the pyramid. He** seems to be in good shape for a heavy smoker in his fifties but he takes his time and pauses every ten steps. When he reaches the top and sits beside me, we share a bottle of water. I inhale his fragrance, feeling wonderful, and I say, "This is where Maya priests must have felt a great source of power tracking Venus across the sky. I *can* feel their spirit."

Frank chuckles as he is catching his breath. He wipes his brow with the handkerchief he carries and says, "You know, 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. It was a great honor to die as a sacrifice to the gods.”

I don't respond because I'm wondering if he's thinking about me being a virgin.

Sometimes I'm uncertain of how to relate to Frank. He can be so unlike my father who was never flippant.

Frank lights a cigarette and says, “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 world of the ancient Maya.”

“Okay,” **I say, pleased to share the facts I've recently learned. It's gratifying when he appreciates my intellect, rather like my father 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. But they didn't know 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 hold of my hand like my father used to do and makes me feel appreciated, loved, and respected. **I know I'm falling in love with him. And we haven't even broached the topic of sleeping together. But I'm patient about that. It'll be such a big step for me, a complete change in my life. I only hope his hesitation is because he respects me and not because I don't appeal to him.**

We descend Nohoch Mul and trek down a path through the hot tropical jungle to see the stela of the phallus. Along the way, huge moths fluttered past us like birds. In the dark green canopy, monkeys perform jungle acrobatics as green parrots and toucans chatter at one another. Frank walks beside me carrying my bags. He seems to enjoy the tranquility of the setting.

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

“Who?”

“The woman who hurt you.”

“Oh. You mean . . . Stella?” I continue my pace and wait for him to explain. “I suppose she was *tres jolie*, although she was a coquette and you are 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 numerous times before. A woman’s insecure vanity.” He stops in his pace 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, then they crescendo, wane, and trill. At times, the voices peak in unison as if all the ancient Maya are calling to Water Lily Jaguar in the forest swamps.**”

For a moment, I listen to the jungle and smell its musky scent. I feel the sun’s increasing heat but can’t see the sky above the creeping foliage. Frank picks up my bags and we continue along the dirt trail without saying anything more. Frank seems deep in thought and I assume he’s now strategizing about his personal business matters. My own thoughts are dreamy, which is not something I’m used to.

Cenote Choo-Ha

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 are halfway down the stairs, Frank remarks, "We enter Xibalba and die. When we reemerge, we will be reborn into a new life." His voice resonates with the sound of our footsteps trailing down the stairs. At the bottom, artificial lights cast a translucent sheen across the aqua pool that fills much of the cavern floor. Sunlight streaming inside through the stairway 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 at the source of rain and corn."** He holds me closer, and adds, "How could the Maya not worship their gods in such a place?"

I reach down to 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 and reason that there is an underground channel.

Because no one is around Frank strips and wades into the shallow pool. His skin is completely bare of hair and he has no tattoos.

Although I am 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 the cenote cavern 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 told me, that being petite is an asset, a style in vogue.

On boulders at the far edge of the pool, I sit beside Frank. He relates a story he's recently read. "Sixty-five million years ago a comet ten miles across slammed into the Yucatan and killed all the dinosaurs on Earth. The impact created the cenote pools across the Yucatan and Guatemala and was ten billion times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb."

"Maybe," I say. "But it's more likely that Chaac's rain caused the limestone to collapse and form these sinkholes that filled with fresh underground water. But you're right about the comet and the impact center at the Chicxulub Crater. Do you know a sea passage exists under this region? We are landlocked but connected to the oceans."

Without a word Frank plunges back into the water. I follow him and we frolic in the center of the pool until Frank stops in his play and embraces me. "It's time, *mon petite oiseau*," he whispers in my ear. "You will open your womb-jar to me, I know you desire the Sun.

RETURN TO YOUR MAYA ANCESTRY ONCE AGAIN. BECOME THE YOUNG PRINCESS OF ABUNDANT WATERS WHO LIVES IN A GREAT PALACE AND LEARNS TO BECOME A FORMIDABLE RULING QUEEN



Chapter Ten: Yol Tan

Princess of Abundant Waters

In the Red Palace of Abundant Waters, I passed my early childhood without a penetrating spirit of illness. I resided in my own chamber and Lady Ja' Naj was my personal healer. Every morning and night, she gave me a hot cacao drink **with special roots and berries to help me grow strong and to stop the pain** from an emerging tooth.

One tuun 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 the third son in line to the throne and 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 could not produce viable girls. The king personally saw to my upbringing. **Sometimes Queen Mother protested that he spent more time with his father's child than with his sons. Then my brother would tell her that his heart ached from the loss of his three daughters and Queen Mother would fall silent.**

In the white painted reception hall of the Red Palace, my brother received emissaries, traveling merchants, and his vassal lords. Toucans and scarlet macaws were always clattering from their perches in the White Hall even during the tribute ceremonies. My brother sat atop a northern platform on pillows made of jaguar pelts. Queen Mother sat beside him with the b'aah ch'ok at her side holding his pet yellow boa. Attendants, stewards, guards, and lords were always present. Poets, dwarfs, musicians, and dancers entertained my brother, his family, and his visitors.

In one corner of the White Hall, artist-scribes taught the royal sons and other elite boys mathematics, writing, and astronomy. After the lessons, the boys waged pretend battles against the Kaan or imagined they were Hunahpu and Xbalanque playing a ball game with the Lords of

Death. I quietly sat below the platform petting a hairless dog or a baby monkey while listening to the young lords talk about great battles and great ballcourt players. Their stories always intrigued me and one day, after the seating of my fourth tuun, I approached the b'aah ch'ok and asked if I could join in their play. He politely dismissed me but Queen Mother had overheard my request and she admonished me with sharp words. "Although you're a royal princess," she said. "Girls do not participate in politics or matters that interest boys."

I later complained to my brother when he came to my private chamber for a visit. In response, the king provided me with a lifelong servant and playmate named Star Flower. She was a lanky girl of six tuuns. "I'm your loyal servant, *a win a ke na*," she told me when we first met in my chamber. **Her father's name was Flint Paw for the jaguar paws and flints he wore around his neck. He traveled the trade routes throughout the world and bartered cacao beans, jungle feathers, and jade for green obsidian blades and shells from eastern coastal cities. Flint Paw happily traded Star Flower, his youngest of six daughters, to the Holy King so that the palace would always provide his wife Peccary Star with cacao beans, maize, and woven fabric to clothe and feed her remaining five daughters.**

In my private chamber, Star Flower slept on a floor mat next to my bed platform. In my eyes, the girl was homely because her forehead lacked a proper slope and her eyes peered straight ahead as if she were in a daze and couldn't think her own thoughts. On occasion, her mother Peccary Star came to my private chamber to bring Star Flower corn cakes and newly woven cloth. During these times, I regretted not having a mother of my own to show me such affection.

As my life-servant, Star Flower could never marry, never become a mother, and never stop serving me. From the beginning, we understood our relationship as that of a mistress and her

attendant. When the weather was fair, we played and ate elaborate meals on the back terrace overlooking the forest and the estate where they had entombed my mother with my father Precious Jaguar Macaw.

When Chaac clashed heavy rains we quietly played in my private chamber or in the White Hall beside the northern platform. Together we would dance and imagine being whatever I wished us to be. Most often, we were jaguar or peccary wayob spirit dancers. We would sing about kings, queens, and the story of creation and we played games with cedar sticks and rubber balls. I always won our games because Star Flower could not allow me to lose.

During my fifth tuun, my brother arranged for my proper education. Queen Mother taught me how to behave as an elite princess and she scolded me if I addressed her as anything other than Queen Mother. The king's artist-scribes taught me about history, lineage, and how to draw glyphs on sacred bark paper. By the time I was six tuuns, I was creating booklets about patron 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.

On one occasion, I complained to Star Flower that I didn't like behaving as a princess of court. "I don't like being a girl," I admitted. "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 that the gods allow a queen only to produce an heir. Even ruling queens such as Lady Yohl aren'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. Early in our relationship, I had instructed her to give me her honest opinion. She tried to comply but I could tell that she was careful with what she said to me. “I want to do great things,” I added. “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 cannot be everything you wish to be except when we pretend. You will grow up and become a bearer of kings. And I will forever be at your side, *a win a ke na*.”

I didn’t like what my attendant had to say and after that 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 the king 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 geometric 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 that 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 tuun she took 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 your father. That is what I have heard tell, 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 suddenly 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 thanked him and he admired my woven cloth then asked me what I was learning from my tutors.

I admitted that my life was unfair because court decorum forbade me from having the privileges of royal boys. “I want to learn what b’aah ch’ok and his brothers 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.

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

The king kissed my forehead and said, “Hush my 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 wayob spirits.”

Within the week, my brother decided that the only way he could accommodate my unusual interests was to place me under the royal beekeepers, the Cab priests.

Traditionally, only elite boys and royal sons could enter the tree and apprentice at the Cloud Center Royal Apiaries, but my brother made an exception for me.

“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 Kaan.”

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 talked and 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 II, the king who established Bone Dog City, the city of my mother Lady Rigel—named for the creation star in Orion's belt.

Chapter Eleven: Frank

August 11-12, 2004

Chichen Itza

A few days later, I drive Hillary to Valladolid on our way to Chichen Itza. Old cars and pick-up trucks speed down one-way streets as she and I walk along cracked and plastered sidewalks where Yucatec Mayas in traditional costumes are selling limes, pineapples, watermelons, mangoes, a variety of bananas, huge papayas, and red, orange, yellow, and green chilies. We pass by a factory with a wide opening and watch women placing flatten corn dough on a conveyor belt that presses out tortillas. At the city's central park beside a towering church, we sit on a wrought iron bench under flamboyant trees and quietly eat popsicles from a vendor with a rusty ice-box cart. Before us is a concrete fountain of a Maya woman pouring water from a vessel and frogs at the rim squirting water from their mouths. Nearby, an old woman is selling hammocks and huipils and a little girl is peddling knockoff Barbie dolls.

I watch teenage Maya girls dressed in Western clothes and heels parading past the Maya boys in the park and toss my popsicle stick in the flowerbed, listen to the gurgling fountain before us, and watch a shoeshine boy selling packs of Chicklets. I've been quietly strategizing

my next step while enjoying the tranquility of the park. Parks are always restful places for me. They are city havens for people to gather and relax. I don't say anything to Hillary but I sense that she's thinking about our night together at the Club Med Coba. My fragile little sparrow is not a seasoned woman and making love to her was a mechanical act. *Fait pour la form*. I prefer someone who knows what he or she wants, sexually. Hillary is not *une amie du rue*. She wears no makeup. No jewelry. No perfumes. *Perfumes make me sneeze*, she tells me, then, at the same time, 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 now but even in DF she never wears heels. *No*, I think while keeping my sight on the fountain, *this little sparrow is not a woman seasoned in the art of love*.

In the jungle outside the ruins, we stay at Hotel Mayaland and spend the day before the meteor shower exploring what is probably the best-known Maya site. Chichen Itza wasn't a part of the classic period when Tikal, Palenque, Copan, and Calakmul were great city-state kingdoms and overlords to less powerful cities. After the classic Maya collapsed, coastal merchant-warriors called the Itza Maya, a name meaning *the itz from the sea*, invaded the inland area of the Yucatan and established Chichen Itza at a large cenote. In addition to human bones at the cenote bottom, archaeologists have found gold from Oaxaca and jade from as far away as Chaco Canyon, New Mexico which indicates the city was a trading hub in the Americas. Chichen Itza flourished during the tenth baktun from 830 to 1224 AD. Instead of the traditional god king of the classic Mayas, Chichen Itza had a Council of Lords who waged wars against Coba and became the center of the Maya civilization. The Itza Maya of Chichen Itza worshipped the Sun, the phallus, and the Feathered Serpent Kulkulkan which is the Maya name for Venus. The Kulkulkan

pyramid, better known as El Castillo, is a stone calendar with nine terraces and ninety-one steps on each of its four sides. **Its fifty-two panels** represent the number of years it takes for the Maya ceremonial and solar calendars to reconcile. During both equinoxes, the late afternoon sun strikes the NW corner of El Castillo and casts shadows that create the illusion that Kulkulkan is wiggling down the balustrade, marking the god's return.

Perseid Meteor Shower, August 12, 2004

After the evening's sound and light show, tourists vacate the national INAH park, I hand the night guard a small sum of cash, and we climb the pyramid by the glow of artificial lights.

On the NE corner of the platform, near the entrance to the High Temple, Hillary sets up her tripod and camera to capture the meteorites radiating from the constellation of Perseus. I hand her whatever I need from her bag. It's still warm and humid but cooler on the pyramid top because of a gentle breeze from Yellow Chaac.

I watch Hillary attach a hood to her camera lens to keep ambient light from washing-out her night-sky images, she tells me then says, "My father 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.**

At midnight, the watchman turns off the pyramid's artificial lights as we've 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."

When the meteor shower peaks at two AM, Hillary is standing beside her tripod holding a shutter trigger remote and taking thirty-second exposures with the lens focus set to infinity while I am sitting at the edge of the platform on the top step.

“On nights such as this,” **I say**, “the gods are shooting flaming arrows to pierce the human heart with beauty.” I am smoking a cigarette and being careful not to blow it my way.

“That’s beautiful,” Hillary says and looks through her binoculars toward the radiant, as she calls it, hoping to catch a meteorite flashing past my sight. “The Maya saw meteorites and comets as large fiery cigars. Smoking Stars, they called them.”

“Tell me about the Maya constellations,” I say knowing how much my little sparrow enjoys talking about the stars.

“The Celestial Bird is Cygnus in the Milky Way,” she says. “Although some claim it’s the Big Dipper or even the Summer Triangle perched in the branches of the Maya Tree. Itzam-yeh is **an avatar of Itzamnaj which is why he’s so heavily represented in the night sky.**” She pauses to look through the binoculars at the Perseus constellation.

At three AM the crescent moon rises and we walk around the platform to stretch our legs and observe other features of the sky. On the SE corner of the temple, Hillary points to Scorpius and Sagittarius near the southern horizon and says, “One of the first things my father taught me was that we live in the spiral arm of Orion, between the arms of Perseus and Sagittarius. The galaxy’s center lies beyond the Scorpion’s heart, 25,000 light years away. That’s where this super blackhole is, the one you talked about at my PowerPoint lecture. This is my favorite part of the night sky.”

“*Ek’ way-nal*, the star portal into the world beyond,” I say to Hillary, take the binoculars, and gaze at the bright star Antares; happy she remembers what I said at her

lecture before we even met. It confirms that I've made a deep impact on her, like one of her moon craters. Perhaps Hillary can offer me even more than her priceless codex. Maybe this delicate woman of science is my chosen nagual and will take me to where I'll become who I truly am.

I move beside her and place my arm around her shoulders. My gesture is 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. 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'm patient and can wait for my transformation. A pitzl's greatest asset is the precision of his move.

"Did you know, little sparrow," I say after a moment of listening to the quiet darkness on top of the pyramid of Kulkukan, "That the Mayas called Venus the Wasp Star."

"Yes," she says. "I have read that they believed the cycle of Venus was the magic cycle of the wasp."

"That is truly lovely," I say and I feel her trembling in my hold, as if she is cold when the night is warm and still moist with the jungle's humidity. I feel her firmly within my grasp as I again guide her into my world of ancient spirituality. 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. When I possess the powers of Hillary's ancient and mysterious codex and the powers of the god of duality. When I will finally become both a man and a woman.

Hillary leans her head on my shoulder with her eyes closed. I can see her small delicate face in the dim red light of our torches. She is ready, I know, for me to take her back into the time of the ancient Mayas. “Now,” I whisper as if not to disturb the many gods of night. “Become your ancestor once again and listen to the night jungle. Do you hear the humming of a wasp? The buzzing of a hive of bees? You are a young Jaguar Blood Moon, princess of Abundant Waters and a beekeeper at Pakal’s sacred hives.”

Chapter Twelve: Yol Tan

Cloud Center Royal Apiaries

The Cloud Center Royal Apiaries lie in a secluded forest clearing beyond the terraced hills of ancient Cloud Center, **the first city the Jaguar Dynasty established.** Under ten wooden shelters aligned to the four directions of Chaac, the Cab priests stack hollow log beehives into pyramids. Ceramic plugs block the ends of each log and in the center is an entry hole where a sentry bee keeps guard.

Ceramic statues stand around the perimeter of the apiary to protect the bees from armadillos, racoons, and wasps. A single blue wasp can destroy an entire bee colony in less time than it takes to eat a maize cake. The protective statues include the beekeeper gods Mok Chi, Ah-Muzen-Cab, the Great Bee Caretaker, the bee goddess Colel Cab, Lady Royal Bee, and the four Ba Cab patrons of beekeeping who uphold the four corners of the world. The main Ba Cab idol is Chac Xib Hobin who stands at the eastern entrance where priests and initiates bow down to him before entering or leaving the hive sanctuary.

When I first arrived at the apiary, the hives were buzzing with bees like the forest is always chattering with birds and monkeys. Yax K’uh, whose name means Precious Owl, stood

with the Cab priests before the Chac Xib Hobin statue. He welcomed me by waving the incense torch that he was using to pacify the bees and bring them joy as they work. Unlike wasps and hornets, royal bees do not sting or swarm but they can bite when they become agitated or sense a threat to their hive.

Precious Owl was as handsome as his cousins the king's sons, my nephews. His skin was smooth and honey brown, his forehead sloped and with tattoos of his royal bloodline, and his **bright brown eyes perfectly peered inwardly**. He wore a white loincloth and apron of the finest cotton and a black jacked woven with beads, shells, and hummingbird feathers.

After the young lord showed me the hives and **dazzled me with his wit and charm**, I asked him why the king's sons were not novice beekeepers, especially his best friend Second Son Kan Xul. In the White Hall of the Red Palace, I had always seen Kan Xul and Yax K'uh 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 is for lords who will become great generals to the king," Yax K'uh paused and smiled at me. "And for ladies such as yourself, Mistress 14 Ocelot Yol Tan."

For the six-month dry season, I entered the tree of bee keeping priests as an initiate, a Ta Ochle. In addition to tending the hives, the Cab priests taught Yax K'uh and me beekeeping songs and dances and they explained **the uses of pollen, beeswax, and honey, the itz of Ah-Muzen-Cab and Colel Cab. People add pollen to maze cakes, they said, to make the body and mind strong. They use beeswax to keep torches lit with flames that spit smoke and they use honey to sweeten cacao, to heal wounds, and defend the body against spirits of disease and sickness.**

Each day the 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 stayed at the hives and watched the bees fly from the log portals to search for its nectar in the forest.

“Royal bees are like ball players and warriors,” Yax K'uh told me. “Each hive has its own scouts to gather intelligence and determine distance and direction. Like our kings, bees attack their invaders. They protect their sacred cache of honey, wax, and pupae. Like warriors, bees give their lives to their king so that he may sustain the generations to come.”

Over our days together at the hives, Yax K'uh enchanted me with stories about Pakal's Scar Dog Warriors. “Like injured dogs,” he said, “they fight without fear of pain and bear their battle scars with pride. They endure suffering and death because fear destroys strength and intelligence. Scar Dog warriors have stone fists and hearts chiseled with the name of our Holy King Pakal. They carry into battle the banner and effigy of White Bone Centipede, the wayob spirit of Abundant Waters. Snake warriors of the Kaan carry the banner of Sun Belly Jaguar.”

“Tell me about the Kaan snake kings,” I asked Yax K'uh. “I hear they have defeated our Overlord in the city of Yax Mutul.”

“That's right,” the young lord said. “And the Kaan want the Jaguar Kingdom under their fold again, like they had during the reign of Lady Yohl. Our Holy King Pakal restored the buildings and altars that Kaan warriors had destroyed, but Yax Mutul is now under the foot of the Kaan king Yuknoom.”

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

“Yuknoom is a cunning and slippery viper. He plays city against city by bribe or threat. He installed as king of Dragon Waters the brother of Yax Mutul's king Nuun Ujol

Chaac. One day, when I become a great nacom general for King Pakal, I will lead an army to defeat Yuknoom and help the rightful king of Yax Mutul win back his kingdom.”

As I intently listened to his stories, I felt inseparable in spirit with Yax K’uh and I hoped he felt the same way about me. Not long into our apprenticeship, we began holding hands like sister and brother when we stood among the hives and Yax K’uh told his stories.

Together we watched doorkeeper bees pop in and out of their portal holes when worker bees return with legs filled with pollen itz. With much affection, Yax K’uh began calling me Ix Cab, Lady Beekeeper, and I started calling him younger brother Mok Chi.

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, 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 the attractive young lord, his stories, and his pleasant and amusing disposition. This was poor judgment on my part. I mistakenly believed Star Flower loved me as her mistress, but my words and stories about Yax K’uh filled her heart with a spirit of jealousy. While she spoke encouragingly to me, as I now know, **Star Flower did not like that I was learning about things beyond what girls typically learn. Even royal girls. She told other court attendants 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 that his queen had complained that I was associating too closely with a young lord, that**

beekeeping wasn't correct behavior for a princess of the Jaguar Kingdom, and that my birthright wasn't that of a royal boy.

My brother had become furious with the Queen Mother, he said, more so than ever before. "How dare you interfere with my decisions concerning my sister," he yelled at his queen. "Your behavior does not sit well with me, mother of my sons. My young sister is as brilliant as the morning star. Her essence dances and sings with male wayob spirits. The least I can do is assign her a beekeeping apprenticeship. And my young lord Yax K'uh is an excellent companion. He is a forthright, prudent boy filled with the makings of a powerful nacom general. His influence on my sister will give her what she requires. She wants to hear about battles and wars and I have no time to indulge her. Nor does the b'aah ch'ok or my second son Kan Xul."

After that, the queen held her tongue when it came to me because her influence with my brother only went so far. What the Holy Lord decided is what happened.

On the day of harvesting wax and honey, after the sun retrograded 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. But it was a sad ceremony for me because my joyous days with Yax K'uh were ending. Next season, he would seat his tenth tuun and start training in the ballcourt with Pakal and his Scar Dog warriors. He would not be returning to the bee hives.

Chapter Thirteen: Hillary

Aug 20, 2004

From Chichen Itza we drive to Montejo Hotel in Merida, a city the Conquistadors founded in 1542. Three hundred years later John Lloyd Stephens explored the nearby sites of the Puuc region using altazimuths, compasses, sextants, heliograph measuring tapes, levels, and waywiser perambulator wheels. Desire Charnay took pictures of Uxmal in 1860 and Bradley Nolan visited **Uxmal, Labna, Sayil, and Kabah**—the sites that my father took me to in 1991.

The jungle road to the ruins is teeming with white and yellow butterflies fluttering about like **windblown autumn leaves or winter snowflakes**. We drive through villages with unmarked speed bumps and trishaws that could be straight from Bradley's era. Dogs, chickens, goats, and turkeys wander about the villages. Cats sit on the window ledges of simple thatched houses. Through open doorways, I see hammocks strung across spartan rooms with sod floors and perhaps a single wooden cabinet. When we arrive in Uxmal, busloads of tourists are already present although the crowds are nothing like those at Chichen Itza and Tulum.

Puuc means hill country and indicates an architectural style that features long rows of half columns and building corners with stacked masks of the Witz Monster who represents the entryway into a mountain. Some of the stacked masks are of the Celestial bird Itzam-yeh who marks buildings where priests taught astronomy. And other masks are of the rain god Chaac with a long curly nose, a flat forehead, and crossed-eyes. Because Puuc is a dry region without lakes and rivers, the Maya built cisterns they called chultuns or *Chaac's Rainwater Stones*.

On La Ruta Puuc I merely take pictures of the impressive stonework and have no mystical trance or serpent vision in a cloud of fragrant smoke. Our exploration of the four sites is a quiet time for Frank and me. A few times I find him meditating under an arch or on top of a stone structure and I let him be and explore the area on my own. My mother

taught me not to disturb a man in his private domain, such as when my father was in his office or when my granddad was relaxing on his recliner and reading the Philly Inquirer or Daily News. Frank promises that at our next stop, Edzna, he'll lead me through the Witz Monster into the Maya spiritual world.

Edzna, August 21, 2004

Hillary Jacobs

At the Ramada Inn near Campeche City, Frank and I share a suite with a spectacular view of the Gulf of Mexico. We haven't made love since our first time at the Club Med but since then I've been calling him my teddy bear because that's what he feels like when we cuddle together in bed before falling asleep. I'm not too troubled that we aren't having a 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, I assure myself, Frank probably isn't sexually active because of his age.

Frank seems to have many sides. He makes his pseudoscientific views abundantly known to me, but he keeps parts of himself to himself. This makes me all the more curious about him. Recently I ask about his childhood in Paris because I wanted to know how his early life created the man he now is. We were eating dinner in the Ramada's restaurant and enjoying a chilled glasses of Chablis after a day of exploration in the sweltering heat.

"It is better to know your friends as they presently are," Frank said and seemed a bit irritated, as if I disturbed his focus on more important matters, such as his many business ventures which I know so little about.

"Teddy Bear," I had persisted. "We're more than friends! Aren't we?"

“Por Supesto, Little Sparrow,” he said and returned his attention to me. “We are more than friends. But even lovers should keep their lives in the present and not dredge up past matters that are no longer important.”

“But your childhood is important to me.” I smiled at him and inhaled his cologne, and then added, “Besides, I’ve told you about my childhood. How my father shaped my life.”

“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. At times Frank seemed vulnerable beneath his rough exterior, like a boy who has lost his mother. I wanted him to confide in me so we could better know each other. But Frank stubbornly wouldn’t talk about a childhood that certainly contrasted from my own structured one.

“Yes, I trust you, cherie. And in time I will 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 put down my glass of Chablis and wondered what to say. Frank had caught me off guard, made me stumble in my thoughts. I don’t like Bradly’s diary or the codex coming between us. It’s my own piece of privacy, the only mitzvah I keep. Besides, the topic was about Frank and his refusal to discuss his boyhood, no matter how painful it might have been. He talks about gods and “transforming” but not about his childhood.

“I don’t understand why you’re so secretive,” I persisted, ignoring his comment about the diary and codex. “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 took my hand from across the table and said, “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 had suddenly felt frustrated and annoyed. “I despise secrets,” I said. “My mother kept secrets from me, about my true ancestry.” Frank said nothing in response and continued eating his beef enchiladas. I caught hold of my emotions and kept quiet for the remainder of our dinner because I didn’t want to reveal the bat mitzvah secret Mom told me. Fortunately, Frank didn’t ask me what I mean. Instead, he cleared his throat and suggested we postpone our talk until after we returned to our room. “Then, if you insist,” he added, “I will tell you whatever you want to know.”

His words suddenly made me feel the guilt my mother instilled in me as a little girl. Guilt for making someone else feel bad, for failing to make others feel good. “No,” I said, feeling ashamed of myself, like I was being a noisy Yenta and a two-faced busybody. “It’s okay. I understand. You don’t have to tell me anything until or unless you want to.”

“I’ve made you feel uncomfortable,” he suggested.

I touch his hand, but say nothing. I had already riled the buzzing honey pot, somehow. Frank and I had had our first argument.

When we enter the *Zona Arqueologica de Edzna*, no one else is around. The site is not a major stop on the tourist track which is one reason Frank chose it for my spiritual induction. Off the Grand Acropolis, five stone structures arise from a groomed lawn. The sun lights dewy blades of grass that sweetly scent the morning. Distant monkeys are howling and hundreds of

birds are making their clattering calls. A few butterflies are fluttering about but nothing like those along La Ruta Puuc.

The *Piramide de los Cinco Pisos* dominates the Grand Acropolis. I labor up the sixty-five steps in a zig zag fashion and sit on the top tier near the small combed roof temple. I am not too short of breath because I've learned to pace myself on these strenuous "stone mountain" climbs. I'm becoming a seasoned pyramid climber.

When Frank arrives on top of the Edzna wedding cake, as I call the pyramid, he catches his breath, hands me my camera bag, then 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 magic of the peaceful setting and struck by my wanderlust love.

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 New Age theories. But now something inside me calls out and aches to unite in spirit with Frank and with the ancient Maya. Frank will show me his vision of god, of Ometeotl. And then 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.

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

I stand to look for Frank and when I don't see him, I call out his name. He doesn't answer and is nowhere in sight. I walk to the other side of the combed roof temple and peek inside

rooms where ancient priests once calculated solar and lunar cycles and timed the return of Venus as a morning war star. “Frank,” I shout, suspecting he’s off somewhere meditating, being distant and secretive.

At the back of the high stone temple overlooking the jungle expanse, I spot Frank standing in a niche. He has his arms outstretched from his sides. His palms are open to catch the morning rays. He has his eyes closed and his expression is serious. His mind is communicating with the Great One Who is Whole, I recall Frank’s description of Ometeotl.

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

Frank suddenly says my name and I wonder if he’s been watching me the entire time. “Viens,” he indicates before him. “Face Venus as Kulkulkan rises 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, easing my tension. “Hold out your palms, close your eyes, listen to itz k’uh, the sounds of nature. 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 like separating clouds. How long must I stand here? My mind asks. I sense the warm sun sweating my brow and begin to wonder how Frank seems to know me so completely, as if I’ve detailed everything about myself to him.

All at once, I feel itz k’uh sweep through the niche swishing like autumn leaves. As the air cools, my senses strengthen. Soon thousands of tingles explode from the depths of my

stomach. Then a powerful force radiates from my feet to my head, electrifying my hair in all directions.

The wind grows stronger, the energy more swishing and vivid. I feel alone, hollow, yet wonderfully alive and open to this mysterious sway. “Consume me, set me on fire,” My mind speaks and I wonder if I’m hearing conch shells announcing a battle, the eerie playing of ancient string instruments, and voices calling me from the four directions. What are their words? What is the message? “I only half comprehend your glyphs, Jaguar Blood Moon,” I say aloud. “Teach me everything there is to know about your life and spirit. Tell me your story.”

A breeze rustles through me and the jungle exhales the aroma of its humus and nectar. Chaac’s lightning axe strikes the clouds with thunder and bright stone faces, masks, awaken from centuries of frozen sleep. I see 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 then grows old at sunset and morphs into the jaguar of darkness.

I feel a hand on my shoulders and the trilling breeze on my face. “This is all a transcript,” I whisper.

“God is dancing,” I hear Frank say. “His symbols are in your head. The glyphs from your ancestors’ codex are unlocking the universal itz k’uh.”

“I’m here, take me,” my mind shouts.

The wind dwindles and suddenly stops. I hear the twitchy buzz of a hummingbird beating its wings. Then I hear nothing else and feel no sensation at all until 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 then 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 and 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. It was wonderful. I heard ancient voices and saw flashes 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.”

Halfway down the mountain rift, I stop for a moment, face the Acropolis, and look at the Council House beyond. The Nohochna. Frank stands a few steps below me because on the way down the pyramids, he is usually quicker than me. “Frank,” I say. “Will you initiate me as your shaman apprentice in Palenque? Like Grandfather Thunder initiated my great-great-grandfather.”

“Did you take a peyote button?” He teases. **“In Palenque, I will help you on your rite of passage into the next stage of your spiritual quest. You will experience more than you**

can imagine when I 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 Fourteen: Yol Tan

Menarche Rite of Passage

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

For the next seven kins I remained secluded with Star Flower in my private chamber. To ease the cramping pain, nursemaids 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 the menarche rite of passage. An artist painted my face with a permanent glyph to indicate my royal bloodline.

I was thrilled about my change in life and eagerly shared my joy with my lifelong attendant. But I sensed that Star Flower was jealous and I knew why. She had passed into

womanhood two years before but she could never anticipate marriage or producing children because her father had gifted her life to serving me.

For most young girls who reach their time of change, their mothers guide them through the passage. They say that the transformation sacrifices the little girl and buries her in the underworld waters and then she's reborn as a woman who will nourish the world with her harvest. But I had no mother to guide me and only knew about my mother and father through the stories my brother told. **He described** her as demure, polite, and a precious treasure from the kingdom of Lake Turtle Macaw II. At times, when I drifted to sleep at night, **I would pray to the spirit of Lady Rigel, Star of the Creation Stone, and then I would find a powerful force within me that proclaimed I would become more than what the world restricted me to be.**

During my menarche seclusion, Queen Mother taught me the secrets of human reproduction by describing the cycle of corn. She said, "The planting of seeds in soil is as the man plants his itz in the woman. 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 surprised me. I could not 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 because 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 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 learning hand-to-hand combat and how to use a blowgun, spear, and **atlatl spear thrower. Even if I could have spoken with Yax**

K'uh, as we did at the hives, I doubt I would have shared how enthralled I was to emerge from the underwaters as a new being, 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.

On one afternoon in the Red Palace, the young lord passed by me in a gallery and he slyly brushed his hand against mine which made my body burst with tingles. I know my smile lit the gallery hall. But I didn't realize that Queen Mother noticed this encounter between me and Yax K'uh until she later confronted me for behaving inappropriately. "Now that you're a woman you must keep away from Yax K'uh and my sons," the queen warned me.

"Never," I argued in defiance. I really did not like Queen Mother because I knew she didn't like me and I also knew that 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 and 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 I 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 said hatefully. "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 birth."

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 the Akbal 9 before the southern solstice, 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 and magic. 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 who is 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 divine 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. When she is full for three days, she is the Thirteenth Sky Moon poised with her rabbit. As my patron goddess, I choose the waning moon Blood Moon **of the Third Creation. Even the youngest citizen knows the creation story by heart and Lord Mountain retold it to me on the** day after the waxing Thirteenth Moon:

“Before the existence of anything,” Lord Mountain said, “nothingness hovered above a primordial sea of fire. First creation began when Heart of Sky parted the primordial sea and caused the Earth to rise from the waters on the back of a turtle. He planted a ceiba tree with roots that reach into the nine underworlds of Xibalba, a trunk that sustains the middle world, and branches that stretch as high as the thirteenth heaven beyond the Milky Way Road where Itzamnaj splashes white dew drops across the night sky and the four rainbow roads that cross the ecliptic.

“In the Second Creation, the gods created Mud People who didn’t possess itz k’uh. This displeased the gods so they create Wood People who abused the animals because they also didn’t possess itz k’uh. Displeased, the gods ordered the animals to eat the Wood People; those who survived, the gods turned into the forest monkeys.

“In Third Creation, darkness covered the Earth. First Mother gave birth to brothers 1 Hunahpu and 7 Hunahpu who played in a ballcourt above the Watery Underworld of Xibalba. Their games disturbed the Death Lords who 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 killed 1 Hunahpu and planted his head in the ballcourt of Xibalba and it grew into a giant cacao tree.

“Blood Moon was daughter of a Death Lord and lived in the Watery Underworld. One day she approached the cacao tree and the head of 1 Hunahpu spit into her hand and fertilized her womb with his seed. This angered the Lords of Death. They sent owls to kill Blood Moon but the owls helped her escape to Earth where she gave harvest to the sons of 1 Hunahpu--Hunahpu and Xbalanque. The brothers become hunters, scribes, and ball players. One day their ball game disturbed the Death Lords who summoned them to Xibalba and put them through trials in the Six Houses of Hell. 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, however, they hid inside their blowguns during the night but just before dawn, Hunahpu peered out and a bat bit off his head. The sons of Blood Moon were reborn five days later and forced the Death Lords to never again bother the people of Earth.

“After the 13th baktun of Third Creation, the sons of Blood Moon 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, the gods made real people from white and yellow corn mixed with itz k’uh and were pleased. Maize people worship them, unlike the animals, the Mud People, and the people made from wood who now live in the forest as screeching monkeys.”



Each morning after sunrise, Lady Ja’ Naj sat on a 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. The old woman taught us songs to cast away demons from the six hells. She taught us to call upon Chaac Ix Chel, Lady of medicinal brews, for cures and Lady Hun Ahau, Lady at the portal to Xibalba, to cast away the sickness demons. Lady Ja’ Naj also showed us the magic of cursing those who cause us harm, like the king curses his enemies before a battle. “Such magic is very powerful,” the old healer explained. “Use this knowledge for healing and extricating bad spirits, and setting right a wrong.” Lady Ja’ Naj repeatedly warned us not to use magic for selfish reasons. “A curse opens portals to the Watery Underworld and can bring about the froth of a rabid dog.”

During these sessions, I noticed that Star Flower showed too much interest in the art of casting spells and curses which was an unusual occurrence in our relationship because I

forbade her from venturing beyond my wishes and aspirations. However, I failed to correct her because of my newfound happiness with exploring the natural world and my emerging womanhood. I loved to smell the orchids in the cedar trees and to hear the rushing river and the calls of resplendent quetzals. My spirit felt enraptured as if my real mother Lady Rigel were tightly embracing me with her love.

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 passion flower to bring about vivid dreams so I could learn my wayob animal spirit. During my first few days of deep sleep, I had unsettling and fantastic dreams about people, places, and worlds I've never imagined. But my mind never settled on one spirit when I awoke. I could not tell Ja' Naj about the wayob dancers in my dreams.

When the Moon waned to first quarter gibbous and the winds of Chaac swept through the trees with brays and shouts, I awoke from a pleasant dream in which I saw thousands of yellow iridescent butterflies fluttering about 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, "You metamorphize from pupae to caterpillar to a butterfly who wanders from flower to flower. 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 had a vivid dream about Water Lily Jaguar. In the dream it was just after the rainy season when jungle flowers were fully blooming and Lord Sun had passed zenith. Water Lily Jaguar plunged into a

lake of 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.

Lady Ja' Naj explained that my dream revealed that I was born from the heart of Heaven, Yol Tan, in the place of the Primordial Sea of Fire. When I touched Earth, Waterlily Jaguar became my wayob animal spirit and together we dance on the lily pads and roar louder than Chaac's clashing thunder. "The Jaguar's roar is Ahkan," Ja' Naj explained, "A vision of itz k'uh and the rainbow road of no return. On the day they entomb you, the zenith sun will cast no shadow and Ix Chel will leave the caverns of Earth to have union with her brother Lord Sun."

"Who is the caiman?" I asked.

"He is the son you will one day bring into the world," she told me. "But beware, Yol Tan. He will be so conniving, like a caiman, like the People of Wood, that he will kill and betray even his own mother."



Chapter Fifteen: Hillary

August 23-26, 2004

Palenque and Bonampak, Sites of the Classic Maya

It takes four and a half hours to drive from the Ramada in Campeche to Hotel Tulija in Palenque Village. Our room is spartan and Mexican rustic with the air-conditioner plugged into an exposed socket, boards extending from the bed, and lots of other potential lawsuits if this were the US. In Chiapas, the Maya women wear navy blue woven wraps and red sashes, not the frumpy white embroidered Yucatan dresses with slips hanging out.

Eight miles from Palenque Village the ruins sit in lush hills near the Usumacinta River that borders Guatemala. Palenque is smaller than Chichen Itza and lies at the edge of the Lacandon rainforest where liana vines creep up enormous cedar, ceiba, mahogany, and sapodilla trees and bind the canopy together; the jungle stretches from Chiapas to Honduras and is home to jaguars, macaws, tapirs, monkeys, deer, frogs, and swamp caiman.

Palenque is Spanish for palisades but the classic Maya called their city-state Lakamha which means Abundant Waters and refers to the Usumacinta River. The city developed after 226 BC and lasted until the Mayas abandoned it by 800 AD. In 1740, a priest re-discovered the ruins. Forty years later, King Charles III of Spain sent expeditions that looted stone panels from the site. Alex von Humbolt's writings caught the attention of John Lloyd Stephens who visited Palenque in 1840. Nearly twenty years later Desire Charnay became the first person to photograph the ruins where Bradly Nolan learned about my ancestor's tomb.

In 1991 my father and I spent two days exploring Pakal's tomb at the bottom of a dim claustrophobic stone corridor. The jade mask and jewelry on Pakal's remains are now on display at the Anthropology Museum in Mexico City. The seven-ton stone lid to his sarcophagus is by far my favorite piece of Maya art. Frank's as well, he tells me. The detailed motif portrays the "Apotheosis of Pakal" and represents the great king as the Maize God Reborn. He sits in the World Tree at the center of 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. The rim of the his sarcophagus lid portrays the Sun, Moon, Venus, various constellations, and the names of Pakal's father Precious Jaguar Macaw, his mother Sak K'uk, and his grandmother the ruling queen Lady Yohl."

Three years after my father and I explored Palenque, archaeologists discovered a woman's remains in a vaulted temple beside the pyramid tomb of Pakal. She wore a mask of malachite pieces and red cinnabar powder covered her bones. Some scholars believe the mysterious Red Queen is the wife of Pakal, Tz'akbu. Two of her three sons became kings and took the regnal names Kan Balam II and K'an Joy Chitam II.

After waiting three days for the pelting rain to subside so Frank can conduct my rite at the Palenque Palace, we decide to drive ninety miles to the Bonampak ruins near a tributary of the Usumacinta River. In the fifth and sixth centuries AD, Bonampak was a satellite city of nearby Yaxchilan, a vassal to the Kaans of Calakmul. Kings of Bonampak waged war against Palenque, in fact, and when Yaxchilan fell in the 9th century, Bonampak also collapsed.

We reach our jungle lodging in less than three hours and 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 which Frank has seen many times before. I've been looking forward to him telling me about the murals.

Outside **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, "You'll have to see the murals alone because I'm meeting with friends."**

“But I wanted you to describe the murals,” I say. “I want to learn your spiritual interpretation.”

“I’m sorry, little sparrow. But I really must meet with my friends.”

“It seems that everywhere we go you have to meet friends,” I add. “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 is being secretive and mysterious, a side of him that bothers me because 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 am 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. BUT FRANK AND I SEEM TO BE ALONE OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE’S ENTRANCE.

“HILLARY,” FRANK SAYS AND TAKES MY HAND. “YOU ARE MAKING TOO MUCH OUT OF NOTHING. I HAVE A LOT OF BUSINESS DEALINGS WITH THESE PEOPLE, HAVE HAD FOR MANY YEARS. AND REMEMBER I TOLD YOU I AM RELATED TO THEM THROUGH MY GRANDMOTHER. LIKE YOU ARE THROUGH YOUR DISTANT RELATIVE. BE AT PEACE AND GO SEE THE MURALS FOR YOURSELF. Dream about lying on the mat of your Maker and waking up as a ruling warrior queen. The images will play in your mind and you’ll dance with many wayob spirits during your ceremony in Palenque. IT’S BETTER YOU SEE THE murals WITH A

FRESH MIND UNCORRUPTED BY MY INTERPRETIONS. THE SPIRIT WILL COME TO YOU AND TOMORROW, IF THE RAINS have subsided, I WILL GUIDE YOU FURTHER INTO THE MAYA WORLD AT THE GREAT RED PALACE IN PALENQUE.” HE SQUEEZES MY HAND AND ADDS, “LITTLE SPARROW. I MUST GO NOW. MY FRIENDS ARE WAITING. I’LL BE BACK BY THE TIME YOU ARE 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 LACANDON 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 wear an aura of feathers and 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. In truth, the classic Maya were constantly waging wars and the frescoes show priests blowing conch shells

and trumpets and beating drums to call the warriors into battle. In one mural, warriors are presenting the king with captives who lie bleeding and tortured on the steps.

The frescoes in Room Three ARE THE MOST STRIKING TO ME. THEY SHOW A celebration dance after a victorious battle. I AM ESPECIALLY STRUCK BY the scene WHERE royal ladies are sitting on or at a large bench, one holds a child, and passing thorny ropes through their tongues to collect the blood splatter on sacred amate paper. Priests burn the paper and from the rising smoke they have what the Maya called a snake **vision or a butz chan of gods and ancestors who made predictions about warfare or the birth of a royal heir to the patriline. While gazing at the mural, I wonder what I might see at the Palenque palace when I have my own butz chan into the spirit world. No matter what Frank has in mind, I assure myself, it won't involve blood-letting even if Bradly Nolan himself were performing the rite.**

Chapter Sixteen: Frank

August 26, 2004

Butz Chan at Palenque Palace

Early the next morning I drive Hillary back to Palenque WHERE I'M PLEASED TO see clear skies. BY NOON we ARE walking among the palace ruins AND MY LITTLE SPARROW IS ANTICIPATING HER butz chan rite, as SHE IS now calling this spiritual induction. SHE'S wearing Tevas, shorts, a white Haines v-neck, and a tapestry shawl from Merida to shield HER from the sun and to use as a mat during THE rite.

As usual, I AM carrying HER camera bag along with a knapsack filled with items for the ceremony. In the humid heat, HILLARY takeS pictures of the Palace Tower "where classic

Maya priests once marked the rising sun on winter solstice,” SHE TELLS ME. Then we wander to a quiet courtyard in the palace complex and sit on the steps off a STONE corridor CHISELED with figures and glyphs. We’re facing a square of green lawn in the middle of the galleries.

I rest MY hand on HER leg and directly say, once again, that I’d like to read Bradly’s diary. “Maybe I can offer you a unique perspective.”

“I’m sorry, Frank,” SHE SAYS AND SQUEEZES MY hand. “I promised myself not to share the diary until after I find the queen’s tomb.” I SENSE her guilt ABOUT KEEPING THE DIARY FROM ME WHEN SHE sayS, “I think Bradly Nolan was in love with Mesoamerica, rather like you, teddy bear. In fact, I believe you are Bradly Nolan reincarnated to guide me to the treasures he discovered. **Lately, I’ve been contemplating this possible connection and realizing that YOUR spirit is influencing my perceptions.**”

Hillary’s words intrigue me, I think as I smell the green grass before us. She’s giving me more room inside her guarded emotions. Although in many ways I probably am Hillary’s Bradly Nolan. In any regard, I’m determined to read his diary and find this lost codex. Nothing will stop me. Of course, I understand that 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 and from the depths of my essence I believe the codex exists and will bring me millions in Euros or dollars. Hillary is too serious a woman to con the world. To con a con. In fact, I believe the gods have intertwined our destinies and that we were together in past lives, probably several times. She as a man and I as a woman. Once we were brothers, I’m quite certain. Hillary as a man excites me. I like her for her accomplishments and determination

which are masculine attributes. But I don't push for a physical relationship because she might become too emotionally attached to me, too quickly. And she's a delicate flower, the type of woman who could easily crumble and break when it comes to l'amour.

HILLARY 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 which Pakal's son Chan Balam finished to record his royal lineage both in legend and in historic fact.

I take the camera to look at the picture THEN HOLD HER TINY hand and say, "The four corners of the universe are calling for you to become one with Ometeotl. At **the center OF THE MAYA TREE lies all knowledge and creative power.** Alors, Professor. Let's enter the world beyond the five senses. But first you must take off your Tevas and relax. Your bare feet must touch the Earth."

I remove from MY backpack a silver flask and a pouch of morning glory seeds that a Lacandon shaman in Bonampak gave him. "Chew these seeds 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 rational thinking. I don't need to become drunk, do I?" HILLARY ASKS. "I like my clear, sober, and rational mind."

"It'll loosen your thoughts and you'll better appreciate the celestial dance in your butz chan."

SHE hesitateS. "I've never smoked pot or even tobacco before and I've only had an occasional half glass of Chardonnay with a colleague and a few nightcaps on this trip with YOU, but never enough to get drunk. Does it take drugs to go beyond the five senses?" she asks.

“You must do what the Maya did. They took hallucinogenic drugs to have snake visions in a cloud of smoke. Now you must reach beyond the probe of your scientific mind or you’ll never understand the secrets behind the glyphs.”

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,” SHE SAYS. “YOU’RE the best friend of my life, right now. YOU’RE my confidant, my lover, and shaman guide. But I am still cautious. 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 am here. You will not miss a thing. Au contraire, you’ll capture the power of **Itzamnaj** of the iguana house where all roads lead to Heaven and Xibalba.”

“That’s beautiful,” SHE SAYS then putS a handful of the bitter morning glory seeds in HER mouth AND swallowS them with the balche while looking at ME. HER EYES PROCLAIM ME AS the man SHE loveS and trustS as completely as SHE ever trusted HER father. “Ix Chel was there for Bradly,” she SAYS. “Now you are 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 my 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. I see the codex of Jaguar Blood Moon.**”

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 begin chanting, “Holy Maize God Reborn, bring us to the place of nectar. Holy Queen Bee, Ix K’uh Cab, bring us to the open place in 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 TINY shoulders. “It feels like serpents ARE crawling on my back,” SHE SAYS.

I FEEL HER GROW increasingly sweaty in the sweltering heat. “Look at Kulkulkan.” I POINT HER 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, jade bead necklaces, girdles, and sandals. In my mind, or in the real world, I hear a voice calling *When the sun enters the Pleiades, Venus enters White Bone Snake and opens the portal to the dark road leading to Xibalba.*”

HILLARY STANDS AND REELS onto the courtyard lawn where I spread out HER shawl AS SHE tumbleS onto the ground and peerS at the sky. “Make it stop,” SHE SAYS WHILE I CHANT about becoming.

“Don’t fear,” I say. “You cannot be afraid if you wish to see your nagual spirit. Follow them to Ometeotl. He is your redeemer.” I RUN MY HANDS ALONG HER ARMS AND HEAD. “Breathe deeply. Purify yourself before you enter Ek’ way-nal, the portal to the spiritual world, the other half of existence. Transform on the mat of K’awiil and awaken a queen. . .”

Chapter Seventeen: Yol Tan

The Queen of Bone Dog

After Yax K’uh left the Cloud Center Apiaries, I entreated my brother to permit me to serve out two years as Ta Ochle under the Cab priests. Pakal agreed, but allowed no other young lord to apprentice beside me. **Secretly, I was beseeching my patron gods Blood Moon and**

Chaac of the four directions, that Pakal did not arrange my marriage with anyone other than Yax K'uh.

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 seemed to loom among the buzzing hives and I missed hearing his stories about warriors and battle strategies. I kept recalling his funny remarks. My younger brother Mok Chi had made me laugh at places in his stories where I probably should not have laughed.

One afternoon, several lunar cycles after Yax K'uh had left the hives, I heard a whistle coming from the forest. At first I dismissed it because the Cab priests customarily whistle to one another to announce when they find a hive log or a nest of wasps that they must burn and destroy. If danger should arrive at the hives, then I would also whistle to alert the priests. But on this day, I did not recognize the whistle but I knew it wasn't the call of a macaw, toucan, wild turkey, or a pheasant. The whistle came from a man and I suspected that he was trying to summon 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. Then I quickly looked back at the bees worried that an armadillo was invading the hives for their precious 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 forward 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.

I immediately recognized Yax K'uh, my younger brother Mok Chi. My best friend of spirit. Lately, I had rarely seen him in the Red Palace because he was usually away with Pakal, B'aah Ch'ok, and Second Son, often 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 would think about day and night was now nearly a man of twelve. Why had he waited so long to come find me? Why hadn't I arranged for a rendezvous with him through Star Flower? She did whatever I ask. But I knew why. I didn't trust her. She would show signs of jealousy whenever 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 Chac 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 and heat.

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 said and then placed a kiss fully on my lips and my entire body shivered with delight as sweet as Royal Lady Bee honey.

When the young lord stopped his kiss, he stood back to look at my face. Then he declared his love for me and elegantly stated, "I want to marry you, 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 am a woman. What can we do? My purity is intact but my love for you is overwhelming.”

“I have gifts for you,” he said and took from his cloth bundle a round stone calendar. “I give you this to keep the spirits of time.” He then removed a black stone the size of his fist. It looked like obsidian without its glimmering sheen.

“From a mountain volcano?” I asked as I examined the stone.

“No. During my last hunting trip, I watched Chanal K’uh the celestial god, hurl this stone to Earth through layers of the sky. These gifts from Heaven will protect you from the bad spirits of Earth and from the Death Lords and demons of Hell.”

We again kissed in the forest shade behind the old temple until the cacophonous crescendo of monkeys and birds warned us that the priests were returning. I re-bundled my gifts and Yax K’uh promised to return as soon as he could but he did not 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 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 and I quickly discovered my lifelong attendant peering at us from

behind a ceiba tree. “What are you doing?” I yelled at Star Flower, pulling free from my lord’s embrace.

“You are my charge, Beloved Mistress. *A win a ke na,*” Star Flower said as she stepped from behind the enormous tree trunk. **Obviously, she had soiled and ripped her huipil during her trek through the jungle’s outskirts.** “I’m concerned for your welfare and purity, Lady Yol Tan,” she stuttered.

The monkeys raised the pitch of their laughing screams 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 took my young lord’s hand.

“Not true, Mistress,” Star Flower protested. “My father gives my life to you. It is my duty to see that you keep your courtly purity. The gods forbid this display of affection.”

I erupted in anger, like the chattering monkeys. But I then began to worry that 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 to be a liar and I did not 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.

I looked at Yax K’uh. My eyes were imploring him to 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 could not return to her parents' home and shame them and cause them jeopardy 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 meetings with Yax K'uh. The queen naturally told my brother, unconcerned about the consequences it seems. She evidently felt the matter was too urgent to keep a 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 II 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 Abundant Waters to the Kaan of Three Stone City. When Venus appeared at the cusp of night, the year I seated my fourth tuun, 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. He's now a three katun lord," my brother told me as we stood beside the golden perch of two scarlet macaws in the White Hall. "His first queen entered the road without producing sons." The news stunned me but I said nothing as I respectfully listened to my brother while feeding the birds guava fruit. "He requires a young princess of my bloodline to give him an heir and to 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 third cousin to Hummingbird Sun."

“I understand, Holy Brother, that you must make this alliance,” I said. “But I don’t want to marry this old 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. “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 am already a three-katun lord. 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.”

Both macaws loudly squawk for more succulent fruit. Their vivid scarlet feathers and the blue, green, and yellow feathers on their wings are most often trade items used in religious ceremonies. But these two birds were Pakal’s treasured pets because they had belonged to his mother Sak K’uk and were older than the king himself.

“Our daykeepers predict that you will produce Hummingbird Sun a healthy heir,” my brother continued. “And I need Bone Dog as my vassal city **to protect my trade interests along the Usumacinta and** to keep the Kaan on the defensive. Already, Yuknoom infiltrates cities near Bone Dog. The Kaan 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 to you.” He paused for a moment to pet

the male scarlet macaw whose name was Chaac Aj then he firmly added, “We leave for Bone Dog when the next dry season begins and the morning star rises.”

I felt trapped and unable to say anything more. My duty in life was to my Holy King and I could no longer push the boundaries of his love for me. But at least I took comfort in knowing that Yax K’uh would be part of the royal wedding entourage from Abundant Waters to Bone Dog.

One tuun after the Kaan puppet king, God that Hammers the Sky, 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 and 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 the 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. Beside me on the canoe bottom sat Star Flower. The river breeze kept us refreshed and an ointment of cedar and allspice kept away flies and mosquitoes. Yax K’uh traveled in the canoe ahead of mine, along with generals, high lords, and priests. We often caught sight of each other during the long voyage.

Our wedding flotilla passed many cities and villages. Some were allies of Pakal, others had pledged their allegiance to the Kaan 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 stood 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 and proclaimed themselves to be warrior kings. *Perhaps they are singing love songs to those who travel on the river*, I sometimes thought. I saw caiman basking on logs and white tail deer drinking from stagnant pools that smelled like a sweaty man. 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 so that Yax Mutul would rise again as the most powerful city in the world.

Before dusk each day our flotilla stopped at sandy beaches along the shore. 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 Orion rose high in the sky, the king and his sons and lords sat around a large fire burning cedar logs to keep away the insects. While crickets chirped and the river swished nearby, my brother told stories about gods, battles, and the night sky. The oil and feathers in his long hair glistens from

the dancing firelight. Beside him sat B'aah Ch'ok, Second Son, and Yax K'uh. Each of them wore jade ear plugs and bone nose piercings.

For me, these occasions were the best part of the upstream journey because Yax K'uh sat across from me and 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 orate his stories. One story was about the stars of Orion, the Ak Turtle who hangs below the ecliptic snake.

“Alnitak, Saiph, and Rigel are the three hearth stones of creation 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 three stones. Jaguar Paddler planted the first stone and called it the Jaguar Throne in the House of Five Sky. Sting Ray Paddler planted the second stone and called it the Snake Throne in the House of Earth. Itzamnaj planted the third stone Rigel, 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 and my royal wedding party trekked the white sacbe road through the jungle to the city of 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 hidden from the plaza at the forest's edge.

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 that the pictures and glyphs represented the nine directions of east, north, west, and south, up and down, and Kan, Kab, and Xibalba and **marked the celestial events since the beginning of the present creation.**

"Chaac from all directions helps the king keep order in the world," the priest told me. "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 the fierce winds of destruction upon 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 to Bone Dog. 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 had given 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 tuuns before.

The old king sat at the edge of the platform, his hands grasping his walking staff. He had difficulty with his agility. The room was quiet except for the spitting torches and three scarlet macaws chattering on their perches. 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. 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 that 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 with a cloth bundle. He helped the king remove his regalia then he 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.”

“I am 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 realized that I was his prisoner. The king, my husband, was now my master, but I never anticipated his abrasive harshness. “Place the oval stones in your secret chamber,” he said to me 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 is your Overlord.”

“Insolent child!” The king slapped my face but his strength was feeble and 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. But he couldn’t easily rise from where he sat so he remained seated. His breath reeked of balche, the

liquor made from forest spirits, and I realized he was a decrepit, hideous, and intoxicated old man. The thought that my pure body must join his, revolted me. But 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 tuun, 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 own 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 is 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 was still 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 a cape of jade beads. I then went to the Temple of Directions to ask Red Chac Xib Chaac of the East why I must suffer.

I sat on the center bench and contemplated my situation. I had never known such cruelty in my life. Never suffered from someone's illogical manners. My only fault, if I must have 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 king? 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 the Cloud Center apiaries, but 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 did not know. And if it did, I doubted my new husband would allow me to serve as a beekeeping 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, the young lord wore a loincloth with back tails and a pectoral of Lord Sun. Feathers from the Harpy eagle adorned his long hair muddled with red clay and scented from peccary glands. I rested my head on his shoulder and wept.

"Why are you sad, Lady Bee?" he asked.

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 and then ask, "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 would live together forever. My only hope is that one day King Pakal will wage war against your demented husband. Then I will 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. Then he asked, “Do you still have my gifts from the Cloud Center temple? The stone hurled to Earth from the gods? The calendar that marks time?”

I said that I kept his gifts at my bedside.

“Then the gods will keep you safe for now. Your husband the king will not live long. By his own devices, or by mine, he shall soon die and you will 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 might be a white tail deer or a peccary, but then, all of a sudden, I recognized Star Flower lurking about and pretending that she was seeking plants for her remedies and magic. I told Yax K’uh that my lifelong servant was spying on us, once again.

“Then I must take my leave, Lady Bee,” Yax K’uh whispered as Star Flower noticed my gaze and scurried into the forest. “Pakal awaits me at the encampment and your servant seeks to make more trouble than you already have.”

“Tonight, I will send Star Flower 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? I can’t help but wonder. Is she drunk and demented like my husband the king?”

“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 side door of the temple, away from the spying eyes of Star Flower. I remained seated for 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, King 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 didn’t possess or for things that really didn’t matter. He compared me to his first wife who died before he took the throne and failed to produce him any 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 and drew glyphs in booklets about my gods while I 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 could hear them on top of the hill. At times, Star Flower and I wove cloth 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 or his reign, except during state visits when he required my presence in his receiving hall to regally 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. Where I 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 that 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 am your life-servant, my Lady Yol Tan."

I dismissed her pleas because I really had no choice but to accept whomever the king assigned to me. In Bone Dog, I shared little confidence with Star Flower which was so unlike when we were little girls playing games and dancing to wayob songs. She never admitted to seeing me with Yax K'uh at the Temple of Directions but I knew she had and I worried that she would somehow relay this secret to the old king.

As it turned out, 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 Ol Nitt 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 be able to 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 will 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 will prepare for you a special brew made by the goddess Chaac Ix Chel herself. I will arrange for the king to visit your chamber when your moon is full."

Two lunar cycles past the departure of King Pakal, 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. But it didn't matter because 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. More anger consumed him 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 protested, trying to defend myself. Fear and anger fill my heart. "I have slept only with you."

The king refused to believe me and demanded I undergo a purification ceremony Lake Turtle Macaw near the western mountains. King Lake Turtle Macaw II 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 II believed that First Mother and First Father united in the waters of this sacred lake and created the maize people of the Fourth Creation.

“A purity rite will reveal your essence,” Hummingbird Sun yelled at me while waving his staff and nearly falling over. “If you are guilty, the Lords of Death will steal you away to the Watery Underworld. If you are 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. His name was Roaring Sky Dance and he was a first cousin to Pakal’s wife Queen Mother. I also knew, in my heart, that Star Flower had gossiped about my meeting with Yax K’uh at the Temple of Directions and someone had informed the old king.

Chapter Eighteen: Hillary

August 26, 2004

Butz Ch’an at Palenque Palace

I awaken from a dream on the queen’s mat and hear jungle whistles, screeches, and howls. The humid air smells of sweat, bark, and seeds--the best medicines of the world. My anxiety subsides and I repeat the chants of my shaman until I fall into an unsteady dance with the figures on the walls. **The vision serpents of teotl itz k’uh creep and crawl over my skin without hissing.**

“Become,” I hear his voice. “Let poison drain from your body into the ground. Let Earth absorb harm and pain. Purify yourself before the portal to the other half of existence. Lord Sun will burn away the infections of your body and mind.”

The serpents slither down my arms and legs, guiding my trance. I cannot stop them or the chanting. I cannot stop my dance.

“She arrives. Cursed woman,” Frank suddenly bellows. **“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 walls. They grow dimmer in the lightlessness of the Third Creation. I close my eyes. My mind replays the ‘91 solar eclipse when the sky turned into 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 and a shadow falls over my face. He stands 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 do not want to move nor have 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 am having but my thoughts dance with kings and warriors of sacrifice. I cannot calm my mind.

When I awake, the clouds have parted and the bright sun appears twenty degrees from the western horizon. I feel like I have suffered without food and sleep for many days. I sit up. My head pounds. For a moment I wonder where I am and what has happened. *We have safely returned.* I hear a voice.

Frank sits beside me and rubs my temples. “Unfortunately, fear overcame your dance, Little Sparrow. The Cursed Woman pulled you back from Ek’ way-nal.”

“Who is the Cursed Woman?” Do I speak, I’m wondering, or do the words ring in my mind?

Frank resolves the matter. “She is 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 and at myself for succumbing to drugs and thinking I might discover something beyond my own rational mind. What has happened to me? How did I become so stupid? “This was a big mistake,” I say and wrap the shawl tightly around me. 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 I have. Is this fear as well?”

“Yes,” he sits behind me and massages my shoulders and rubs my temples, relieving the pain. “Now chew this,” he hands me coca leaves from his shaman stash of supplies. “It’ll bring you relief.”

“No more drugs.” I push away his hand.

“You must take this. It’s natural medicine from the Americas. Nothing bad has happened to you, Hillary. Soon you’ll remember and the glyphs will speak 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 am still feeling dizzy and close my eyes.

“Be still,” Frank eases me back on the steps and sits before me to massage my feet. Suddenly, I feel at rest and secure and begin trusting Frank again, completely. It feels good to be with him, my shaman guide.

“Voila,” he softly speaks. “You are returning. El Diablo lets go. Fear holds you no more. Rest, Little Sparrow. Soon the day ends and you have journeyed far. Next time your nagual will 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 has just occurred the past few hours but because of the drugs I can’t remember what was real or a dream. “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, 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 jaguar night.

September 2004

Since I’ve returned to Mexico City from my trip with Frank, Monte Vasquez seems personally interested in me. He practically insists we meet after work to discuss my research. Monte doesn’t want Frank to go on the expedition. He’s disliked Frank since he found his curriculum vitae on my desk. I know he read my note about our luncheon at Adonis because someone had moved it 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 such words as 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 dinner and to 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 our first time in Coba. 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 before the expedition.

On September 6th I begin my lecture series at UNAM and recapture my avid interest in the archaeoastronomy of the Desert SW. During this time, I apply for professorships at various universities in preparation for my life after the Fulbright postdoc. In November, I fly to Arizona State University for an interview. 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 that 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 when I share my news with him. "I'll really miss you, Teddy Bear," I say. "When I leave Mexico City."

"Life is full of surprises, mon cherie," he says, calmly smoking a cigarette. His cologne **invades** the air I am breathing. "The modern world is a small place. We'll be but a few hours apart."

He speaks like my father, I'm thinking, recalling that Sheldon said the same thing seven years before when he and Mom dropped me off at my freshman dorm in Tucson. A lot has changed since then and I wonder how far I am willing to go with Frank. My feelings for him run deep. He has become more than a mere lover and friend. I consider him family, as close to me as

my parents ever were. Maybe even closer because Frank is my shaman guide and has taken me into the mind of my ancient queen. I can feel what she is saying when I transcribe and re-read the glyphs in her ancient book. Because of Frank, I now hear her speaking directly to me, the *Ta Ochle* of her lineage tree. . .

Chapter Nineteen: Yol Tan

Purity Rite at Lake Turtle Macaw

For two days, the king and his entourage trekked along the jungle scab to the western mountains. Stewards carried the old king on his litter but he insisted that I walk along the road 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 did not 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 up to the lake's clear water. Scattered boulders and foliage edged the NW shore.

By mid-afternoon the king's men were busy hoisting fire wood down the southern limestone cliff while stewards were preparing the night's sleeping shelters and setting small fires around the lake. An hour before Lord Sun was due to enter the jaguar night, attendants placed the king beside the main fire at the water's edge so he could watch the ceremony take place across the lake.

It began when Ol Nitt handed me a lit cigar laced with mushrooms and I deeply inhaled the smoke then quickly grew lightheaded. I heard jungle macaws squawking and imagined Seven

Macaw at the top of his tree. A distant turkey gobbled and then screeched and I knew the cook was preparing the king's dinner. I doubted I would be joining him for the meal because I wasn't sure I'd survive whatever the king had in mind for me. I again inhaled the smoke and the scent of its nectar. My heart suddenly embraced the lake and I thought it was the most beautiful place on Earth.

Two priests dressed in loin cloths, their hair muddled and tied back, dove into the water and swam to the far shore where they ignited a sacred fire before the entrance to a cave. Ol Nitt positioned me at the water's edge and 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. After they wove beads into my hair, the king stood from his chair and ordered me to swim across the lake to the fire before the cave entry.

"But the weight of this garment will pull me down," I broke my silence in protest. "And I cannot swim like a warrior."

"Lady child of Pakal," the king said with impatience. "That is the heart of your trial. To swim the lake then dry off before k'ak k'uh, the sacred fire. If you fail to make the distance, if you fail to dry your garment, and show yourself to lack the purity I require from my bride, I will then sacrifice you to the Watery Underworld if the Death Lords don't take you first."

I waded into the cool lake, fearing I would fail the king's trial. Then a surge of anger overtook my fear. Why must I suffer such injustice--the questioning of my own integrity? The king is the ugly repulsive one, 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 the Jaguar of the Night!"

In the dwindling light, I waded farther into the lake then dove toward the high cliffs at the far shore. My voluminous garment caught hold of the water like jagged flints on fish netting. I could hear the jungle sounds of twilight and smell the fullness of fresh water. I gulped and tasted its sweetness. Despite my burden, I propelled myself forward as bubbles of water surrounded me along with the jade beads strung from my dress and hair.

At the far shore, I reached a pile of scree below the cave where the two priests were dancing and singing around the sacred fire. As I climbed from the water, they dove into the lake and swam back to the other shore, leaving me alone to perform the rite.

One of the beaded strings on my garment caught onto a shrub growing from the rocks. I tugged to free myself and the strand broke and the beads scatter. I was sure this would befoul my trial. The king in his irascibility 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 out my arms from my sides. On the distant shore, I noticed the king sitting in his litter watching me while dancing lords and priests surrounded him and sang hymns to the wayob spirits of the forest and lake.

Suddenly, from behind me I heard a swooshing downdraft like Chaac's prevailing winds were emerging from all directions. The air felt dry and heated, its dampness extinguished. The odor of wet fur filled my nostrils. Then I heard a multitude of squealing and wanted to hold my ears but I kept my arms extended to let the sacred fire dry off my clothes.

The underworld gods began pelting my back with stones, one, then two, then many all at once. I stared into the flames, awaiting a voice to tell me which road to take. But I heard only what sounded like screams.

The pelting on my back intensified tenfold. I glanced to my side and saw hundreds of small brown bats escaping from an ek' way-nal of Xibalba. Although my arms grew heavy, I remained unmoving. My hair and garment ensnared bat after bat. They winced and struggled to free themselves. Some fell into the flames and screeched as they burst into the smell of cooked meat. I braced myself as the 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 ten degrees, I stayed unmoving at the fire and my arms felt paralyzed. Across the lake the king was gazing at me with amazement and I realized that he had placed me before the cave when the underworld messengers emerged on their feasting frenzy. People die from bat bites after they become rabid like a dog. **This was the king's trial, not merely my swimming across the lake.**

I yelled, "Hummingbird Sun, hear me now. I call upon Camazotz, the death bat monster, Hum Hau and Cizin the death gods, and B'a Ajaw, head lord of hell. I call upon Blood Moon, daughter of Xibalban Lord Cuchumaquic. I invoke Chac Xib Chaac, god of the sunrise. Grant me the strength of K'awiil and Baby Jaguar. Initiate Ta Ochle that I may 'enter the tree' and pass this trial set forth by a demon from hell, my husband, the king of Bone Dog."

Suddenly, the vortex of bats diminished as quickly as it had grown and the swirl dissipated until each and every bat dissolved into darkness. Those entangled in my hair and on my garment vanished in puffs of smoke, one by one.

I removed my dry clothes and tossed them in k'ak k'uh then stood naked before the dancing flames. I felt no pain and saw no wound or abrasion on my skin. The bats hadn't punctured and penetrated my essence. The king had not defeated me.

I dove into the moonlit lake without any garment to weigh me down and swam toward the king's shore where 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 the day 5 Caiman, I produced his prophesized son. As soon as I gave birth and the old king confirmed that he had a son, he took my baby from the birthing room to live in his private chambers where his healers and nursemaids would see to the infant's needs. Not me. Hummingbird Sun did not even allow me to hold my son, or give him my milk. Privately, I called the baby B'ayal, my first born, but the old king named him Tapir Rabbit 5 Caiman, Tul Til. He had accepted that the child was of his harvest because the bats had not bitten me during my purity rite.

Over the days to come, I only saw my b'ayal only when the king required my presence in his receiving hall which happened 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 would sit beside the king's throne but a nursemaid held the b'aah ch'ok on the other side of the king. At times, I tried to take my b'ayal from the nursemaid but the child did not know me and would cry and the old king would laugh and tell me his son knew I wasn't worthy of being his mother. I suspected that 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 and that he returned to Abundant Waters with captive Kaan 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 taunt me and one night he admitted that he had wanted to marry a Kaan princess instead of me. "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 be a mother to my child and 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 did not need me anymore because he had the son he desired.

When Tul Til seated his fourth tuun, tension develops between Hummingbird Sun and my brother. First, an envoy from Pakal arrived in Bone Dog to investigate my welfare and gather intelligence from the Scar Dog warriors who were 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 the Kaan snake king Yuknoom.

In response to this threat, Hummingbird Sun held Pakal's emissaries hostage and killed his own citizens that he suspected were loyal to Pakal. One of these men fled to Abundant Waters to inform my brother that the king of Bone Dog was forming an alliance with the Kaan.

Bone Dog began stirring with gossip about an impending attack from the Jaguar king and most citizens rallied behind their Holy Lord Hummingbird Sun, Ta Ochle of Foliated Fire Cloud, the first king of Bone Dog. Then the old king began telling his people that Yuknoom was now their Overlord and Kaan troops started arriving in Bone Dog and killing Pakal's Scar Dog warriors or forcing them to flee.

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 in Abundant Waters. B'aah Ch'ok, Second Son, and nacom lords led the Scar Dog troops **to fight Pakal's battles.**

When my brother learned about Hummingbird Sun's betrayal, he sent the b'aah ch'ok on a mission to sack the Kaan vassal cities of Bonampak and Broken Sky City and he appointed Second Son as the **Officer in Charge of a Star War operation to sack Bone Dog. Pakal named Yax K'uh 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 of Bone Dog, **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 thickly padded with packs of salt, and armed with blowguns, spears, shields, and maquahuitl clubs, Pakal's warriors slaughtered the guards at the city gates. The nacom's offensive was to penetrate the palace with his elite Alemehenob team and take me under his personal care.

While the city was under siege, Hummingbird Sun secured me and my lifelong servant in a lower chamber of his hilltop palace. He placed a guard before my door and told me he was keeping me safe but I knew I was nothing to him but a valuable hostage.

Batabs and priests then ushered my husband away from the city with his lords, stewards, and 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 he retreated to the closest vassal city of the Kaan.

The basement where my husband kept me was a miserable place 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 linger many kins but it lasted only until evening fell. At that time, a palace guard escorted me and my servant to the king's receiving hall where Bone Dog lords crowded around the room, along with elite warriors of the Kaan. I quickly understood that Pakal's surprise assault led by Second Son and Yax K'uh had failed. The Kaan had outwitted Pakal in his maneuver. With the support of Overlord Yuknoom, I later learned, Bone Dog had been prepared for the siege and had three flanks of Kaan warriors at the back hills of the city standing ready for battle.

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.

Attendants helped the king stand before his captives and he yelled, "On behalf of the Great Kaloomte Yuknoom, Great Hummingbird Sun of Bone Dog captures the second son and nacom of the Jaguar king. They are my hostages. If Pakal fails to pay my ransom price, I will sacrifice them to the gods on a day priests declare auspicious."

A Kaan general then spoke and called upon surviving Scar Dog warriors to join his troops or die with shame. Some joined to spare their own lives and those who did not remained as captives for the king to sacrifice at a Victory Game in the city's ballcourt.

The next sunrise when Fang Moon appeared, Hummingbird Sun held the games which he watched from a northern platform in the ballcourt. Tul Til and I sat beside him. I did not 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. But of course, their efforts were futile because they could not win. The king was holding the games only to further humiliates his captives.

By the hour 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 and 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.

Late that same night, Hummingbird Sun surprised me with a visit to my bed chamber. I had believed he would no longer bother 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 and told me that during the victory games he had been impressed with the distinctive ballcourt skills and strategies of Pakal's second son. "I want another heir from you, sister of Pakal," he told me. "I want you to give me a second son."

I tried to comply with my husband's wishes that night but he was too drunk after celebrating his victory games and he failed to join me in congress. Then the old king grew outraged and blamed me for lacking allure. He began lashing at me with his staff while his attendant braced his stance. In his anger, the king yelled that he would sacrifice Yax K'uh even if Pakal paid the nacom's ransom price if I didn't produce 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 who was lingering in a basement chamber, uncertain of his fate. I was mostly afraid he would die from starvation or illness because of his captivity. I did not know if the king would release him or sacrifice him in the ballcourt. My heart urged me to act but I could do nothing. His fate was not in my hands. I called on the power of K'awiil to allow me to somehow have congress with Yax K'uh and conceive his heir. Boy or girl, son or daughter, it did not matter.

"Sky K'awiil," I prayed, "Awaken itz k'uh, the sacred winds of all the 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 medicine to increase my fertility, then 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 apiaries. *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 do not spread this as gossip. The king hears every word echoed through the court and he is 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 milk.

When I was at my most fertile moon, the king stumbled into my chamber with two young attendants bracing his every step and seating him on my bed platform.

Dressed in a white sheath and red sash of cotton weave, I lay on my bed, my head propped up on jaguar pillows. Hummingbird Sun looked me up and down then said in his decrepit voice, "Tonight, you will produce 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 could not help but speak the truth because I felt empowered by the spirit of K'awiil. I knew that the winds of Chaac would make magic happen that night. For me and Yax K'uh, Precious Owl.

"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. Then 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 then 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 to escort me to the palace basement.

When the kuleboob entered my chamber, he looked at the sleeping king and 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 descended, the stench of musky urine intensified. At the bottom of the stairway, two guards were standing at a curtained door. I dismissed them but they did not budge and one uttered, “I beg your Lady’s pardon, but 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 contrive 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 but 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 that my husband would somehow awaken and come down 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 did not 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 one for drinking and a plate of uneaten corn cakes. The copal burning in the room did not 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 gods 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 but 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.

"Yitz'in, younger brother," I called to him. He raised his head and 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. Then 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 have convinced our Holy King Pakal to permit me to marry you, Lady Beekeeper."

I told him that the king beat me with his staff and that he kept my b'ayal from my embrace. I described the king's Purity Test at the lake then related my ruse to see him that night

under the powers of K'awiil. He laughed for the first time and I continued to say, "The impotent king now sleeps in my bed. I am 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 spirits of cruelty from the Houses of Hell."

"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 and I hastened back to my private chamber before the king stirred and noticed my absence. I shook the king awake and said he had succeeded in having relations with me. But instead of being happy, the king 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 and the same kuleboob who accompanied me to the basement entered the chamber. The man was equally loyal to me and to 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 mind taints him and 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."

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. And I feared that if I left my room at night to secretly meet with Yax K'uh, the king would undoubtedly 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. But I convinced the king that the fetus was from the night he came to my chamber and that he simply did not remember our joining in union.

It was about this time that an envoy from my brother arrived in Bone Dog, 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 tell Pakal that he, King Hummingbird Sun, vassal of Kaan Overlord King Yuknoom, was going to offer in sacrifice his greatest captive 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 that I carried his second son. And besides, Hummingbird Sun did not want to 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.

By the king’s orders, I also 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 did not take my baby from me because it wasn’t the promised second son. In fact, anger consumed him because I had produced a girl. He called me a sorcerous and Jade Moon an ill omen.

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 and I tightly held Jade Moon. Each moment, since my daughter's birth ten kins before, I was imploring the gods to keep her alive and viable, despite my old husband's curses.

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 and then peered at the father of Jade Moon 1 Rabbit. My beloved Mok Chi. The cheering crowd awaited the blood sacrifice. They hoped to witness the captive's essence flying into the sky as a hummingbird spirit. The sacrifice would ensure that the gods brought bountiful harvests to the citizens of Great Hummingbird Sun and Kaan Kaloomte Yuknoom.

The king stood at the edge of the platform, supported by his attendant, and raised his K'awiil scepter. He then 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* but the king didn't realize that the nacom was chanting my name and that 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 take Hummingbird Sun to the houses of blades, bats, and fire in the dungeons of Hell. Cause him eternal agony for the wrongs 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 and you will never enter the portal to the highest heaven."

Outraged, the king signaled the execution and 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 Yuknoom.

Chapter Twenty: Hillary

January 2005

The Classic Maya Sites of Copan and Tikal

On New Year's Day, 2005, a month before I plan to study Mam in Todos Santos, Frank takes me in his Land Rover to the sites of Copan and Tikal. I tell him that on this trip I want to explore the ruins and not undergo anything mystical or spiritual. "I only want the history and archaeology to speak to me," I say. "I experienced enough spirituality in Palenque. It overwhelmed me."

"I know, Little Sparrow. No more hallucinatory drugs. Only empirical chit chat until you are ready to experience more. But it won't be up to you. Your next spiritual encounter is up to the whim of Ometeotl."

We first travel 800 miles to Quetzaltenango, a city called Xela after the nearby late-classic Quiche ruins Xelaju. After two nights at Hotel Modelo, Frank and I drive to a hot-springs and bathe in the nude then we take a boat tour around Lake Atitlan. Next, we drive to the ruins of Iximche, the late post-classic capital of the Kaqchikel Maya who allied with the Quiche until they became enemies. After the Spanish conquest, small pox wiped out most of these native peoples.

Before heading to Guatemala City, we swing by the market town of Chichicastenango. In the 1500s, the Quiche Maya recorded a famous text called the *Book of Council*, the Popol Vuh, but then they lost it until the 1700's when a Dominican priest rediscovered the text in the Chichicastenango church. By the 1970's, archaeologists had learned that the Maya creation story featured in the Popol Vuh occurs on pottery and inscriptions as early as the pre-classic periods.

At the University of San Carlos in the chaotic metropolis of Guatemala City, I meet with my academic host Dr. Carlos Morales and the two graduate students who will be joining my expedition team. José Juan Trejo and Pedro Molina Hernandez plan to help me document my expedition from Todos Santos to the cenote cave at the bottom of the Cuchumatanes and lend their expertise about the terrain and archaeology of Guatemala.

Dr. Morales already told me he's too old to join the expedition but he has helped me with permits and licenses from the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes because he personally knows the Director General of Cultural and Natural Heritage. He suggests I get a work permit for the expedition and a special permit from the Institute of Archaeology and History (IDAEH).

From Guatemala City, we drove six hours straight to the Copan archaeological site across the Honduran border. We stay at the Paty Hotel in Copan Ruinas Puebla and for three days, in the mud and pouring rain, we explore the ruins. Most often, I go my way and Frank goes his until we meet up and return to the hotel where we enjoy a meal and discuss the site's history.

In 1570, about the time Palenque was re-discovered, Diego Garcia del Palacio discovered Copan in the name of king Philip II of Spain. In 1834, Queen Isabella II sent the

first Spanish expedition to the ruins to plunder and loot the site. Colonel Juan Galendo excavated Copan. Less than ten years later John Lloyd Stephens purchased Copan for \$50 and made the Maya ruins world famous. He described the stonework as equal to that of Egypt.

At the far southern reaches of the Maya region, the ancients had established Copan along a river which brought them fertile soil for their corn fields. They called their city Ux Witik. Ancient Teotihuacan expanded its realm as far as Copan and probably established the city's first dynasty in 331 BC. The site features a ballcourt with macaw heads and the Hieroglyphic Stairway of more than 2000 glyphs, the longest single inscription in Mesoamerica. It commemorates the lives of sixteen kings from the founding father Great Sun Quetzal Macaw, and records their births, ascensions to the throne, deaths, and the wars they waged. Unfortunately, early archaeologists haphazardly upset the arrangement making today's decipherment difficult.

The twelfth king of Copan ruled 67 years. He died at age 91 and his son 18 Rabbit entombed him under the Hieroglyphic Stairway. 18 Rabbit ruled over 40 years and built many of the monuments, stelae, and altars at the site. Glyphs and images on these stelae connect 18 Rabbit's life to celestial events and the creation story. On one stela, the king portrays himself as the Maize God Reborn from the rift of the Macaw Mountain Monster. He holds the double-headed serpent staff as a sign of his divinity and his power to communicate with the gods.

The stelae of Copan record that Tikal, Palenque, Copan, and Calakmul were the four great cities of the classic Maya. Copan allied with Tikal, Palenque, and neighboring Quirigua. In 724 AD, 18 Rabbit installed the king of Quirigua but fourteen years later,

under the support of the Calakmul Kaan kingdom, Quirigua's king sacked Copan and beheaded 18 Rabbit. Tikal had just taken back the Petén and the Kaan sought revenge and control of the jade mines near Copan. Even after the collapse of other classic kingdoms, Copan continued to exist as a city until 1000 AD.

We drive three hundred miles from Copan to Tikal National Park. When I first enter the park, I see a peccary and a small deer-like rodent and in a tall straight palm with orchids, a black squirrel monkey looks down at me. To reach the top platform of the tallest pyramid, which jungle vines and roots nearly consume, we climb a series of ladders. On the other side we hike down a steep path and have a spectacular view of the thick multi-layered canopy which explains why the ancient Mayas believed in so many levels of heaven above Earth.

Few tourists are in the park because of its remoteness. John Lloyd Stephens made it as far as Lake Petén but didn't reach the ruins. He wrote *According to Lacandon, beyond lake Petén stretches a mysterious city never reached by white men*. Bradley Nolan never made it to Tikal and my father and I had only traveled to the sites in Mexico.

The ancient citizens of Tikal named their city Yax Mutul after the city's lineage founder Yax Enb' Xook who ruled between 100 and 200 AD. Archaeologists believe that the 12th ruler of Tikal, Une Balam or Baby Jaguar, was the earliest ruling Maya queen. In 360 AD Great Flint Claw took the throne and made Tikal a superpower in the Maya world. Flint Claw died January 15, 378 AD when the Mexican warlord Fire Born arrived as an emissary of Spearthrower Owl, the ruler of Teotihuacan. Fire Born installed as king the son of Spearthrower Owl and under the authority of Teotihuacan, Tikal expanded its

absolute power and adopted the Tlaloc-Venus warfare culture of Teotihuacan which heavily permeated the classic Maya world. During the onset of the 9th baktun, Copan, Palenque, and Quirigua were allies of Tikal under Teotihuacan authority. Another ruling queen of Tikal was Ix Yok'in, the Lady of Tikal. She took the throne at age six and for sixteen years she co-ruled with her husband Lord Jaguar. She celebrated the 4th katun of the 9th baktun and died in 527 AD.

The predominant power struggle during the classic period occurred between Tikal and the dynasty known as the Snaked-Headed Kaan. In 635 AD the Kaan established as their capital Calakmul which the ancients knew as Three Stone City or Ox Te' Tuun. In endless regional wars, Maya cities allied with either the Kaan or with Tikal, Palenque, and Copan. With strategic marriage alliances, the Kaan undermined Tikal's vassal cities and infiltrated the western edge of the classic Maya world. In 599 AD, Kaan King Scroll Serpent invaded Palenque. On a second invasion in 611 AD, Lady Yohl, ruling queen of Palenque, surrendered. One theory suggests that the Kaan wanted to destroy Palenque's bloodline and stop the foreign influence of Teotihuacan. Tikal stopped using Teotihuacan imagery when under Calakmul's authority.

Between 636-686 AD Yuknoom Ch'een II became the greatest ruler of the Kaan empire. People called him the "Shaker of Cities." He strategically played one city against another. His daughter Water Lily Hand married a Waka prince and became a warrior queen. In 648 AD Yuknoom engineered a split in Tikal's royal family. He established a city 70 miles SW of Tikal and installed as its king the brother of Tikal's 25th ruler Nuun Ujol Chaac. In 657 Yuknoom attacked Tikal and exiled King Nuun but later Nuun managed to

restore himself as king of Tikal for five years before his brother God That Hammers the Sky, under the Kaan, attacked Tikal and defeated King Nuun.

God That Hammers the Sky sent his daughter Lady Six Sky to Naranjo in a marriage alliance. She carried with her royal blood from both Tikal and Calakmul which made her a perfect queen for a city that wavered between the two superpowers. Under the patronage of the Kaan, Lady Six Sky 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 the queen of my own lineage. To date, I have deciphered that Jaguar Blood Moon was a warrior queen ally and daughter of King Pakal of Palenque and that she led a military campaign to Tikal where she observed a Venus transit of the sun.

Chapter Twenty-one: Jaguar Blood Moon

9.11.14.12.7 8 Manik' 0 Sip

Warrior Queen of the Wasp Star, Xux Ek

By the time Jade Moon 1 Rabbit seats her second tuun, I decide to facilitate the king's demise. 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 doors. My visit is unusual but the guard allows me to enter because I am the queen and I tell him my moon is full because of the Blood Moon.

The king is lying on his bed platform restlessly attempting to sleep. When he sees me, he questions why I am in his room. "I want no more daughters from you, sister of Pakal!"

"I bring you a brew for your ailments, Lord Husband," I say, help him sit up, and then offer him a ceramic vessel with a brew of pulque mixed with potent medicines and extra honey to hide the bitter taste. The king's nightly balche has already left him intoxicated and his behavior is unusually passive. Perhaps because we are not in my bed chamber and his attendants aren't around, he isn't lashing out at me. Or maybe my appearance confounds him. In any event, he accepts my brew and I help him hold the cup as he drinks with shaking hands. He then lies on his bed and makes a quick, exasperated snort like a peccary's last gasp after the killing arrow 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 that never returns. Lock him in the house of bats in the dungeons of Xibalba. Hurl at him flint blades of fire that cause him never-ending agony for the death he has 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 do not suspect me of casting harm upon the king because he was sickly and old. They believe his union with me caused his heart to erupt and they do not

blame me for that. I feel no remorse or any 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 and implore my brother to restore the broken alliance between Abundant Waters and Bone Dog. I 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 for my citizens, 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 am speaking to my citizens, my daughter is beside me with her nurse but Tul Til 5 Caiman is nowhere in sight. I do not trust the heart of the crown prince, especially now that he has seated eight stones. His manners toward me are unpredictable. And I do not want to alarm my citizens with his bad behavior while reassuring them that I am their ruling queen. People are not aware of the rift between their late king and me. They do not know that the b'aah ch'ok and his mother haven't bonded in kinship. Citizens only understand that they must now look to me for guidance. They believe that my bloodline powers will assure Bone Dog of its prosperity and that when my son is of age, he will take the mat of accession. But 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 had been ailing for many years and now he suffers no more." Rumbles of concern wave through the crowd and I must quickly appease their fears. "The king is gone but our city will not fall into destruction. You will not starve and die from disease and petulance," I announce. "I will 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 in a renewal of bountiful harvests and victories.

12 Ik' 15 Yax K'in

When the next Fang Moon appears with Venus as 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 that marks my birth, my arrival in Bone Dog, and my ascension to the jaguar throne today 12 Ik' 15 Yax K'in. The stela notes that my precious daughter is present at the seating of this event but deliberately omits the name of my son.

On a platform beside the steps, I am sitting cross-legged before my bloodletting vessel. To prepare for the Venus blood sacrifice to the gods and to my bloodline, I have purified myself in a sweat bath and have drunken 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 before the event and he now sits passively. I did not want him at the ceremony because of his disruptive behavior but the citizens call for his presence and I must assure them that I am keeping their world in order. For them, Tul Til 5 Caiman is their future king in the direct patrilineage of Foliated Fire Cloud.

A priest hands me a lighted cigar laced with medicines 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 wrought with thorns through the hole. The pain is practically undetectable, like a subtle bite from 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 and priests blow conch shells, chant, and throw copal and chicle sap onto the sacred fire. As the smoke rises, I call, “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 of vapors of fire, heavy plumes of smoke surround me and become my umbilical cord to Heaven. Ek’ way-nal opens and the gray smoke spews forth a hazy snake vision that fades in and out as it opens its maw. The face of a queen wearing the warrior headdress of Tlaloc Chaac Ek appears. But I know she is not my mother. Instead, Pakal’s mother Sak K’uk materializes like a misty apparition in a pirate mirror. I recognize her from stone etchings at the Red Palace in Abundant Waters.

Her words hum and clatter unintelligibly like swarming wasps or howler monkeys 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 have called upon my bloodline, my mother, Lady Rigel? Why do you appear before me?”

“I am your ancestor,” the voice becomes clear.

“You are first wife to my father Precious Jaguar Macaw,” I say. “You are a great queen, like your mother Lady Yohl. Like Une Balam and the Lady of Yax Mutul. But you are 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.

The voice continues, *"Your father is not my husband Precious Jaguar Macaw. Your sire is my son King Pakal, lover to your mother Lady Rigel who now serves my husband in the world beyond the rainbow road."*

I hold my head tighter as 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 is a rapacious caiman who 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 crown upon your head and give you the atl atl to wage war against the snake king Yuknook. The legitimate king of Yax Mutul currently resides under the foot of Yuknook. Together with my son, your father of the Jaguar kingdom, you will battle Kaan vassals and sacrifice Kaan leaders 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. Then I ask the Great Sak K'uk, "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 the date 9 baktun 11 katun 16 tun 15 uinal 2 k’in, you will mark the Venus transit from atop the pyramid of the founding father of Yax Mutul. Your blood sacrifice will conjure powerful visions and you will know 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 is no more.

I drink from my water cup. My attendant wipes my brow. I stand, face my citizens, and declare, “Kaloonte Yuknoom corrupted your king with the promise of power. My husband broke from the shield of King Pakal. But fear not citizens. The Great Queen Mother of Pakal has revealed my regnal name as 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 Abundant Waters and Yax Mutul. Until my son can reign by the power of K’awiil, I take up the warrior helmet of Tlaloc Chaac Ek. Your queen will rid our kingdom of Kaan snakes. Citizens. Be not afraid. Listen to the highest voice of 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 man.”

When I become ruling queen, Bone Dog has very few warriors of its own. Until he switched alliance to the Kaan, my husband had relied on Pakal’s Scar Dog warriors. Then he relied on the Sun Bellied Kaan warriors. After Hummingbird Sun entered the dark road, all the Kaan warriors left Bone Dog to rejoin Yuknoom and his allies. But rumors quickly spread that

they would return with reinforcements, with Yuknoom himself, and destroy the gods of my adopted city. To remedy this, I summon men throughout the world to join my entrada to Yax Mutul and to wage war against the Kaan. Over the next two lunar cycles, young men arrive from all directions, although most come from the cities allied with the Jaguar kingdom, including Ux Witik, Edzna, Coba, and Stone Mountain City Where All Gods Unite.

During the third lunar cycle past my ascension, Kan Xul arrives in Bone Dog with two thousand Scar Dog warriors. Nearly five tuuns have passed since Kan Xul returned to his father in shameful defeat 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 am 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 and 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 and jewelry, I am sitting on my jaguar throne. My daughter sits beside me as she almost always does. Tul Til and Star Flower are feeding the macaws at the far corner of the hall. Because they are beyond earshot, and the birds are loudly squawking, I admit to Kan Xul that I do not trust my son's judgments, heart, nor his intentions. "The heir apparent needs to vastly mature before he takes the mat or he will 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 am away, I won't miss him but I'll spend every night crying for my daughter. I would bring her on the entrada if it weren't so fraught with danger. I have arranged for my healer Ol Nitt to care for

Jade Moon. My servant Star Flower believes she should care for my daughter but I do not trust her as well. 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 am asking you, Second Son, please keep the crown prince occupied and away from my daughter while I am away."

"I vow by my life to keep Jade Moon safe," Kan Xul reassures me. "And I won't allow the b'aah ch'ok to behave inappropriately. I will teach him the manners of 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 am second in line and my father is thriving in his old age. Still, we can dream and have visions of possibilities. Can't we?"

I look at my daughter beside me. She is happily playing with dolls made from corn husks. Jade Moon 1 Rabbit always warms my heart. "Your granddam Sak K'uk manifested in the butz chan of my accession," I tell Kan Xul. "She conveyed that Holy King Pakal is my father. You are my brother, Lord Second Son."

Kan Xul smiles with eyes that take on the sunlight entering the hall from 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 about his love for you and now 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 am 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 have not told my citizens

that I am the daughter of Pakal. Something held me back from revealing this revelation. Do you think I made the right decisions?"

"Dear sister queen," Kan Xul says. "On more than one occasion our father has confessed to me that you are the seed of his harvest. It is a secret he kept from his father. But many years have passed since Precious Jaguar Macaw entered the rainbow road and I know our father himself will proclaim you as his true child who possesses his mother's bloodline and the bloodline of Lady Rigel. But I advise you to keep this secret until after you return to Bone Dog. You do not 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 away from her dolls, Jade Moon politely replies, "When I seat my eighth stone, I will 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 to animals. She has the burgeoning essence of a great leader and possesses no malignant spirit. My greatest hope is that one day she will 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 room. They approach and place upon the platform a large palm-leaf basket. Second Son reaches inside and pulls out a jaguar cub that he hands 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. She promises her uncle to fulfill his wonderful prophesy.

During the wet season before the entrada departs, my warriors practice hand-to-hand combat in the ballcourt of Bone Dog, through rain and sweltering heat. They are 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 together at the northern platform and give commands to prepare my troops for battle. To show my powers of the moon and K'awiil, I am always wearing my netted jade dress and the royal belt with glyphs of my patron goddess Blood Moon and my patron god Red Chac Xib Chaac of the Eastern Sunrise. My jade ankle cuffs bear glyphs of day and night spirits. A shield at my back has the crescent fang moon.

On the first day of their training, I stand before my troops and orate, "Together with your gods you will battle to defeat the Sun Bellied Jaguar of the Kaan snake Yuknoom. You are pitzl players against the Lords of Death, mightier than the warrior wasp. You possess the power of your discipline and bravery. The Kaan threat is ever-present. King Nuun sits on the throne of Yax Mutul but Yuknoom has besieged his kingdom. With your might, we 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 practicing troops and discussing whom to appoint as my nacom, 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 against the 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 and continues, “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 counsel because I feel a strong kinship with him now that he is firmly my brother and not my nephew. That 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 is the onset of the dry season, the wasps are beginning to swarm in the forest in preparation for new colonies. These swarms present the perfect opportunity for my warriors to demonstrate courage, wit, and stamina. When I tell Second Son about my idea, he proclaims that the Death Lords of Xibalba could not have fashioned a better bravery trial.

That day, I stand on the ballcourt platform before my men. I am wearing a shell headdress that carries the emblem of Xux Ek, the wasp goddess Venus as the evening star. Kan Xul is standing beside me as I orate to my troops, “We shall adopt as our battle patron Xux Ek. The wasp goddess will guide you, protect you, and fill you with her itz k’uh, her holy essence and spirit. In battle we will carry her emblem and effigy along with the White Bone Centipede of King Pakal and the Baby Jaguar of Yax Mutul.”

The men cheer and begin chanting *Xux Ek*.

“In a dream,” I continue, “Xux Ek revealed to me a bravery trial that involves the forest warrior wasps. Their sting inflicts pain only the bravest of men can endure.”

The warriors cheer and shout. Every man wants to undergo the trial.

“I will 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 very next 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 in search of swarming warrior wasps on low branches and logs. With Kan Xul, my priests, and stewards, I also search the forest for these 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 warriors loudly whistles and we gather around a low ceiba branch where a swarm of warrior wasps are clustering together in a colony the size of a man’s torso and the color of obsidian blue. My troops 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 his 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 blooms of its vapor as I slowly walk toward the breathing, beating colony. The droning of the swarm and the pounding of my heart intensify with each step I take but my presence does not alarm the wasp scouts because of the tranquilizing smoke.

As I approach the colony, my mind is unwavering. I recall something Yax K'uh once said at the Cloud Center Apiary. *I am sustainer of those who sustain me and I do not fear the bites of bats nor the stings of wasps. A 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. Wasps are hovering close to the mass that loudly hums, crackles, and murmurs. While I puffing clouds of smoke onto the cluster that smells of decay, menstrual blood, and smelted copper, I carefully and slowly insert my small tattooed hand inside the throbbing mass; it seems like each wasp is moving aside for me.

For a moment I feel the heat of the pulsating energy, then I carefully pull back my hand and step away without suffering a single sting. I have passed my own trial and feel as brave and determined as I had nearly ten tuuns before at Lake Turtle Macaw when I passed the Purity Test that my husband had foisted upon me.

Over the next few kins my warriors and I continue to search for new swarms and 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 Twenty-two: Frank

February 2005

Stone Mountain City Where All Gods Unite

From the Petén Rainforest, I drive my Jeep Wrangler 330 miles to Huehuetenango where we spend the night. The next morning, I take Hillary to Zaculeu, the White Ruins, a

site I've went to ten years before when I came to Todo Santos to learn Mam. Hillary believes that I became a shaman in Todo Santos although I really learned my spiritual skills under a master in Oaxaca. But WHEN I FIRST MET HILLARY, I WANTED HER TO THINK I had strong spiritual ties to these mountains SO THAT 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 AND IS SOMETHING I NEVER DO. I STICK TO MY ORIGINAL STORY AND NEVER ALLOW MY THOUGHTS TO CONFUSE ME. Besides, WHERE I learned my skills is not important and I WELL KNOW these mountain top villages. DURING THE TIME OF THE GUATEMALAN CIVIL WAR in the late 1980's and early '90's, I HAD SPENT A YEAR LEARNING MAM AT the Proyecto Lingistico in Todo Santos WHILE I MADE SEVERAL BUSINESS ARRANGEMENTS AND CONNECTIONS WITH THE LOCALS AND THE GUATEMALAN ARMY TO PROCURE VALUABLE ANTIQUITIES. Even these days I know the community and many of the locals quite well.

A few months before, WHILE HILLARY WAS BUSY TEACHING AT UNAM, I HAD DRIVEN TO TODO SANTOS AND ARRANGED FOR HER THREE-MONTH enrollment at the Proyecto Linguistico, the same language school I went. I knew the HEAD TEACHER AT THE PROYECTO, an ethnic Mam named Julian, and WHEN I TOLD Julian I needed to arrange a homestay with a shaman, he INTRODUCED ME TO Mam Antonio. NOW I HAVE HILLARY BELIEVING 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 OTHERWISE. I FIND HER EASY TO MISLEAD. SHE HAS BECOME VERY TRUSTING OF ME IN ALL THINGS.

I WARNED HILLARY that conditions at the shaman's homestead were rudimentary BECAUSE SHE'S not used TO SUCH CONDITIONS. "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 CONVINCED HER THAT SHE NEEDED TO immerse HERSELF in Mam and learn about Antonio's ancestry Because shamanism is typically a trait passed down through the generations AND any shaman in Todos Santos, including MY master shaman, could be related to HILLARY by way of HER great-great-great-granddad Grandfather Thunder.

As we wander the Zaculeu ruins, I tell Hillary what I know about the history of these mountains. It's important that 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 because I will take possession of the codex one day and claim its powers and transform into the god I'm destined to become.

"THE MAYA have lived in the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes since 1500 BC," I say as Hillary takes notes in her spiral pad on the steps of the Zaculeu pyramid ARISING FROM THE GREEN LAWNS. "In Mam *cuchy matan* means to unite with the force of God. A Mam king NAMED Quicab the Great ruled the mountains from 1425 AD until the Quiche Maya overtook the region in 1475. Zaculeu was the capital of the Mam kingdom 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. A FEW GUATEMALAN TOURISTS CLATTER

ABOUT THE SITE and take PICTURES OF THE STONE RUINS. “The year Queen Victoria died, my great-great-granddad visited the site on his way to Todos Santos to find the ancient queen’s tomb.”

“AND HERE WE ARE,” I SAY AND PLACE MY ARM OVER HER TINY SHOULDERS, DRAWING HER CLOSE TO ME. IT IS SOMETHING SHE LIKES ME TO DO. “ON OUR WAY TO FIND the queen’s TREASURES.”

HILLARY RESTS HER HEAD UPON MY SHOULDERS and seems VERY CONTENT. “YES, FRANK. I KNOW WE ARE DESTINED TO find MY ANCESTOR’S TOMB AND WITH YOUR HELP I WILL LEARN THE HIDDEN MYSTERIES OF MY HERITAGE.”

“AND the meaning of this mysterious CODEX OF JAGUAR BLOOD MOON,” I ADD BECAUSE THE ancient text IS NEVER FAR FROM MY THOUGHTS.

From Hue Hue I MANEUVER MY jeep up the mountain, around old trucks and buses chugging up and downhill and 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 villages of San Martin, Santiago, San Juan, Atilan, and Chimaltenango. The dry thin mountain air is about 70 degrees.

I carefully dive down the cobblestone streets where women in denim blue skirts, red huipils, and woven shawls are walking with their children. Boys and men wearing red and white striped pants and blue shirts with embroidered broad collars, are sitting outside concrete shops crocheting handbags. I feel a surge of nostalgic delight remembering my

profitable year in these mountains and finding that nothing has changed over these ten years. "IT IS THE MAM CUSTOM FOR Men TO crochet and women weave cloth," I TELL HILLARY AS WE APPROACH the city's park which has a model of the mountains and a gazebo flanked by bougainvillea. DURING MY YEAR OF STUDYING MAM, I SPENT A LOT OF TIME IN THIS PARK TO ENJOY A SMOKE AND MEET WITH THE LOCALS WHO ACQUIRED THE ANTIQUITIES OF MY TRADE.

children from a nearby school are running into the park, shouting and cheering AS I PULL up to the Proyecto Linguistico, a whitewashed mud-brick hacienda WITH a large front veranda furnished with tables and chairs. JULIAN is expecting us and opens the front gate, WARMLY GREETs us, AND SUGGESTS I park beside the mango and peach trees in the front yard. I ARRANGE to leave the jeep for the night while I TAKE HILLARY to the homestead. I AM PLANNING to depart the next day because I AM eager to reach MY APARTMENT in Antigua and manage MY affairs until the expedition in May.

At the back of the Land Rover, HILLARY SLIPS on a gray Sun Devil's sweatshirt to fend off the growing chill. For the expedition, SHE'S brought along 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 or the internet. SHE'S fitted everything into two duffle bags THAT SHE PLANS to take to the homestead. Sometimes I cannot 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 SUGGEST YOU take only a knapsack and leave the rest of your luggage in the school’s office with YOUR laptop,” I TELL HER. “You can retrieve what you need while you attend your lessons each day.”

“I want to take at least one of my duffel bags,” HILLARY protest. “If I’m going to rough it, I need to be prepared for any kind of medical emergency and I plan on doing a lot of reading while at the homestead.”

AFTER SOME BACK AND FORTH I REALIZE I CANNOT CONVINCE THIs STUBBORN WOMAN TO BE MORE PRACTICAL SO I agree to bring just one of HER duffel bags TO THE HOMESTEAD. I heave the bag from the back of THE JEEP and we head down the main road of town. Outside a tienda, I set aside the bag and enter the shop to buy a gift for MASTER ANTONIO. The inside smells of exhaust from all the trucks and buses that make it into town AND 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 named Sergio and hire him to help me carry HILLARY’S duffel 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 along BEHIND US with A knapsack, fanny pack, and HER HEFTY camera bag with the tripod attached; SHE intendS to take lots of pictures of the homestead and countryside, she tells me.

After about fifteen minutes, the shaman's daughter Minga, short for Dominga, happens along. She takes HILLARY'S three bags, heaves them on her head, and leads us ON to the homestead where three whitewashed adobe brick houses sit on a hillside clearing 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 learned from my previous visit. MASTER ANTONIO and his wife live in the house higher up the slope beside the main house where Minga and her sister Rita, short for Margarita, live with their children.

When we arrive, the angling sunset is illuminating a red woven tapestry hanging from the red tile roof of the main house. Before a split front door painted RED with green trim, Rita is sitting at a handheld loom and four small children are playing on the sod veranda. ANTONIO'S old wife is sitting on the sod ground sifting purple, red, and yellow beans through her fingers while blowing away the chafe.

Farther up the slope are pig pens and a corral with two plow horses and two stallions used for riding in the mountains and racing in the *All Saints Festival* held in November. "ALL SAINTS DAY the biggest celebration OF these mountains," I TELL HILLARY as Minga's five-year-old son José tugs at HER sweatshirt and asks HER name in Spanish.

"Hillary," SHE sayS and the boy enunciates it perfectly.

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 TO HILLARY.

"Where IS her husband, MASTER Antonio?" HILLARY IMPATIENTLY ASKS. "I'M anxious to meet HIM and learn what he might know about my ancestry." This is another trait I'm finding a bit troublesome about my little sparrow. She is impatient

sometimes and wants to immediately get to the crux of her 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 is 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 and strategic 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 practically gasps as if her hopes have been foiled.

"Gas pains," Mim Antonella suggests and places her hands on her stomach.

José takes HILLARY'S hand and leads HER inside the one room house where ears of corn are hanging from the rafters AND A central cooking hearth is burning with smoke rising through a smoke hole in the roof. As with all Maya homes I have ever been to, the hearth has the three traditional stones that the Mayas have been using since ancient times to represent the three hearth stones of creation, the Orion stars Alnitak, Saiph, and Rigel.

Minga places HILLARY'S bags on the guest cot against the far wall THAT the family offers to foreign students at the Proyecto to earn extra money for the All-Saints Day Festival. Sergio AND I set HER duffle bag on the floor. WHILE HILLARY UNPACKS in the remaining daylight, SERGIO AND I SIT AT THE HEARTH AND ENJOY THE FRESH TORTILLAS, GUACAMOLI, AND BEANS MINGA AND RITA OFFER US. For the night, I AM PLANNING TO SLEEP IN the shaman's house on another guest bed.

AS 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. THEN SHE pullS back the covers and sprays HER bed. I glance back at

the women and see that they are 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 Mam Antonio in a room with three other occupied cots. He is thin, frail, toothless and looks puzzled after I GREET HIM AS IF HE'S MY OLD MASTER AND INTRODUCE HILLARY as the great-great-great granddaughter of a Todos Santos master shaman NAMED GRANDFATHER THUNDER.

I help Antonio drink a glass of water from the clinic's kitchen and he perks up and starts speaking in Mam. "After the civil war and the genocide of my people," I TRANSLATE FOR HILLARY'S SAKE, "the world has 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 AS SHE STANDS AT THE FOOT OF THE COT WITH HER KNAPSACK OVER HER SHOULDER.

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."

Encouraged by the shaman's response, HILLARY ask if he's heard about Bradly Nolan.

"I remember stories about the foreign man, the Sak Itz'at, the wiseman who became one of us. People never fully trusted him because he was an outsider. I was born fifteen years after he left Guatemala. In those days, everyone remembered the outsider and my memory is not completely gone. My father told me the Sak Itz'at pulled teeth and treated ailments by bloodletting. He 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 a curse would befall them if they even mentioned his name." The old man pauses to catch his breath. "He took his child. The mother died in childbirth, a sacrifice to the Almighty." Antonio closes his eyes AND I take his hand and TRANSLATE THIS TO HILLARY.

"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 AND I RELATE TO HILLARY, "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."

WITH THIS NEW LEAD IN MIND, We leave the old shaman at the clinic and return to the homestead WHERE I PLAN TO NOW REMAIN until after we meet with

Consuela May. I AM TOO INTRIGUED BY THE NOTION OF LEARNING ABOUT BRADLY NOLAN, INFORMATION THAT COULD LEAD TO THE ANCIENT TREASURES, TO DEPART. I CAN WAIT A FEW MORE DAYS. MY BUSINESS AND MY CONTACTS IN ANTIGUA WILL STILL BE THERE WAITING FOR ME.

The next morning, HILLARY and I trek the Sun Mountain trail to the village of San Juan. Because of the chill, HILLARY IS wearing cargo pants and her Sun Devil's sweatshirt. I'm wearing a leather jacket over a turtleneck sweater and as always, AM CARRYING HER camera bag and knapsack which 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.

At the top of a ridge, WE stop to rest because HILLARY IS feeling lightheaded in the HIGH MOUNTAIN air and I want to stop for a smoke. Shortly, a young man happens along leading a mule carrying a load of wood. His name is Luis and he happily talks about his family and his farm outside the village of San Juan. He speaks mostly to ME but he's impressed with HILLARY'S few words of Mam.

I ASK about Mim Consuela May and Luis says that everyone knows Grandmother Consuela. I ask if he's heard of Bradley Nolan, the Sak Itz'at apprentice to shaman of one hundred years before named Mam ah Peku, Grandfather Thunder.

***"Lo siento,"* Luis replies. "I never heard about this gringo. Grandmother Consuela will remember. Let me warn you, however, her mind plays tricks. You must be patient. If today is not 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 ends up escorting 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 and we find Consuela May feeding turkey chicks in the yard. Luis calls her name and she walks toward 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 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 where we sit around the three stone hearth on tiny wooden chairs. 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, pleased with my gifts. Then, with raspy breaths, she speaks in Mam and recalls the old days before the civil war when women with babies in their bellies married the men they had tricked and when the shaman was a respected and powerful town elder.

Hillary takes Mim Consuala’s frail hand and ask if she remembers stories about Grandfather Thunder and a Sak Itz’at named Bradly Nolin who pulled teeth and let blood. I translate.

“Grandfather Thunder had a daughter named Ix Chel,” Hillary emphasizes in English when she hears me mention Bradly’s name. “She’s my great-great-grandmother.”

“You’re related to Grandfather Thunder?” The old woman says and bears a toothless grin. Her breath reeks of alcohol as she informs me that her ancestor is also the

daughter of Grandfather Thunder. “The white gringo you speak of murdered Ix Chel, stole her child, and fled from the mountains. Such a man is your grandfather, not mine.”

Undeterred by the old woman’s comment, I say, “We’re looking for something Sak Itz’at left behind.”

The old woman laughs and swallows more aguardiente. “I have what you want,” she says.

My heart leaps. “The ancient Maya codex?” I ask and Hillary gives me a questioning look and I know why. To date, whenever I’ve asked about the codex, she would emphasize that our goal was to find the tomb. She really doesn’t want to talk about the codex mentioned in Nolan’s diary just as she doesn’t like talking about the diary itself. I believe she doesn’t quite trust me enough to reveal all her secrets. I understand. I am the same way but I am also a man who patiently persists, play by play, until he achieves what he wants and gains what he’s after.

“Yes,” Mim Consuela adds. “And the book written by your Sak Itz’at.”

“A diary?” Hillary asks and looks at me. I wink feeling as thrilled as Hillary must be that we are finally onto something. “Bradly must have left behind another diary,” she continues. “Mim Consuela must be telling the truth. Bradly has a second diary and the codex are here!”

Grandmother Consuela takes another swig, then tells me, “What your lady seeks is down the south hill beyond the pigs. At the place of three crosses. The ancient book lies under a pile of boulders.”

“Boulders?” Hillary asks when I translate. “Or she mean rocks we can set aside?”

Mim Consuela finishes her bottle of aguardiente and lights another Payasos. She suddenly becomes agitated and yells, “You bother me, chiquitos. Go find your treasure and leave me alone!”

Hillary and I politely thank Mim Consuela for the information and get up to begin our search for these three crosses. Before we reach the door, the old woman yells for her grandniece to provide us with shovels for our task.

About an hour before dusk, we locate three pinewood crosses at the edge of the old woman’s milpa beyond a dozen pigs snorting in a mire of mud. Before the crosses, vines and grasses are covering a large pile of stones.

“It appears to be an old grave or an ancestor shrine,” I remark as we begin clearing the foliage and moving the rocks. Then I shovel the hard soil like Huitzliopochtli brandishing his hatchet at Earth.

For several hours, we toil under the cold light of the moon until I finally throw my shovel into the corn field and declare, “The old lady plays tricks on us.” I’m not really furious because I know the game of tricksters; however, as one myself, I do not relish being the mark of a con.

“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,” she declares.

“The old lady sends us on *un fausse piste* and now she laughs,” I say. “Cursed goddess of mischief. Such craftiness keeps her heart going, no doubt. She’s the rabbit outwitting the coyote.”

“She’s Ix Chel the trickster who gives birth to the rabbit on the moon,” Hillary suggests and we both laugh at our ridiculous predicament until it seems the mountains are trembling.

We return to the old woman’s house and sleep on blankets beside her hearth. Early the next morning, the grandniece feeds us tortillas and eggs while Consuela 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 Mam ah Peku 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 the grandson never returned and the lineage of Grandfather Thunder died with him and his daughter. Women no longer became shamans after Ix Chel.”

“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; the old woman studies it and claims that her father was a friend to the Sak Itz’at.

“She says her father took her to where the diary and ancient book lie buried under stones,” I translate to Hillary. “In the mountains across from her village at the place of three crosses.”

Hillary and I draw a map according to Consuela’s specifications but all the while I question whether the old woman isn’t sending us on another *vaine recherche*. A con and hustler like myself can sense when someone is playing tricks or making a scam. But I feel optimistic this time. 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've become desperate which is never a very smart play.

By early afternoon Hillary and I arrive at Antonio's homestead, soiled, sweaty, and weary from our trek and ordeal the night before. We find Antonio standing at the corral wearing a blue jacket and a white straw hat with a blue striped 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*, a stone, mud, and corn-straw sweathouse with a conical roof off the main house. "Sweat casts away the bad spirits who trick you from your due rewards," the old shaman tells me.

For the next two hours Hillary and I sit barefoot and wrapped in towels on a bench inside the *ohook* while Antonio chants, "Headaches, twisted stomachs, and cramps disappear. . . let the steam restore your body and spirit." Every so often he opens the ram-skin flap and tosses water on the stones smoldering over coals and fragrant Palo Santo wood. When we exit into the fresh thin air, under the bright afternoon sun, I feel invigorated and refreshed. "How do you feel now, little sparrow?"

"All of my muscles are relaxed," Hillary says.

Suddenly, I'm feeling amorous for my little sparrow. She isn't exactly the type of woman, or man, who can please my sexual cravings, my lustful nature, but she's the only woman around. And I am 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 or from the exertion of last night. For whatever reason, I take Hillary in my arms and suggest we take a sunset horse ride onto

the upper slopes of pine and cypress trees. “We’ll return in the moonlight. Can’t you feel the romance of the setting and moment?”

“Yes I do,” she says and 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 is standing nearby grinning at us.

I tell the old shaman to ride his best horse and he saddles up a sturdy black stallion named Tzimin Chaac which means Thunder Horse. I help Hillary sit behind me where she holds my waist as we head up the slope, ride along a dry riverbed and down a ravine of scree, boulders, grasses, wildflowers, and gnarly cypress trees.

Thunder Horse drinks at a trickling brook of cold water 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. “This is a perfect place for love,” I say. “See how the mountain winds and the force of the water have permanently bent cypress trees clinging to the rocks formation that looks like a vagina.”

Hillary hits my arm and says, “I don’t know about that. But it’s beautiful, teddy bear. You must have been here before.”

“Not really. I think our horse understood right where to take us. I sense magic in this place.”

I help Hillary off Thunder Horse and tie his reins to a pine tree. Then, on the cool grassy earth at the edge of the waterfall, I spread out a tapestried blanket from the saddle roll. The fading sunlight casts a rainbow in the waterfall’s mist and a fragrance like vanilla scents the air.

“Lie back on the tapestry, little sparrow. I want to make love to you, right here, right now. I feel the love of the Rainbow Goddess in the air.”

“I was beginning to think we’d never make love again. I thought That maybe you didn’t like our experience six months ago at the Club Med in Coba,” Hillary says as she lies back on the blanket and mist falls on her face like the sparkling makeup mes amis in Paris loved to wear. Blue diamond sparkles of mist. My mind and body are becoming consumed with a familiar urge to immerse myself in the sensation of fully making love.

“NO no,” I whisper in her ear and smell her scent. She does not wear the perfumes of mes amis, Tabu, Rive Gauche, Soir de Paris. Instead, I smell her Secret deodorant but it will have to do because now I am to far gone into my familiar desires. “No. Little sparrow. IT’S NOT THAT AT ALL. 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 IS TIME WE PHYSICALLY UNITE ONCE AGAIN. The sweat bath entwined our souls with spiritual love.” I embrace HER and catch MY breath. “Feel the mist on YOUR face AND LET YOUR Thoughts explode with constellations, planets, novas, and every feature of the night sky. Mine have,” I SAY AND WE MAKE LOVE for the second time. But 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’VE decided that I won’t take the job in Arizona. I don’t want to leave you. my Teddy Bear. YOU HAVE become everything to me.”

“AS YOU ARE TO ME,” I SAY AND REACH FOR MY KNAPSACK. I AM not through with our lovemaking; I’VE DECIDED AND REMOVE a large woven cloth and

unwrap a dildo that glows in the moonlight like a Maya stela. I THEN ASK HILLARY to use it.

I AM NOT SURPRISED WHEN SHE turnS away AND SAYS, “No.”

“WHY NOT? LITTLE SPARROW. YOU CAN USE IT ON ME.”

“No,” SHE AGAIN SAYS THIS TIME with alarm AS SHE LOOKS back at ME.

“YOU’VE just confirmed my concerns,” SHE adds. “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 REFLECTING ON MES AMIS IN PARIS.

“No. I can’t EVEN fathom what YOU ARE SUGGESTING.”

I simply smile at her tiny misted 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. We are each other’s wayob dancers.”

SHE sayS nothing as we pack up and ride back to the homestead IN A moonglow on the ground THAT looks like the freshly fallen snow I once saw on the streets of *Place Blanche Paris*.

Chapter Twenty-three: Jaguar Blood Moon

7 Kab’an 5 Muwan

Entrada to Yax Mutul

Six paddlers are propelling my royal jukub down the Usumacinta. Nearly 3000 Xux Ek warriors surround me in three hundred canoes. My warriors have painted their faces red and black and they wear short-sleeved cotton jackets dyed yellow with black puma patches. 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 marriage one half katun before, during the time King Nuun had sacked Dragon Waters and dethroned his brother God that Hammers the Sky. Now King Nuun is back on the throne of Yax Mutul but under the venomous snake king Yuknoom.** My mind is set on restoring Yax Mutul to its former glory with the help of King Nuun and his ancestral powers.

At each night's encampment, cooks prepare meals while men erect the popol naj shelter where I parlay with my nacom and batabs and where I sleep. The troops sleep in netted hammocks and lean-to huts while scouts patrol the perimeter with torches and hunt to supplement our supply of corn, squash, and cacao beans.

I am always aware that Kaan warriors are watching our movement. But I have a strategy for my campaign. My troops show no effigies and banners that might betray our intentions. Their shields bear no emblems. When we encounter Kaan warriors, I claim my kingdom retains the alliance my husband 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 the Kaan capital of Ox Te' Tuun." As my brother Kan Xul advised, I never reveal that I am daughter of Pakal and if I must, I claim that I broke ties with Abundant Waters when my husband allied with the Kaan.

Down the river past Yokib, we travel east on a tributary of the Usumacinta. 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 King Yuknoom named Maize Jaguar 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 cannot reveal my true intentions. “Bone Dog pays tribute to you and your Overlord Yuknoom,” I say. “I am 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 have 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. I ask the Kaan lord, Maize Jaguar Snake, why very few Kaan warriors are present in the city and he tells me his troops are away fighting battles in Ux Witik and Edzna. “And they are waging a war against the warrior queen of Coba who dares oppose the power of Yuknoom.”

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 pillowed bench beside Nuun on his jaguar throne. His young queen sits beside him and appears near to giving harvest to a child. 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 and says, referring to his queen, “This is Lady Macaw Waterlily, daughter of Yuknoom’s younger brother.”

The young pregnant queen says nothing but she politely nods at me. Nuun then asks the queen's attendants to take his wife to rest in her private chamber.

I'm glad because I don't trust the king's Kaan bride or any of her servants and certainly not Maize Jaguar Snake. Fortunately, the Kaan lord is away investigating an incident at the city gates.

When I am alone with King Nuun, I reveal my true intentions for coming to Yax Mutul. "I have broken from my husband's alliance and am only maintaining a pretense in front of the Kaan. I am really the daughter of King Pakal and am loyal only to him. I married one of his vassal kings but my husband Hummingbird Sun betrayed my father's trust and formed an alliance with snakes. On the date, 1 Kimi 14 Xul, my brother Kan Xul waged a war against my husband, but Kaan warriors stood ready. Hummingbird Sun captured and sacrificed Pakal's nacom Yax K'uh, the true father of my daughter Jade Moon 1 Rabbit. I am here to help restore Yax Mutul to its former power as the world's mightiest city and as Overlord to my father King Pakal."

King Nuun listens intently then relates in a low voice the story of his reign and his struggle against the Kaan. "As eldest son of my father, 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 his allegiance to the Kaan and turned against me and my city. We held back for seventeen years. Our enemies flanked us on three sides and I ordered defensive palisades and walls built against northern attacks from Kaan vassals. But the Sun Belly Jaguar outmaneuvered my forces and on the date 2 Ix 12 K'ayab, the snakes defaced the monuments of Yax Mutul. They smashed

pottery, and desecrated the tombs of Lady Yok'in and her husband who ruled together at the time of Lake Turtle Macaw the first, of the Jaguar kingdom.

I tell King Nuun about my snake vision. "Sak K'uk prophesized that during the meeting of Venus and Lord Sun, I will have a great vision at the top of the pyramid of your founding father. King Pakal has damaged the Kaan hegemony but there will be no peace while the snake king Yuknoom remains alive."

A servant man enters the hall and interrupts us to offer maize cakes with honey and guava. He leaves and the king continues 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' Tunn. He threatened to sacrifice them if I failed to return to Yax Mutul as his puppet king and use the powers of my royal bloodline for his campaigns. He will kill me before I surrender **my powers of lineage, the greatest Maya tree in history.**"

"What has become of your family?" I ask and eat a bite of my honey cake.

"I don't know their fate. But I have continued to serve my citizens as Yuknoom's puppet king. My greatest hope is that my family and I will reunite one day. But that day has never come. Now you arrive with a regiment of warriors, gracious queen. I accept your offer of help if you accept mine. I still have many men loyal only to me who will join your forces when you return to Bone Dog. At the Venus transit, I will conjure my lineage founder Yax Enb' Xook. He will wield upon you and your warriors k'ulel, the cosmic force that makes victories possible."

Chapter Twenty-four: Hillary

April 23, 2005

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, but we find nothing but the rabbit's laugh. After Frank heads off to Antigua, I began reading my many books and walking in the milpas around the homestead until the dogs start yapping at my heels. In late afternoons, after six hours of one-on-one lessons at the Proyecto, I usually sit on my bed, lean against the sod-brick wall, and write in my notebook imagining Bradley doing the same thing one hundred years before. The conditions I'm presently living under can't be much different from those at the beginning of the 1900's.

At night, as I try to sleep on the uncomfortable bed, the room grows colder and colder and I smell urine and wonder if animals roam freely inside the house. I think about bugs and tells myself *I'm not Coatique's daughter, the goddess who talks to spiders and centipedes.* Then I toss and turn and start having doubts about the codex. Did Bradley somehow contrive the Brownie pictures and his diary? Is he also a trickster? I also wonder about Consuela's claim that Bradley 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 over two months, I decide I've studied enough Mam and that I want to be with him again before he returns to Todo Santos and we head out on the expedition

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.

With nothing but the clothes on my back and a rainbow-colored handbag Eduardo crochets for me, I catch an antiquated bus that rumbles down the winding dirt roads of the Cuchumatanes. The bus is overflowing with smoking campesinos and mujeres with their babies. One sits beside me and her baby wets on my side and causing my colorful crocheted bag to bleed. I change the bus in Hue Hue, Chimaltenango, and Guatemala City before reaching the city Guatemalans call Old Guatemala because it was the first capital of the Spanish colony. After a devastating earthquake in 1773, the Spanish Crown moved its capital to Nueva Guatemala de la Asuncion, today's Guatemala City.

In vast contrast to the traffic, smog, and poverty of 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 colonial city which is really a tourist mecca of coffee shops, internet pastry bars, restaurants, night clubs, and language schools.

Outside a café near the city's central park, I sit at a table and call Frank, eager to surprise him with my visit. Unfortunately, my call goes straight to voice mail. "Teddy. I'm in Antigua!" I declare over my cellphone perhaps a little too loudly. People at the neighboring tables are glancing at me and 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 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, seemingly unattached to anyone. Sometimes he retrieves the vendor's soda bottles from customers so I assume he works for the old man.

Such a beautiful little boy, I think as I place the phone in my crocheted bag slumped 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 fa vore," He holds out his hand for money.

The waiter appears and sets a plate with a burger and fries before me. He shoos away the boy, apologizes, and suggests I avoid giving the *golfillo nino* money or food. "Pardon, Señorita. Money encourages his bad behavior."

I take a bite of my burger then notice a commotion across the street. At the cart, the boy is struggling to retrieve a floppy rainbow purse from the old vendor. I stand and yell, "That's my bag!"

The boy looks at me, yanks the purse from vendor's grasp and crosses the street to return my bag with apologies.

"What sort of scam are you playing? Little man," I ask. The boy smiles before me. I leave cash on the table and invite him to a meal in the park. He looks like he could use something to eat.

From park vendors, I buy chicharrones and a soda, and sit with the boy on a bench shaded by flowering jacaranda trees. Before us is the three-tier fountain of mermaids. **Fragrant honeysuckle flower beds surround us as women with baby strollers, local business men, and foreign students from the language schools stroll by.**

“*Gracias, Señorita. Estoy muy agradecida,*” the boy speaks while he happily eats his meal. I ask him where his parents are. He doesn’t know. He tells me his name is Pablo and from what I gather, his Maya parents lost him in Guatemala City last year.

“They disappear in La Ciudad,” he suggests. He doesn’t speak about why his family came to the capital. 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 the police beat him, he claims, and older *chicos de la calle* force him to sniff glue.

I smile at the boy who’s had unbearably bad luck yet he appears healthy and happy, except for his dirty hair and fingernails. His face has no scars and his eyes gleam with innocence. Perhaps the gods haven’t completely ripped away his spirit, I think to myself.

“How did you get to Antigua?” I ask and listen to the water splashing into the mermaid pool. It’s a beautiful day. **After a night of rain, hot sunshine is now infiltrating the city. From where I sit, I see Agua Volcano and recall a flyer posted in the café warning tourists not to climb the three volcanoes because of bandits lurking in the forests and waiting for easy prey.**

The boy drinks his soda, wipes his mouth with his shirt, and explains that he heard Old Guatemala was a magical town with Spanish castles, a mermaid fountain with clean water, and plenty of tourist money. About a month before, he hid in the back of a pickup truck delivering frozen meat from the airport to restaurants in Antigua. He hopped off in an alley behind an art gallery restaurant that serves French, Italian, and Spanish food. He claims to sleep under a dumpster behind the restaurant. “The waiters smoke cocaine in the alley and bring me leftover 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. "Have you seen this man?" I ask and to my surprise he has.

"Señor Frances. Mucho dinero," the boy says. "I ask him for cigarettes."

"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 me in the direction of Fuego Volcano. I turn and see Frank pulling alongside the curb in his Land Rover. He again honks the horn. "Doctor Jacobs," he shouts from his jeep window. "I got your message and have been driving around town looking for you. I see you're with the little *golfillo*." Frank gestures the boy over, gives him a few quetzals, then tells him to scam.

Pablo politely nods and says, "Señor Frances, Señorita, *muy encantado*." He 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 a view 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 that I follow him up the spiral stairs.

His upstairs suite has a large hacienda bed and a vanity against a mirrored wall across the room from 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 enough to say, matter-of-factly, “I’m just a lover of love.”

I’m uncomfortable with all the porno and don’t want him to pull out another “stela” but 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 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 a 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. “*Après, 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 or two.”

“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 of men’s clothes on one side and colorful evening dresses, scarfs, and boas on the other. Men’s shoes align the floor across from colorful women’s heels neatly arranged. On the shelves above the clothes 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, mon cherie.”

“And you kept her things?”

“She died.”

“I’m so sorry,” I respond in reflex, feeling awkward. But 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 prepare for his party.

After a hot shower I put on the gown and find that it snugly hugs my boyish curves. I refuse to wear the heels Frank has 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'm thinking. Then suddenly I recognize 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 while waiting for a table and thinking Frank was meeting business associates. "Frank?" I exclaim.

Frank turns from his friends and says, "Je m'appelle François, Mademoiselle Professor."

I quickly realize that the other two women are not who they seem to be either. They are all men **prepared to party.**

Frank offers his "lady" friends and the young man drinks from his bar then 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 had been trying to have a burger when 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 and a glass of wine from the bottle of Margaux Bordeaux sitting on the counter. I then return to the sofa to get away from the guests who are dancing with François.

The two ladies must be from a legal brothel strip club, I surmise as I watch them from the sofa. Or a transgender bar in Guatemala City. As François twirls his lady friends like a debutant of the ball, I'm wondering **what he's expecting from me during this little soiree.**

The young man is standing at the kitchen counter smoking a cigarette when he suddenly **breaks from the fiesta and** sits on the floor at the green patina coffee table with his back 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 me, "Te gusta?" referring to the cocaine.

"No, me gusta," I say and turn my attention to Frank who is 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. I suddenly 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 a MS13?

I reproach myself for being so paranoid. This is a party, I think, and everyone is 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 in a slow dance with his ladies, Frank catches sight of my stare. He's been neglectful, he seems to realize, and leaves his friends and joins me at the sofa. He snorts a line on the coffee table, breathes in his high then places his hand on my knee. "Are you happy, little dove?"

His dimpled smile bears cracked makeup. He has red lipstick on a tooth. His *White Diamonds* perfume strongly assaults my senses. Or is it Versace's *Yellow Diamonds*? It's not the cheap knockoff scents from street vendors. From his lady friends. "I'm fine," I suggest while feeling annoyed. "This is such a travesty and why are you ignoring me?"

"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, François."

He rises to fetch me more Bordeaux. I'm grateful he doesn't push himself on me, sexually, and that he doesn't invite me to snort cocaine. I have my limits to all this frivolity.

When François 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 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 his 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,” François 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 and I feel 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.

François is now playing Edith Pilaf songs on his stereo. He approaches me and offers his hand 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. François 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 François 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.

The Bonampak murals begin casting shadows over my perceptions and images fill my head with wayob dancers, like a slide show at a PowerPoint lecture.

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 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 and 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 François?

Over and over again, I hear her sing, "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.

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 François. 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 to praise the gods for making the king victorious in 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 must blood . . .

Then. 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? Sex toys--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 underwear. I'm disheveled. Has someone violated me? I sit up. Blood splatters are on the bedsheets and my hands. I want to scream. Then I remember the syringe and the bloodletting. Things have gone too far! I'm thinking. I must flee from this lunatic. Then I notice Frank beside me. As a man. All man. And no one else is present in the room. The house is silent.

"Little Sparrow," Frank says, 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 and I feel his heartbeat as he strokes my hair. It's an irregular beat, probably from the drugs. Certainly, if nothing else, he over exerted himself the night before. I question why I would ever take him on my expedition, after such a display of wanton foolishness? But the answer is simple. I love the man. He makes my life feel complete. He is my spiritual guide and companion. My family. And I want him with me when I discover the treasures of my ancient Maya queen.

Chapter Twenty-five: Jaguar Blood Moon

9 Baktun 11 katun 16 tun 15 uinal 2 k'in

Red Fire Macaw Transits Lord Sun

A stately man is given,
In ecstasy his own,
Demoralizing answer,
Succession to the throne.

On the festive day when Red Fire Macaw transits Lord Sun during the peak of sweltering heat, the citizens await at the bottom of the founder's pyramid erected during the eighth baktun. Three different kings have subsequently added stairs, rooms, and a contemplation bench in the crested temple.

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 reverential 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 am sitting crossed-legged on a central stone bench where generations of kings and queens have sacrificed their royal blood to maintain the world order by conjuring a snake vision. Two priests are attending me. Clay bowls in the corners of the small chamber burn copal incense and royal beeswax. A priest hands me a potent cigar. I deeply inhale the smoke and then use a stingray spine to re-pierce the hole in my tongue. My blood drips onto the bark paper in a bowl before me. The paper has glyph names of many gods. I light the paper with my cigar and it burns with plumes of smoke.

"I call upon my ancestors to conjure K'awiil, the divine powers from my royal bloodlines," I say.

My blood sacrifice, my itz k'uh, brings about a smoky vision. From the serpent's open mouth, the face of a woman hazily appears. She wears the helmet of Tlaloc Chaac Ek, the warfare god of thunder who hurls obsidian flints to Earth. The chanting priests cannot see what I am seeing as they throw copal resin into the bloodletting vessel.

"I'm Lady Une Balam," the vision says. "Baby Jaguar, goddess of Yax Mutul, patron of the Jaguar kingdom and the kingdom of Ux Witik. My heavenly brother is Chac Xib Chaac. By the miracle of creation, we sacrifice to become reborn as the sun and moon. Hear my story, Jaguar Blood Moon:

"Before Spearthrower Owl's entrada changed the world, my earthly brother overthrew my seating and forced me to flee Yax Mutul. This was nearly six katuns before the 9th baktun. I journeyed to the Place of Reeds, northern city of Spearthrower Owl, domain of the feathered serpent and the great Mother God. The king treated me well in my exile and 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 let this entrada and replaced my brother's son with my great-grandson. In this way I broke my brother's patriline and established my lineage tree.

"At the seating of the ninth baktun, my harvest spread across the world. Quetzal Jaguar who founded the Jaguar kingdom is my great-great-grandson. Grandson of Spearthrower Owl and my granddaughter. The founder of Ux Witik came from northern Yax Mutul. He is my great-great-grandson and 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 and prosperity. My lineage is yours and you are of my dynastic tree. Through you I continue to rule and live."

As the revelation sinks into my mind, 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's itz k'uh but the face in the snake vision's maw proclaims herself as Lady Yok'in of Yax Mutul.

"I'm ancestor of Lady Rigel," the vision says. "Hear my story, Jaguar Blood Moon. My brother and I rivaled for the throne but I ruled Yax Mutul with my husband until cities around us fell to the Kaan. Yax Mutul, Abundant Waters, and Ux Witik remained steadfast allies in the Tlaloc Chaac Ek alliance of Spearthrower Owl. My younger brother took my life and declared himself the rightful heir. He sacked Ux Witik before Lake Turtle Macaw II installed the first king of Bone Dog. My brother believed he was Fire Born but the Kaan sacked our city and killed him. I had my retribution when they broke my brother's patriline. 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 breathe in the sweet copal scent and my mind reels from the revelations of my butz chan. I'm guardian of the bloodline of two great queens.

I peer deeply into the burning flames of my bloodletting vessel. The glyphs on the smoldering paper project the god names with burning edges. I watch the face of Lady Yok'in grow clearer as she continues to speak.

"As Lady of my lineage tree I prophesizes the events of my bloodline. In one half katun, the brother of King Nuun, under the shield of Yuknoom, will sacrifice Nuun in the ballcourt of Yax Mutul and will take the mat of our city. He will go to the Kaan capital with Yuknoom to celebrate the period ending. 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 of

Abundant Waters. Three tuuns 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.

“The son of King Nuun will become a great leader of Yax Mutul and will build reservoirs, plazas, and the largest pyramids in **the world. He will 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. When the son of Yuknoom enters the dark road, seven snake kings will follow until the Bat dynasty returns and the snake kaloomte crumbles.**

“And then Chaac will arrive from all directions. His mirrors will reflect the brilliance of his flashing thunder axe. Rains will come from the south and temperatures will flux. Hurricanes will bombard 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 before the people leave and he dies in his scattering ritual when the new world order ends.”

From the smoke and serpent’s maw, the face of Lady Baby Jaguar appears beside Lady Yok’in. Together their voices merge and resonate, “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 Tlalac Chaac Ek, don the clothes of the Moon, and uphold the banner of your gods. 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. The priests

announce, “The meeting of Red Fire Macaw and Lord Sun has ended,” and I awaken from my trance.

Later that day, I privately meet with King Nuun to recount the prophecy of the two Mutul queens. “You will defeat the Kaan and 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 will come true. 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 city’s regiments and from neighboring cities. **Because the Kaan lord Maize Jaguar 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 to Bone Dog.** However, when I gather my warriors in a forest clearing outside of Yax Mutul I reveal that my father is King Pakal and that my snake vision during the Venus transit revealed that my bloodline stems from the founders of all the greatest cities except those the Kaan has established.

“The Wasp Star Xux Ek will wield upon you k’ulel,” I loudly say. “All the cosmic forces will join together to make our victories possible. We will rid the world of snake headed kings. If you die by the hands of our enemy, you will flit to the highest heaven as a hummingbird and return to Earth as 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 my patron gods of power--Xux Ek, Chac Xib Chaac, Une Balam, Blood Moon, and the Maize God Reborn.

I use strategies I learned from Yax K'uh and Kan Xul and create new tactics of my own using ballgame deception and cunning. We strike the cities that I had 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 into his palace, believing I am 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.

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 are 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 heir and I tell her that one day she will be the 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. But I do not 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. Ol Nitt and Kan Xul sit with me on the northern platform. Even Jade Moon is with me to watch the beheadings of the bound and defeated men in the middle of the arena. Tul Til had informed me, through a herald, that he was not attending and I felt 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 do not know, trust, nor like.

Second Son declares to the citizens gathered at the ballcourt that I am the daughter of Holy King Pakal and that my 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 and I decide which enemy warrior to set free to tell Yuknoom of my victories.

Before each man bravely dies in the ballcourt, I shout the names of my gods and say to those who will die under my orders, "You are a sacrifice. Your itz k'uh will flitter to Heaven like a warrior killed in battle and a woman who loses her life during the birth of her child."

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 now exists in my kingdom. My healer Ol Nitt confides in me that she has heard many rumors among

courtiers and the 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 have noticed, since my return, that whenever I do meet with Tul Til he is more disrespectful toward me. He does not acknowledge me at formal occasions. He does not want to hear about my battle victories or the games at the ballcourt. He does not 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 me. “My nephew plays one man against another, like my brother did. He keeps voices silent. Your son took Kan Xul unaware because he is 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, however. I cannot plot against the b’aah ch’ok or criticize him. For the citizens of Bone Dog, my son is of the bloodline established when Lake Turtle Macaw II installed Foliated Fire Cloud as first king of their city. Tul Til hides his malignancies from public view and people believe he is strong and righteous. I end up holding a public rally to recount my victories and reassure my people that their b’aah ch’ok will co-rule with me after he’s fought a few battles.

In less than a lunation, the situation grows hostile. Tul Til demands the crown, his lords tell me, but I forbid his ascension until he seats fifteen stones. My son retaliates by thrashing vitriolic 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 is always at my side.

Bit by bit, Tul Til takes over the kingdom. He cuts down the forest, so to speak, clears the land, 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 and I must take the mat and restore his alliance with the Kaan.”

As the kins pass, sentries discover 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 I know my son would rule with a corrupt and wicked heart. I am able to maintain my rule because of the nacom and batobs who have vowed their lives to me.

The struggle between my son and me continues for **two solar cycles** after my return to Bone Dog. 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 have full rule over 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 have 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 am in the palace receiving hall and the vassal lords from the cities I’ve conquered are paying their annual tribute. One by one, an envoy approaches the throne platform where I am sitting with my daughter. Tul Til isn’t present because he never attends my events and I have no avenue to speak frankly with him. I know he

has no love for me, like his father. He bears only the contempt and greed spawned by Hummingbird Sun.

A vassal lord of Sky Cave City presents me with a live scarlet macaw but before I can reach to pet the sacred bird and name him Red Fire Macaw, **Kaan warriors burst into the room 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 to me. "And **reestablished alliance with Kaloomte Yuknoom. I terminate your rule, Mother. Already Kaan warriors have infiltrated the city and murdered many of your Xux Ek warriors and guards.** Kaloomte Yuknoom will make me a great king along the southern river trade route."

Amid the vast confusion, I grab my daughter's hand and attempt to flee but 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 his regent. He faces some opposition from those who want me to remain queen because of my power to conjure two 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 of them 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 while we are in my chamber. “You must keep your loyal citizens and lords from rallying against me. Kaloomte Yuknoom requires you to conjure your gods and bloodline 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 evil eyes, 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 and says, “I know Jade Moon’s true father is Pakal’s nacom Yax K’uh. Star Flower told me, dear mother.”

“How?” I ask, taken by surprise. “My attendant doesn’t know this.” The betrayal is severe, I am thinking, even for Star Flower. I never told her 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 am 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 has always been jealous of me because she has no husband or child. She has no lover, no beloved.”

“Star Flower is my lover,” the king proclaims to deliberately taunt me, it seems. He laughs 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. Now I surmise that while I was away, she seduced the b’aah ch’ok, 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 is under the protection of the king and my daughter and I are under his spiteful and venomous 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 Lake Turtle Macaw below the western mountains between the two cities King Lake Turtle Macaw II established and the lake where Hummingbird Sun forced me to have a purity test.**

My brother's message is that the king of Stone Mountain City Where All Gods Unite, Roaring Sky Dance, will receive Jade Moon and keep her safe. When fifteen, she will marry him and bring a new bloodline to his mountain city which the Kaan never touch. Even if Yuknoom knows about the Jaguar dynasty outpost, he has no ambition to sack cities hidden in the mountains far from the strategic river trade routes or jade mines.

I am unable to act on the plan until Jade Moon 1 Rabbit seats ten stones. During the thirteenth moon, after 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 quickly arrange a secret trek to the lake with the help of my most loyal servants. I convince the guards who are holding me captive in the palace that I must provide my daughter with her menarche transformation ceremony at the Usumacinta. I dispatch king Roaring Sky Dance of Stone Mountain City and request that his warriors meet us at the lake **during the next Fang Moon and retrieve my daughter.**

On the evening before the crescent moon rises, my daughter and I are sitting on mats beside Lake Turtle Macaw. Precious Soft Paw lies between us. An elite team of warriors from

Stone Mountain City stand vigil around the encampment, prepared to escort the princess to her new kingdom. I talk to my daughter about her father and give her the jaguar canine necklace from my father Pakal and the celestial stone and calendar from Yax K'uh. "These are treasures of your heritage to keep you safe in your new mountain city."

At dusk, we watch bats leave the cave across the lake and I tell Jade Moon about what my wicked old husband put me through sixteen tuuns before. "This is the most beautiful place on Earth," I say. "And it is where I want my entombment. But the cruelty of Hummingbird Sun has tainted the lake. We must cleanse it of all his diseased spirits and curse those who might enter my tomb with wicked and sorcerous intentions."

I hold my daughter tightly and say, "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 in darkness. You are guardian of my lineage tree and the tree of many great Maya 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 II. You will bring a new bloodline to Stone Mountain City Where All Gods Unite when you marry the king in five years."

The next day, the elite warriors of King Roaring Sky Dance escort Jade Moon 1 Rabbit up the mountain to her new city and I return to Bone Dog fearing in my heart that I will never see my daughter again. I would join her but as queen of Bone Dog I am duty bound to my loyal subjects. If I fail to return, I fear my son will massacre the men, women, and children who have ever uttered my name.

Before the rainy season, my son King Fiery Jaguar Paw returns from his campaign and meets me in my private chamber. "Where is my half-sister?" he demands.

“I sent her to live with Pakal for protection from the Kaan. **He will make her a princess of Abundant Waters.**”

“You cannot do that!” The king becomes as angry as his father ever was. “Jade Moon is my princess to trade with the Kaan. Dispatch King Pakal immediately and demand her return.”

I refuse and the king threatens to send me away in a marriage alliance to a vassal of Yuknoom. To keep my son pacified and from causing myself great harm, I promise to dispatch Pakal and request that Kan Xul escorts Jade Moon back to Bone Dog. I tell him this because I need time to develop a plan of escape to Stone Mountain City where I can live with my daughter and away from my treacherous son. It’s a journey of perhaps a half winal and I need an escort to take me there. I must also bring with me as many of my loyal subjects along as I can, to save their lives. There are no remaining Xux Ek warriors in Bone Dog. My son murdered those who did not flee or join his Kaan troops. A few lords, guards, and attendants have remained secretly loyal to me, but I cannot rely on anyone with my life. It seems that everyone has fallen under the spell of my son.

One tuun after Tul Til’s ascension to the throne, he summons me to the Temple of Directions. He now allows me to wander the palace and city with escorts from his Kaan guards. The king tells me he is planning a royal hunting trip at the river lodge and wants me to conjure my gods to assure him a bountiful expedition. I am secretly hoping that his hunting trip will present me with the opportunity to escape from Bone Dog and I want to assure him of my devotion to his rule. **I previously told my son that Pakal had betrothed his sister to a lord in Yax Mutul so he would stop demanding her return.** He had been furious and continued his threats of marrying me to a lord of Yaknoom.

Ol Nitt warns me against meeting with her nephew at the Temple of Directions, but I have no choice **even 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.** But I hold on to the belief that 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.**

When I go to the Temple of Directions, Red Chac Xib Chaac is upholding the eastern sky. I sit alone on the center bench and wait for my son to arrive. Copal burns in the four corners of the stone room. While I'm contemplating my gods, my fate, and the fate 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 and I want your help with my rule. **I am not going on a hunting trip. In truth, I will be leading my men into battle against vassals loyal to your father and the king of Yax Mutul. I need your influence over the vassal 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." I say nothing. "A surprise visit from your dear old friend."

Star Flower suddenly enters the temple room of frescoes. She is carrying a royal drinking vessel with the name *Itz Balham U*. It's a familiar cup because royal artists had made it for me when I became queen and took the power of K'awiil.

“Star Flower?” I ask with surprise. I haven’t seen her since I returned from Lake Turtle Macaw because, presumably, she has been with my son and avoiding my company. She now devotes herself entirely to the young king and accompanies him during his travels.

“*A win a ke na,*” she replies.

“You’ve betrayed me many times,” I say. “You’ve never been my life-companion. Since my menarche rite nearly one katun past, you’ve practiced black magic. 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. But that is no matter. 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 are nothing but the sorcerous of my husband’s bad seed. You are not worthy of even a curse. You have 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 until I 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,” he says as he takes Star Flower’s hand and leads her from the temple’s eastern door.

Chapter Twenty-six: Hillary

May – June 2005

Expedition to the Tomb of a Ruling Maya Queen

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

We first ride horses along dirt roads through pine and oak groves. Halfway down the mountain slope we enter the cloud forest with ferns, orchids, mosses, and bromeliads growing on tree branches and trunks. When we reach the rainforest of the valley floor, the vaqueros return to Todos Santos with their horses and our team forges through the unmarked jungle with the mules and muleteer trailing behind. In places, Luis and Julian resort to clearing our path with machetes. Of course, I'm using Bradley Nolan's machete to clear my path while picturing my virile great-great-grandfather forging his own way to the queen's tomb.

By late afternoon on day one, clouds begin to gather and soon thunder booms and lightning flashes. We hastily pitch our two tents beside a stream running through the dripping canopy of the rainforest. During the night, Chaac ceaselessly pelts the canvas roof of my tent where Monte and José Juan sleep on one side of the center pole and Frank and I on the other,

each in our own sleeping bags. Frank is now completely a man and the nonsense of Antigua is far from my mind. My thoughts exclusively entail what treasures we might discover in the tomb. So far, no one has said much about what lies ahead perhaps because no one wants to jinx the expedition by dreaming of possibilities and building up hopes. But in my mind, I have already gone way beyond this and am expecting to uncover priceless artifacts including the codex of Jaguar Blood Moon. Everything has gone so smoothly since I discovered Bradley's trunk that I feel like Mom and Daddy are looking out for me and I know they will not let me down.

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

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

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

"Ometeotl?" Frank asks, dealing himself another card.

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

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

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

"King to a Queen," Frank slaps down his cards.

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

“I take offense, Professor!”

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

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

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

At noon the sun appears and evaporates the wetness. We break camp and resume hacking through the jungle with Julian and Luis blazing our trail. The day’s humidity grows intense. In my protective REI cargo pants, a long-sleeved tee, a bandana around my neck, and Bradley Nolan’s safari hat, I’m sweating, constantly batting away mosquitoes, and closely watching my every step to avoid venomous snakes and ant hills. Leaf cutting ants are notorious in the region for stripping foliage and following their trails of pheromones. When seeing them, I think about the Polpol Vuh episode in the House of Knives where leaf cutting ants help the hero brothers outwit the Death Lords of Xibalba.

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

“Don’t move. Don’t swat,” Monte yells from ten feet away where he is sitting on a fallen log in the thick undergrowth. Zak-Kuk and the muleteer are nearby.

Frank shouts, “Soyez tranquil.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Monte quickly appears beside me and takes his own pictures.

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

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

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

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

May 23, 2005

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

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

Wearing diving shoes, shorts, and a J. Crew T-shirt over my swimsuit, I plunge underwater and feel warm and cool currents caress my body like veils of silk. When I resurface, I notice Frank is already at the waybil lighting his ceremonial fire and Monte and the students are

climbing out of the lake. It's somewhat disappointing that I'm not the first to arrive at the cave but I just don't have the stamina of a powerful man.

When we're all standing around the waybil, Frank tosses crystal resin into the flames and sprays a mouthful of aguardiente over the lineage altar where candles are burning on the remnants of old candle wax. Then he summons the queen's spirit with words I helped him write: "We honor you Jaguar Blood Moon, founder of your dynastic tree. We reestablish this ceremony at Lake Turtle Macaw to mark the date of your entombment. On this day of zenith passage, your Ta Ochle returns to announce your greatness to the world. Allow us to enter the cavern of your tomb. Do not curse us but guide us to your treasures and secrets."

After Frank completes the rite, all four men, like gentlemen, or at Frank's insistence, await at the cave entrance for me to enter first. With the morning light behind me, I uphold my lantern and walk down the declining path into the dwelling of Chaac and his daughter Ix Chel, keepers of the portal to Xibalba. I inhale the stuffy air. There's no breeze, no odor, no sound except for echoing drips of water. My heart flutters with each step. At any moment I'm expecting to see Maya kings, priests, and warriors dancing on the walls.

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

Everyone carefully surveys the cavern like detectives walking the grid at a crime scene searching for evidence that someone had previously been here, whether an ancient or modern

Maya, Conquistador, or Bradley M. Nolan himself. No one speaks or even sighs. The only noise is the seeping mineral water, our echoing footsteps, and the occasional scuttling of bats.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Maya weave. Todos Santos," Frank suggests.

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

I turn from Monte's light, shocked by this reality. I feel ridiculous about myself, my achievements, my goals. Was I misled? Have I misled everyone else in the process? I remain silent, finding no words to explain this mystery. "Dr. Vasquez," I finally utter. "Don't give up. I have money to search the forest around the lake. Perhaps this is the wrong cenote. Maybe there's another cavern nearby. We're destined to find something significant. The lost kingdom of the ruling Queen."

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

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

As if reading my thoughts, Frank steps up and exclaims, "Don't belittle our team leader, Professor Vasquez. When we head back is the lady's decision." He stands beside me, takes my

hand, and further shocks me when he says. “I am also frustrated, Señor, the Mexican man. My dreams of treasures and the codex seem foiled. But I respect our leader. It’s not her fault that the cavern contains nothing but the bones of a modern woman. Besides, I still hold out hope that the codex exists. I can’t believe the Almighty would forsake me now. No, I haven’t given up on a game I intend to win.”

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

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

By 11:15 AM, our team is sitting around the camp table drinking coffee while quietly awaiting the zenith sun to strike Lake Turtle Macaw. I suggest to everyone that perhaps another offshoot exists that hides the real tomb and treasures. “We really didn’t have enough time to thoroughly explore the entire cavern and I believe we’ll find something worthwhile this afternoon,” I say as optimistically as possibly.

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

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

About ten minutes to noon, Monte appears at the water’s edge prepared to take pictures. He sits on a boulder and looks through his camera but doesn’t seem to notice Frank and I skinny

dipping in the center of the lake. His camera is focused on the far shore where the Guatemalan students are taking pictures from behind the waybil.

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

At precisely noon, the tropical sun seems to stop directly overhead on its passage across the sky. Lord Sun's white light vertically falls on Frank and I. "A pillar from heaven is anointing us," Frank declares as we swim in the middle of the lake. "The sun hits the water and Ix Chel reveals her rainbow of colors!"

"I feel the warmth of Lord Sun and the embrace of Ix Chel," I say to Frank and slash him. "I have never felt so energized in my life."

"Yes, little sparrow. The gods bless us and we will certainly find the lost codex of your ancient queen. I become who I want to be!"

Before I can respond to Frank, 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. But I remain silent. "I don't believe there is a codex. Doctor Jacobs," he adds, 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 towel off and dress without him seeing me naked. I am humiliated. How can I possibly appease my academic host? I then ask myself if I even want him to stay. He has just shown his true self and he's not a man of stamina.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I’m truly sorry, Frank,” I tell him. “Everything you say is true. You’ve become everything to me.” I hesitate a moment, trying to rationalize why I kept the Brownie pictures from him. Then I think to say, “When I spread my parents’ ashes in the Seine during the Venus transit, I promised them I’d keep quiet about the contents of Bradley’s trunk until I made my discoveries. I vowed to make them proud and I didn’t want to jeopardize this by revealing too

much. To anyone. Don't you understand, Teddy Bear?" I touch his hand on the table and he doesn't push me away. Which is a good sign, I conclude. What I'm telling him is only partly true. I'm not really sure why I didn't reveal the Brownie pictures to him. Maybe deep inside he's been so mysterious, superstitious, and even irrational at times that I find it difficult to fully trust him. Or maybe I just wanted to keep the pictures secret for selfish reasons.

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

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

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

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

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

“I’ve always known,” Antonio tells Frank as he whittles a stick for one of his cages.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Antonio rides Thunder 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 us from taking pictures of the ceremony.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Soiled, exhausted, and elated, we tightly embrace. I want to hold him forever but the sun's position in the sky indicates it's time to leave and 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 because the excitement of discovery consumes my every thought. I didn't fail in my quest after all. I've found the codex.

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

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

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

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

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

In an instant, I understand that Frank, my one and only lover, my spiritual guide, my family, has duped me. He took the codex and pictures of the burial treasures, the evidence of my

heritage from Jaguar Blood Moon. After all my trials and failures, the Kodak pictures of the glyphs and Bradley's diaries are all I now possess. I have no treasure. No glory and fame. But why did Frank leave the second diary? I ask myself. Was it to give me at least some shred of heritage? Perhaps I'll never know because I'm quite certain that my 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.

Chapter Twenty-seven: Jade Moon 1 Rabbit

675 AD

The Entombment of Jaguar Blood Moon at Lake Turtle Macaw

Word quickly reaches the elderly King Pakal, that my brother Tul Til 5 Caiman has murdered my mother Jaguar Blood Moon. The king of Bone Dog tells his citizens that the queen has died from spirits of sickness sent by the Lords of Death because she dared to break the legacy of Hummingbird Sun and his alliance with the Kaloomte Yuknook.

When the wayob spirit Manik is the sixth lord of the night, my uncle Kan Xul sacks Bone Dog on a clandestine operation. Scar Dog warriors carry torches and patron god banners and effigies as they swarm the unprepared city. They upturn monuments, burn and hollow the temples, and capture the king. Kan Xul himself slits the throat of the sorceress Star Flower and embeds the flint knife in her heart.

In the tomb of Hummingbird Sun, Kan Xul finds the remains of my mother beside the king's stone **sarcophagus**. My uncle wraps her bones in a jaguar pelt and takes her to Lake

Turtle Macaw at the bottom of the western mountains. On the day Lord Sun casts no shadow, Roaring Sky Dance and I arrive for her entombment.

My uncle and his priests lead the rite inside the caverns edging the lake. While the priests sing, dance, and burn sacred fires, Second Son positions my mother upon a wall niche. Throughout the burial chamber he places treasures taken from the tomb of Hummingbird Sun and from the city Bone Dog. On the inner wall of the cave, scribes paint **a curse against those who are not Ta Ochle of my mother's lineage tree or who dare enter her tomb on a day other than when Lord Sun casts no shadow.**

In my mother's skeletal arms at her bosom, I place the book I wrote while in the palace of my mountain city. It marks the events of a warrior queen's life and records her words and stories. To preserve the pages for generations to come, Aj tz'ibil have soaked the folding bark pages in resin and cinnabar and wrapped it in a jaguar pelt.

"Jaguar Blood Moon is Lady of her Lineage Tree," the dancing priests sing. "Her resplendent soul travels to the highest heaven beyond the flowery stars and she ascends the stone jaguar throne. Queen Jaguar Blood Moon is founder of those sprouted from her tree. She is first lady of the world. Through her daughter's harvest she establishes her lineage. Each year on the date of her entombment, Ta Ochle will worship at her waybil altar 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.'"

After the rite, everyone exits the tomb and priests seal the entry knowing the sacred fires left burning will soon smolder out.

The sun is arching west of its zenith as Kan Xul stands at the edge of Lake Turtle Macaw and throws a jade bust of himself into placid waters. He calls to my mother's spirit to assure that

one day he will become king. Then my uncle and his warriors escort me and King Roaring Sky Dance back to Stone Mountain City Where All Gods Unite.

Chapter Twenty-eight: Hillary

2006

Curse of an Ancient Maya Queen

Monte hates me and Frank stole my treasures then fled. In Phoenix, I learn that ASU doesn't want to hire me. It seems that Monte has had 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. Who knows how far a curse can stretch? Whatever the case, I return to my childhood home in Chestnut Hill disheartened and try to piece together my life, once again.

Despite my **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 Bradley's diaries. The second diary reveals what happened to my great-great-grandmother Ix Chel. In 1904 Bradley's son Joseph Corazón fell sick with fever, diarrhea, and vomiting. Bradley tried to heal him with his medical skills. Perhaps bloodletting. With chants and divination, Grandfather Thunder sought to cure his grandson and the shaman's 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, Bradley and Ix Chel trekked to Lake Turtle Macaw on a date other than the solar passage at zenith. They performed a ceremony at the waybil and called upon the ancient queen to cure their son.

On their way back 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 hell and killed my great-great-grandmother with a snake's poison.

Bradly carried his wife back to the ancient queen's tomb, laid 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 ever really 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 must have decided that 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 as bargaining chips that he would return with** the last lineage heir of Jaguar Blood Moon. My great-grandfather Joseph Corazón was born to lead a rite at her 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.

Within a year of returning to Philly, it seems that Bradly died and his sister Myriam and her husband Isaiah Waldman adopted Joseph. 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?

Chapter Twenty-nine: The Codex of Jaguar Blood Moon

as transcribed by Hillary JoAnne Jacobs

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, the soul of heaven, Yol Tan, in the place of the Primordial Sea of Fire, K'ak-Nab. Her mother was Ix Tunsel, Lady Star of Creation. Her father was Ajaw K'inich Janaab Pakal of Abundant Waters under the Jaguar Kingdom of Ajaw Quetzal Jaguar.

It is said when Holy Lady Jaguar Blood Moon touched Earth, the roar of Waterlily Jaguar shook the world with a vision of the road to heaven.

On the seating of her 15th tuun, she wed Ajaw Tz'unun K'inich (Hummingbird sun), vassal king of Bak Tz'ul (Bone Dog). Our Great Holy Lady provided her king with his lineage heir, his b'aah ch'ok Tul Til 5 Caiman.

At the seating of her first katun, she gave to the world a daughter named Jade Moon 1 Rabbit whose father was Yax K'uh, nacom of King Pakal. Yax K'uh led the siege on Bone Dog but the Kaan warriors of Yuknoom took him captive. Hummingbird Sun sacrificed Yax K'uh

and his soul flew to heaven one winal after our Holy Lady gave harvest to his daughter Jade Moon.

When Hummingbird Sun traveled the dark road of no return, our Holy Lady 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.

Section Two:

Venus Transit at the founder's temple of Yax Mutul
The meeting of Red Fire Macaw and Lord Sun

On the date 9 baktun 11 katun 16 tun 15 uinal 2 kin (15 May 669 AD) our Holy Lady led an entrada to Yax Mutul for the meeting of Red Fire Macaw and Lord Sun. She conjured two divine queens who directed Our Lady to pick up the flint and wage war against the Kaan.

Our Holy Lady 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 Three:

K'a-yi u sak nik ik'-li
Our Holy Lady enters the rainbow road

She sat in her lordship five tuuns (669 AD to 673 AD) until the son of her harvest took the throne with the regnal name Kakal Ichak Mol, Fiery Jaguar Paw. Our Holy Lady severed the bloodline with her son because he allied with the Kaan and terminated the resplendent flowery soul of Our Holy Lady.

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 daughter of Our Holy Lady saw to her

entombment. On the day Our Holy Lady enters the rainbow road with her flint shield raised, Itzam-yeh (the Celestial Bird) broke clear of the east to frame the brightest section of the Milky Way Tree, Waterlily Jaguar danced, and Ix Chel left the caverns of Earth to have union with her brother the Sun.

Section Four:

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 root sprouts of her Tree. Through them she continues to live and rule. K'awiil Smoking Axe initiates Ta Ochle, the bloodline heir who "enters the tree" and becomes guardian of Our Lady's Tree and keeper of the book she bears upon her chest.

Her beloved daughter is first keeper of tree. Each year on the date her spirit departed, Ta Ochle worship her at her waybill and cast away demons and conjure good spirits to receive bounteous harvest from "She who Sustains Our World." Our Holy Lady will eternally rule at the Place where the 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 the itz k'uh, the essence of life
- Unburden the spirit of impurities
- Receive K'awiil and pray:

Lord Sky Kawiil, divine keeper of the sacred lineage, guardian of the scepter and bloodline, awaken revelations, the source of itz k'uh, holy essence

She of many battles pleases many gods. When Ta Ochle honor Our Holy Lady at her tomb, she summons B'a Ajaw, First Father to oversee the milpas. She invokes Chaac to make

possible the harvest. Chaac Ek Xux Ek to declare war and speak of omens. She calls upon Lord Sun, the Goddess of Rainbows and the Moon, of Fertility and Posterity. She calls to the Heart of Sky beyond Ek' way-nal and she calls upon Blood Moon Xquiq, and Grandmother Xmucane, First Mother on Earth. Mother of Maize God Reborn.

Section Five:
Curse of the Maya Queen

To those unholy who have not “entered the tree” but dare enter my tomb not when the zenith sun marks my flight to heaven, 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, will 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 along whatever road you travel.

Chapter Thirty: Frank

Mexico City, DF, New Year's Day, 2006

Seven months have passed since I nabbed the codex and Brownie pictures as Hillary snored in her sleep. I left her the diary. It was the least I could do for my delicate little flower. But I required the codex, the treasure I've always been after.

I smuggled it from Guatemala to Paris where experts deciphered the message from a set of pictures I took. **The ancient glyphs did not hold secrets about becoming a god of duality, as I had hoped it would. Hillary's “lost codex” failed to cure the pain I've suffered since my**

mother's brutal murder. It did not make me complete, in mind, body, and spirit. But as I like to quip *God may be first, but cash is the bottom line.* In Paris, my fence led me to a Chinese collector who believed the codex prophesized the end of the world and I received enough Euros to maintain my "downtime" lifestyle for a very long while.

These days, I'm living alone in DF. Long ago I sent Anita back to her village. The whore complained too much. I don't miss her. In fact, because of my preoccupation with the codex, I haven't thought about having a woman or a man since before I left for Paris. My bank accounts may be fat, but lately I've been growing restless, irritable, and dissatisfied. I hunger for the thrill of the game in my hunt for the holy grail, the ultimate power of my being. Or, another treasure of great value and worth.

On the Internet I've located Professor Hillary Jacobs. She now teaches astronomy at Mesa Community College in Arizona. I want her back. She brought legitimacy and credibility to my life, attributes I've rarely experienced. My previous women have always been whores and Hillary is anything but that. I am missing my little sparrow, her intelligence, her clumsiness, her very manner of being. She gave me the sort of praise that crooks never give one another. **I need her because the gods chose her as guardian of an ancient queen's bloodline. It is Hillary, not the codex, who possesses the power to help me in my ultimate transformation. I must now leave my deepening winter life and find summer again. I must lure Hillary back into my arms and bring her into my world. She and I are destined to fully become.**

Chapter Thirty-one: Hillary

March, 2006

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 am 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 am sitting in the crowded student union at MCC and mentoring a student who is 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 are burying our heads in azimuth measurements on the student's laptop.

To let my eyes rest for a moment, I look up and scan the large cafeteria hall. Beyond noisy students at many tables, I notice a large blond woman drinking a soda at the food counter. She is a sight that stands out. The strange woman is wearing a turquoise sweater and a 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 and 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 because I am causing a scene, a farce out of Shakespeare. Some of the onlookers are my students. I grab François 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.

Frank claims he never stole the codex and never abandoned me at the homestead. “The Guatemalan police apprehended me and took the ancient book,” he swears. “They held me prisoner.” He lights a Camel then quickly stamps it out on the side of his chair. He knows I don’t like cigarette smoke.

“Then why didn’t they arrest me?” I ask. My hands folded on my desk. “Why not take the entire copper case? Your story doesn’t fit together. Mademoiselle-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 or they would kill me.”

“That sounds so unlikely.” My thumbs are twitching.

“You don’t know the Guatemalan police! They have a vendetta against me. It’s all true. I swear, 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.”

“But 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 crooked. 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.** Only together can we become what we are meant to be.”

I lean on my chair and wonder *Is he deceiving me? Again? Or does he confess the beating of his 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 yesterday. A deep void consumed my heart and then I would start missing Frank.**

“Look,” Frank shows me a sepia photo of the queen’s jade funeral mask. I reach over the desk and take hold of it. “I have the rest of Bradley’s pictures at my apartment in Antigua,” he says.

“You did pilfer them from me!” I stand from my chair.

“No, from the police. Back in Guatemala City, I easily bribed them and they let me go. Then as I left the jailhouse, I retrieved the envelop of photos sitting on an officer’s desk. Child’s play. But the police had locked away the codex.”

I want to believe him because I’m drawn to him, even now as he sits before me dressed like a clown wearing makeup and red heels. A wig. Painted nails. Carrying a purse. François looks like an old cougar on the prowl for a young man.

“Why are you here dressed as a woman? 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.

“Entonces, Doctor,” Frank says to me. “I have a new Land Rover Range Rover. From the DF, we’ll 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, alone before all the gods. Only you can help me in my quest to transform." 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 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.

"Spring break is next week," Frank continues, his 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 is not what you want, Little Sparrow. You want to transform into something powerful and complete. Avec moi."

"And what is a penumbra?" I playfully ask, taking on my role as teacher and advisor probing the mind of my student.

"During an eclipse the Earth casts its shadow on the Moon. The umbra is the darkest part of the shadow. The fuzzy edges are the penumbra," he says in a feminine way.

"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. I stare at him for a moment, smile, and slightly shake my head knowing I'll make the trip despite Frank's current frivolity. I do not like him this way. As a woman. It seems pure nonsense. But I accept him because I've never stopped loving his spirit, 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. **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, now I'm convinced that only Frank can restore my heart and spirit and end the dreadful curse of the Maya queen.

Chapter Thirty-two: Hillary

March 14, 2006

Penumbral Lunar Eclipse

Frank meets me at Mexico City's International Airport and 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 the states of 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 which leaves me to 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 am exhausted.

The next day, we walk around the grounds of the 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 a gold stud. He has traces 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 is smoking and reading *l'Officiel*. I'm reading 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.

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. "For my becoming. He's waiting to lead me through Ek' way-nal and then see to my return."

"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? Frank! We made love last night. You as a man and me as a woman. It was our third time and that's all right with me. As long as you want me. Do you want me?"

"I want us to entwine and reach the thirteenth heaven 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.

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.

In the dwindling light of day and the thick tropical swelter, I climb one-hundred-twenty steps up Nohoch Mul, pacing myself ahead of Frank who carries a hefty backpack for our marriage rite and picknick.

On the stone platform on top, as encroaching darkness surrounds us, Frank spreads out a serape blanket and sets out a bottle of wine, cups, cheese, crackers, a pichacha, and an obsidian knife with an intricate face of Chaac. He tells me it's a relic from the Copan jungles.

"What's it for?" I ask. "Are you actually going to blood-let?"

"You'll see as the eclipse unfolds," Frank replies as he 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 from the Brownie pictures and it occurs to me that it's a copy of a modern picture of the original codex.

"You did pilfer my codex!" I exclaim.

"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." He pours me a cup of wine and makes a toast, presumably to change the topic. "To us becoming under the lunar eclipse," he says. "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 the Earth hiding the Moon from the Sun.

Frank takes from his knapsack his prayer beads and a small baggie of cocaine. He lights copal incense in his pichacha.

"I won't take any drugs," I declare, already feeling woozy from the wine, a reminder I'm petite and cannot drink much alcohol.

Frank says nothing.

I eat a cracker with brie, sit back, inhale the moist fragrance of jungle and Frank's Versace cologne. I loosen up and tell Frank the family secret my mother revealed at my bat

mitzvah. I've never spoken about it since that night on February 26, 1991. "My world slipped away from under my feet that year. I lost my granddad, my father, and my God. I thought the whole matter had died with my parents but now I want to reveal all my secrets before we join in union. I don't know and never will know my biological father. I'm only half known."

"But you have Maya blood. You are umpteenth great granddaughter of a ruling Maya queen." He holds up his mother's beads and silently prays, moving his lips. He then says aloud, "I've spent my life controlling and manipulating others for money and riches. All the while I've been seeking revenge for my mother's murder when I was five. Hillary, I lived 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. I pulled myself from the gutters and used the tricks of the trade to establish a global empire."

Astonished by what he's revealing to me, a story that certainly tops mine, all I can utter is, "Monsieur Guillemont?" My exotic lover has become far more complex and mysterious than I ever imagined. Far more intriguing, in many ways. Far more connected with me. **We both have amazing secrets to share.**

When the Earth's penumbral shadow completely shades the otherwise glowing full moon, Frank tenderly touches my face in the dim light and takes my hand. "God is the top line, mon amour, the bottom line is cash. That is my sweetest revenge. That 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 blood let and unite with you under the eclipse moon."

"You're scaring me Frank," I admit, sipping my wine, awed by his energy. I can't help but **believe that Frank will open the doors of heaven, beyond the domain of stars, and that I will forever change. And this scares me because 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. “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 rolls a quetzal note and snorts a line of cocaine, inhales, then carefully clears the serape blanket and ushers me to lie down with him. “We make love,” he says.

“You’re too wound up, too high,” I exclaim with concern as Frank undresses. “Tumbling around on the pyramid is dangerous.”

“Where else does romance become spiritual and otherworldly? Atop a pyramid under the eyes of heaven is the perfect place to unite and become.”

With hefty gasps, he takes me quickly. I smell his strong breath, his sweaty fervor, and I feel his heart loudly pump. Do I really love this unhinged man? My mind questions as he is resting beside me, catching his breath, and calming his beating heart.

Suddenly, Frank leaps up and faces the moon. He’s stark naked but 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 jaguars, rattlesnakes, and harpy eagles eating human hearts. He raises his arms above his head, spreads his fingers, and shouts to the Moon, “I’m ready to enter the portal to Heaven or Hell. Hear my plea, Ometeotl. Teotl. By teotl. From teotl. The spirit constantly becomes and 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 rush of concern. Until now I haven’t thought of Frank as a mad-man who could murder me and commit suicide. But now he appears crazed from drugs and capable of doing anything.

“Trust me,” Frank says, seemingly detecting my fears. Then, 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. “Now you must nick your tongue, Little Sparrow.”

“No. I don’t want to,” I say and back away from him.

“Just a nick, for the ceremony. Enough to mix our blood together on the picture of gods.” He takes the knife and convinces me to let him prick my tongue. He draws droplets of blood which he smears on the glyphs of gods. He then raises the obsidian knife to the sky.

“Repeat after me,” he says. **“I have many naguals because I was born when Blood Moon covered the face of Lord Sun. I’m descendant 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 realize as I repeat after Frank who seems to know the words by heart. But it suddenly doesn’t matter what he stole from me. He is the one person I love most in life, everyone else is gone. Frank, my wayob dancing companion, makes me shudder with awe. I surrender myself to him and trust him to lead me to the place beyond the five senses.

On his pichacha, Frank places the blood splattered page of god glyphs. “The essence of itz k’uh and teotl unite us,” he says. “Together I burn our blood on the faces of many gods.” Before the paper takes fire, a sudden breeze swoops the page into the air and it flutters away like a bird.

“He takes my offering!” Frank exclaims. “Chaac rewards me for my efforts.” He reaches toward the Milky Way. “I have become that what I am, from one to another I become.”

Suddenly, I hear a thump and see Frank pounding his chest. “I hear the voice of God,” he yells and gazes at me. **“Because you are a woman. You have become the chosen guardian.”**

His eyes roll back, he holds his chest, then he drops to his knees and grabs my arm to stop his collapse, ripping my T-shirt collar. But I cannot keep him from tumbling down the steep long pyramid steps.

I jump to my feet and watch in shock. “Frank,” I scream and carefully descend the incongruous steps alit by the moon and artificial lights. I stop halfway down Nohoch Mul where he lies naked and contorted. Not a man or a woman. His eyes are wide open and he has a somber expression. *Is he seeing God?* is my only thought. When I come to my senses I feel his carotid artery and confirm that he’s dead.

I feel panicked and unable to do anything but tenderly touch his face and close his eyes. **Then I** return to the top of Nohoch Mul and gather whatever I can of 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.

As I slowly descend the long pyramid, counting each of the one-hundred-twenty steps, my thoughts are in a hazy place in the penumbral shadows. Am I committing a crime? I ask myself. Abandoning a body? Will police find some kind of evidence that will incriminate me in 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 Bradley’s Brownie pictures so I have proof that there was a treasure in the queen’s tomb and that I am not a fraud or a manic pipe

dreamer. Perhaps, if I'm lucky, I'll find the codex itself hidden in Frank's apartment. 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 really make sense. Nor does his story about the police abducting him at Antonio's homestead in Todos Santos. It's all simply too preposterous.

I pull out of Coba and frantically drive Frank's Land Rover over 700 miles to Antigua, zig zagging through Belize. Frank's car has all the necessary border permits and a GPS device and I don't encounter any problems reaching Frank's apartment. However, 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 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 then drive around the city looking for coffee and something to eat. As I pass by the central park, I see Pablo and instantly decide 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. Because Pablo is a street urchin he 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 and even after I doze off, I dream about Frank tumbling down the pyramid and 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 watching a telenovela. Knowing that he is warm, safe, clean, and his belly is full makes me happy and I almost forget about the trauma I've so recently endured.

Suddenly, someone pounds on the front door and I nearly stumble down the stairs.

"Policia Nationale. Abre la Puerta," I hear a man yelling before the door bursts open and five national policemen storm-in, all 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, the police cuff me and begin ransacking the apartment.

Chapter Thirty-three: Hillary

March 22, 2006

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 up on the steel cot. The sun is flickering into the dank prison cell where exhaust fumes are sparing with the toilet vapors. It reeks of hell. In neighboring cells, women are snoring and outside the prison firecrackers suddenly snap in rapid succession to mark a religious holiday or someone's birthday.

Under the gray cardigan, I'm still wearing the J. Crew T-shirt torn and spotted with Frank's blood from the rite on Nohoch Mul during the penumbral lunar eclipse. Five days have passed and my tongue still itches from the piercing. I lean against the cracked concrete wall scribbled with dates, Guatemalan names, Spanish obscenities, and I wonder how long I'll be lingering in the Prison de Mujeres. I don't know if they'll 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. No one waits for me on the outside 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 had filched from a careless tourist. He claimed I looked well. *Muy bonita, Señorita* he said, but I can feel my swollen face and my eyes are certainly red.

I think about Frank lying on the steps of Nohoch Mul, wanting to transform into the god of all being. Did he become a hero god or a Xibalban who now plays in the ballcourt of Hell? I wonder. Or did he die a noble death of sacrifice? And what has become of his body? When I fled Nohoch Mul, the yellow Labrador was nowhere in sight. Did Frank's nagual fulfill its mission and take him to Heaven or Hell? Both places exist on earth.

I stand from the cot and begin pacing the cell while images of Frank flitter in and out of my mind like butterflies on La Ruta Puuc.

“The nagual of Quetzalcoatl is a coyote!” I say aloud as if to wake up the world.

“Tezcatlipoca is a son of Ometeotl. He protects the nagual. I have many nagual forms 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!*”

It becomes quiet. Sleep is a great comfort in prison.

My stomach growls from hunger and 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 to me. But now I’m grateful to eat anything other than what a trustee brings 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. Now I have no codex from an ancient Maya queen. Instead, she has cursed me and the Lords of Death will soon take me to Hell. I write these words by the will of the god who is man and woman.

My mind explodes with unrestrained thought. I shake the gold Cross pen and consider what to write. I feel like 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 am 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 hell. Its branches reach beyond the misty stars of the Milky Way into the highest level of Heaven where the god of duality reigns. Itzam-yeh perches in the topmost branches of the Maya Tree. He keeps all secrets known to Heaven, Earth, and Hell from all time before me and after the present sun. The present world changes. God shakes the rug and chooses me to pass on the secrets of Itzam-yeh.

Footsteps echo down the corridor. I quickly hide my pen and paper under the cot because 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 robes, he looms behind a desk podium. My body shakes when 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 I needed for an expedition that failed. Why would I? I'm hardly a criminal.

I look at the alluring face of el Juez. His brass nameplate says *Jorge Fuentes Cabrea*.

A bailiff sits at a lower desk beside the 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?

El Juez glares at me and I feel humbled and confused. What has happened to me? What have I become? Am I violated? Do I not keep the secrets of this world?

He raps his gavel and says, "*Por fa vor. Señorita. El frances?*"

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 and I wonder if I'll remember the story I just contrived or the story of an ancient ruling queen.

"You were in his apartment?" Juez Cabrea interrupts my thoughts.

“Yes, your Honor,” I say, certain now that the police apprehended me for the murder of Frank. “*Por favor*. Let me tell my story.” I explain in my best Spanish that Frank and I had struggled with supernatural forces on top of Nohoch Mul. “He ordained me Guardian of the Fifth Sun when we transformed ourselves. Then he died of a heart attack.”

The judge looks closely at me. “You have perplexing blue eyes,” he says commandingly in his deep voice. “Have the guards slipped you drugs for a few quetzales? I’ve been on the bench twenty-five years and I’ve sentenced many gringos but yours is an interesting case and I have no hearing scheduled until after lunch. I will indulge you. Now, 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 heaven and fully become both a man and a woman.”

“Ay, ay, ay. You aren’t going anywhere gringa unless you cooperate!” Señor Cabrea grabs my attention.

“*Si, si*. Your Honor.” I nod. My neck is sweating. Why am I so anxious? I ask myself. And why doesn’t the judge get on with the extradition proceedings? If this is what’s going on. I am an innocent victim, a woman in love, not a criminal. I live in a confusing world with a lot of confused people in it. Then I remind myself that it doesn’t matter where I go or what’s done to me. I have no choice in my destiny nor did my ancestors since the time of Jaguar Blood Moon. Frank knew this all along. Not until he died, did **I understand that the ancients prophesized our entangled fates and 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.**

My head bursts with uncontrolled and swirling snake visions. But one thought stands steady. I still love Frank, a man who soared high in life, despite or because of the tragic pain from his childhood. 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.

Juez Jorge raps his gavel and bellows, "Our police know Señor Guillemont and notice when he's gone. Lately, he is away. Police have his apartment under surveillance for smuggling antiquities and other sordid crimes. When informers report a woman arrives with a Guatemalan street boy, our police investigate."

Did Frank double-cross a police chief on his payroll? I'm wondering. Perhaps the judge as well. After all, Frank double-crossed me. Are they all cross-dressers? But how can I disparage Frank? He was my lover and guide to the spiritual world. He ordained me as Guardian of Life.

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 the Mayas. Of the people of Guatemala. Why do you carry it? We have stiff penalties for looters of our heritage."

I remember grabbing the knife when I gathered things on top of Nohoch Mul. I thought it might become incriminating evidence if I left it behind. The knife bears my fingerprints and Frank's blood. My blood.

"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 are 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 drogas. 300 dollars for possession of a stolen relic.”

I gladly pay the fine and 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 man for dead and ended up in a Guatemalan prison during spring break?

Now I truly feel blackballed. But after the Magistrate frees 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 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 Bradley Nolan’s diaries.

While I am staying at Frank’s apartment, 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. But I don’t think his origins were the best times of his life. It was simply where he began 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 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 decided to return to Bradly's Yellow Victorian in Chestnut Hill but 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 because 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. When I'm 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'm back in 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 and the legacy of Bradly Nolan will support Pablo and I 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 *Keep box of Secrets*. I'm not sure. But my main focus is on raising Pablo with nurturing instruction that will guide him into 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 and beyond the highest branches of the Maya Tree.