

Sun on the Rocks – The Marble Toucan.

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ABOUT **Sun on the Rocks**:

It's a breezy humor read for adults, specializing in the trivial pursuit. These pleasant fictional amusements with an overtone of humor, follow the adventures of several non competitive good looking women over twenty one years of age, as they become a group of synchronised swimming aquanauts, '*Sun on the Rocks*', on the cruiseship *City of Wellington*, a post-panamax which carries out short trips between Los Angeles and Acapulco in Mexico. The motley crew of women works as a group of entertaining amateurs and as friendly hostesses on the ship, and is led to various places in the Caribbean and elsewhere by the incombustible twenty five year old Stevenson Garden Products Malibu teleoperator **Clarity Nice**, a woman of resourceful intuition, and acute observer of the laws of human mischief.

The Marble Toucan: Teleoperator Clarity Nice and her friend ethnographer Flower Parkwood, reach the picturesque village of *Miradorcito* in the state of Campeche in Mexico. Brought to Campeche in a colorful guagua after a brief vacation in Cancun following the exposure of alcohol traffic in the British Virgin Islands (The Sugar Baby), Clarity works alongside Flower in an archaeological site to make some pocket money, using Flower's '*permiso de arqueologia*', an observation and archaeological dig permit granted by Flower's boss, Egyptian egyptologist Akhris Zephairi. Zephairi's *Alabastriah Foundation*, funded by the Museum of Cairo, and its partner, a shady real estate development company from Belize, Mangrove Barrier Resorts, are looking for new areas to dig in Miradorcito, and are out to invest a pile of cash.

In agreement with Zephairi, the man behind the strategy to throw out of the village all the inhabitants of Miradorcito, the head of the real estate company, his accomplice Lever Fahibian, makes an offer to the elderly head of the village, Ms. Morales, to buy the land of her ancestors, in order to let Zephairi seek an obscure assortment of Mayan ruins buried under Miradorcito for centuries. Using a local authorization from the governor of Campeche, which grants Zephairi a permit to dig under Miradorcito, the egyptologist razes part of the village, insisting on building on the village site a gambling resort similar to those found in Belize. Backed by Zephairi, Fahibian uses the permit granted to build a Mayan historical village along the gambling resort, that will bring new tourist business to the area. Ms Morales can count on no one except Clarity and a toucan which has been passed on by her ancestors, to save the village from the jaws of Zephairi, who wants ownership of Miradorcito's land as a source of revenue for the Museum of Cairo, and has agreed with local politicians to get the traditional Mexican village relocated to Egypt.

BACKSTORIES AND CHARACTERS

TO READ THE AMUSEMENT COMFORTABLY

Buddha Talk: Corpulent, shady genius of circular money flows, scholar of sexual ecstasy, occasional Buddhist and worshipper of a lobster shrine for good Karma, Buddha Talk is banking agent and the heir apparent of *Lofty Bank*, a *Cayman Islands banking institution* with no particular regard for its clients and a lock on ownership held by a Great Dane, *Lord Moorehead III*, British by upbringing and inheritance granted by Lord Moorehead II, a man, old, very old, and dead now, at age ninety seven, previous British Lord, owner of Lofty Bank, who gave all of its wealth and bank ownership rights to his dog. Lord Moorehead acts as front 'man' for Buddha Talk, and is also the official recipient of all bank notices by the monetary authority, a convenient fact for Buddha Talk, and one bark that doesn't cease to surprise the monetary authority who casts a recurring shadow of doubt upon the legalities of having a dog act as front 'man' and official owner of a Bank doing business in the British Overseas Territory located in the Western Caribbean Sea, a pleasant area to live when the money and work issues are solved.

Clarity and Flower, after gaining entry as investors to the bank with the help of Clark, the owner of a diamond shop in Grand Cayman, find themselves owing nearly one hundred thousand dollars to the Lofty Bank outfit for no reason, a debt they can pay by working for the bank for fifty years, as part of the bank's flagship product, *the Crashworthy Deposit*, part bank deposit paying twenty percent, part investment, part insurance policy, and part working arrangement. Lofty has ties with the underworld, and the monetary authority of the Cayman Islands stubbornly refuses to grant it a renewal of its license, something that

doesn't stop the bank from operating in the most illegal manner, advertising its products to potential investors on an air banner carried by a Gippland 200 crop duster flying low on Caribbean and tropical beaches such as those of Cayman, British Virgin Islands, Bahamas and Acapulco. This is all documented in **The Cayman Air Banner**.

Boustrophedon: Large, ancient grey stone inscription filled with Greek letter symbols. In a boustrophedon, letters are inversed; you have to read the inscriptions on the stone from left to right and from right to left alternatively with each line of bi-directional text. Penelope Avalon and Cassandra Scafarel believe that the Boustrophedon holds important information on ancient methods of pleasure, including comments and thoughts on the gate of pleasure, Voluptas de Naturas. The current location of the Boustrophedon that Clarity and her friend Lanai saw at Scafarel's **Hexas Style Resort** in the Bahamas, is unknown to Clarity, known to:

Cassandra Scafarel: Shrewd British expatriate, businesswoman in her forties without a moral code or compass, executive head of beauty lotion outfit 'Elony', sold through illegal flight infomercials with the assistance of Lofty Bank. The infomercial is an excuse to sell to customers, mostly affluent women, Elony's personal growth services, which include how to bring heaven a little closer to home, after doing away with money, in particular fifty thousand dollars that must be paid for a bottle of Elony, in order to receive a resort-pass to reach the Leisure and Pleasure Resort of Scafarel, the **Hexas Style Resort** in the Bahamas island of Eleuthera.

Hexas Style was partly dismantled in **The Bahamas Lotion**, by Al Donway and the **Sensual Brigade of Central Intelligence**, a group of attractive women ensuring Law and Order are respected, along with their

bodies. The Brigade's most representative member is agent **Money Fact**, the woman who introduced Clarity to the nine hour oil-optional massage, proof that work is not a necessary part of life. Money Fact excels at action, mentoring and faulty logic. After a decidedly last minute and decisive intervention from Sensual Intelligence at Hexas Style, Scafarel manages to flee from the Bahamas resort on her private yacht, with the Boustrophedon, but without some secrets regarding pleasure, including the:

Imperial Pelican Fabergé Egg: Intricate egg, or jewel, depending on how hungry you are, eight inches high, made of varicolored gold, opalescent blue enamel and watercolor on ivory. It is known as the *Xenia Imperial Pelican Fabergé egg*, and belongs to the *Private Collection of Maria Feodorovna, Empress Consort of Russia in 1898*. The egg, commissioned by Maria Feodorovna to provide, handle and store, all of her private items of pleasure, went through the hands of Occidental Petroleum tycoon Armand Hammer, an art collector with close ties to the ex-Soviet Union, and has now fallen into the hands of Cassandra Scafarel, a woman who stops at nothing to understand how pleasure works, in particular how the pleasure of a woman works, including her own. The Pelican Fabergé egg, eight inches high, is hollow, and unfolds into eight miniatures, holding what's known in Fabergé egg language, as the surprise inside, a time-tested item of pleasure for the woman, the Jade Egg, a small two inch in diameter jade egg that must be boiled before each intimate, feminine use. Owned by Cassandra Scafarel, requisitioned by the Sensual Brigade of Central Intelligence for examination.

Penelope Avalon: Sex Goddess and Go-Go girl from Las Vegas, dressed in a pink suit, user of the learjet '*Pink Go-Go*' appropriately painted in pink. Penelope has had enough of living the plastic pleasure style of Las Vegas

showgirls, and finds in the outfit of Cassandra Scafarel, the Bahamas Hexas Style Resort, a way out of Hotel California. Penelope likes attractive women unclothed, and would like to do Clarity, because she's nice.

The Symbolic Decryptor: Thai alphabet gadget similar to a smartphone or Blackberry, which can be used as cell phone, useful for understanding all types of characters and symbols, made in VLE mode (Very Limited Edition, less than ten made worldwide) by the mysterious Oriental company known as **Pentatone Scale Learning Systems.**

The item, the gadget, looks like a Blackberry with keyboard, with 36 Thai character keys, doubled with the shift key, for a total of 72, instead of the 26 of the Western alphabet, and its keys are made of hard, white color plastic, similar to the color casing of the Kindle 2, cast against a grey background and a backlit screen. The decryptor can also be used as indicator of calligraphy, as mantra tone guide and geo-locator, using the Global Positioning System to calculate the coordinates of any location worldwide.

Penelope Avalon received one of these decryptors from Lady Scafarel, after completing work on heaven, according to Scafarel's personal growth system, and Clarity would like to keep the item as souvenir, although Money Fact disagrees and is holding custody of the device for strategic and Intelligence reasons. Sure, she likes the nifty item, that's all, and she likes to subtly let Clarity know that she's the boss of Sensual Intelligence.

Book of Decadence: Book written on the topic by the unknown hedonist, a small print manifesto of deep thought with illustrations of ancient goddesses with lion bodies in bronze, and a mosaic of Byzantine nuns, used by Penelope Avalon and the Hexas Style Hedonist Resort in the Bahamas, on how to let go of the encumbrance of work, and dedicate your time, well spent, according to the

book, to leisure, pleasure, et. al. Book clearly advises on the pitfalls of decadence and purportedly how to avoid them.

Telval Studios: Adult Film production unit of the Church of the Holy Flower, led by Cassandra Scafarel, including the film '*Abu Dhabi Chic*', a remake of Andrew Blake's '*Paris Chic*' shown to Clarity and her friends during the unfolding of **The Adult Channel** at the Park Hyatt in Abu Dhabi. Telval produces adult films unlike any other, films like '*Embroidered Air Avenue*', engaging beautiful women in sultry positions and scenes for hours, revealing an oriental connection to the films' choreographies and to the symbolic decryptor, and including codes for women within the films to get inside the Church of the Holy Flower. This includes a keyword of the Book of Decadence, the word **Rosebud**, a mysterious codeword for the Church of the Holy Flower that Clarity seeks to clarify.

The adult films are distributed in large hotel chains worldwide and come with a special remote control for the hotel's adult channel, which makes the films interactive and allows eight digit bank transfers with Telval as beneficiary, to be done remotely. One of the remotes holds an important detail on heaven, as envisioned by Scafarel on earth, with indications provided by the eight miniatures of her Imperial Pelican Fabergé Egg.

The Air Fashion Jet of Owens & Owell: Double deck plane with four engines, a copy of the Airbus 380, refurbished with all kinds of luxuries, from a Jacuzzi to an Indian ritual area for the users of the plane, to a permanent television channel showing fashion shows happening throughout the world. The jet, built in Saudi Arabia, is used by board members and members of the executive committee of the conglomerate Owens & Owell, and by the two rebellious daughters of the main owners, who got married to each other during

The OOL Broderie (Owens & Owell Love Broderie), Shalia Owell, twenty three, and Jenny Owens, twenty two. Shalia Owell and Jenny Owens are two good looking college students studying human sexuality at University of Arizona. They hold Board seats on the Board of Directors of O&O, but the members of the company's executive committee oppose their presence on the Board, after they give a power of attorney to Cassandra Scafarel, the woman who led them to their marriage and wants access to the money of O&O by replacing the two women on their board seat. Scafarel's *Church of the Holy Flower*, includes its very own holy flower, the *Rose of Levity*, a real flower, one of the most expensive in the world, a gold of kina balu rose, a variation on a Mrs. Herbert Stevens Rose.

The Bellagio Center for Underground Strategic and Symbolic Affairs: Located below the Bellagio resort in Las Vegas, the Center of Surveillance of U.S. interests is headed by Colonel Calton Brayfield and her assistant, ex-employee of facebook, Mandy Everglade. The Center's ever present maintenance issues with the elevator leading to the Bellagio, which interferes with the fountains of the resort, are handled by repairman Morgan Afterflow, a man who knows how to swing his red, adjustable pipe wrench in any situation. His side job is to work for the Chinese government as a spy, providing any information that will pay him fifteen dollars an hour more than his current hourly pay at the center, forty five dollars an hour.

The center uses a supercomputer with a quite human consciousness, *Evans*, whose brain is built according to complex algorithms of symbolic logic, which can perform complex social data analytics on millions of people. *Evans*, which refuses to be used dishonestly, reveals the source of this devious use of his super computing ability in **The Bellagio Wikileaks**. Knowing that Bradfield and

Afterflow want it thrown into the scrapyard after refusing to perform simple calculations for them or those who want to lease its computing services, the consciousness of *Evans* reaches a Symbolic Decryptor that Clarity takes away from the center's equipment supplies, and becomes a permanent part of Clarity's gadget, escaping the enslavement of the surveillance center, but becoming part of a stolen gadget belonging to the U.S. government with many features unknown to Clarity or Evans.

Mista Jack: Money changer from the British Virgin Islands, advisor to Cuban Colonel Swarez and the Cuban government in **The Cuban Renegade**, Mista Jack is a dwarf wearing a black Duffield hat, and an ex-assistant of Cubandor with connections at the Bellagio. The short but resourceful man is responsible for stealing one million dollars worth of Federal Reserve bonds that were used on behalf of Cubandor to pay Buddha Talk, in exchange for Lady Fortuna minted gold bar. These bonds, that Clarity and Flower used to leave Cayman, have been giving Clarity a headache, because they were stolen, and Sensual Intelligence has been accusing Clarity and Flower, and also Cubandor, of stealing the bonds and paying Lady Fortuna with stolen U.S. government debt. No one knows how Mista Jack broke into the New York Fed's vault to find the bonds. As a result of the stolen bonds, Clarity and Cubandor lost their U.S. passport, becoming citizens without a country, owning the passport of the Monteviena cigar plantation, a micronation in Cuba which includes Cuba's reserve of precious metals, *Fort Ebena*.

Lady Fortuna: Two hundred fifty gram gold bar minted by *LAMP, Lingots Artisanaux Métaux Précieux*, a producer of gold bullion and rare precious metals items, depicting *Lady Fortuna*, roman goddess of prosperity, along with the horn of plenty, precious coins and wheel of fortune, on its obverse. The

reverse of the bar shows the etched code B235336. *LAMP*'s assayers work in conformity with the *Swiss Precious Metals Control Law*, following directives issued by the *Central Office for Precious Metals Control* in Bern. *LAMP* refines gold-based materials for their exclusive clients, and is one of three referees in charge of testing samples for the *London Bullion Market Association* and the *Curaçao Platinum and Palladium* market. The Lady Fortuna gold minted bar was received by Mista Jack on behalf of Cubandor, from Buddha Talk, in exchange for one million dollars in Treasury bonds delivered to Buddha Talk. The minted bar, coveted by many, found by few, is kept by Mista Jack, and is believed to be a token of initiation to the *Eleusinian Mysteries*, a variety of rituals performed in ancient Greece, which have been adapted to include rituals of sacred or divine sexuality by Lady Scafarel.

Following is a short description of the feminine adult icons of pleasure, leisure and 'less work means a better world', a short fiction biopic text substitute of the feminine lead characters of *Sun on the Rocks*, the non-competitive swimming team who works at **the City of Wellington**, a Post-Panamax ocean liner normally docking in Los Angeles, California, which engages in cruises to Acapulco, the Mexican coast line, the Caribbean, and anywhere where the weather is nice, really. *Sun on the Rocks* includes seven good looking women who like to have fun in the sun, with or without clothes:

Clarity Nice: Teleoperator from Malibu, California, twenty five years of age, quarter century wise. A diligent employee of Malibu outfit Stevenson Garden Products, auburn hair pumpkin born and raised in a wood cabin of Topanga Canyon, a woman of resourceful intuition and acute observer of the Laws of Human Mischief. Clarity means well and unclothes well in general or on the beach. She likes lovemaking, sharing nudity with other women, and the

practical matters and possibilities of sexual ecstasy, after having experienced it first hand at Cassandra Scafarel's adult resort Hexas Style in the Bahamas.

Because she does everything casually, she ignores how holy she and the virtues she embodies are, but she knows that she is good, very good, in fact, the fact that she is honest is the reason why she usually doesn't have much money.

Lanai Thomson: Twenty four year old Librarian from Malibu, originally from Hawaii, Clarity's best friend, somewhat goofy and absent-minded, fun, usually cautious in all of her endeavors, including doing men. She enjoys reading old books with some type of hidden knowledge, specially those which talk about enjoyment or decadence, the first to learn new avenues for it, the second, books such as the book of Decadence, because she wants to know how to avoid the pitfalls of its apparent lure. We would all like to know exactly what she does when she has sex with Clarity or simply unclothes with her for a 'naked pajama night'.

Flower Parkwood: Twenty three year old Bohemian Ethnographer, found by Clarity on the beach in Acapulco after the Acapulco cocktail affair. Flower is like a lost and found item, she disappears unexpectedly at times but you can usually find your way back to her with some effort. Flower has brown hair, is fresh, likes to wear platforms, and is genuinely interested in learning about cultures and the history of those cultures, as long as comfort, leisure and money are nearby. Buddha Talk has attempted to seduce her in The Cayman Air Banner, so far, without success, although they both share a liking for the 'Spirit of Ecstasy', the winged lady traditionally found at the top of Rolls Royce radiators. Flower ignores everything about sexual ecstasy, but she likes the idea.

Taimi Kendrick: Lifeguard by profession from Malibu, twenty two years of age, she's one of the original four members of Sun on the Rocks, with Lanai,

Cynthia, and Clarity. No nonsense, practical, fun and genuine, mischievous when the opportunity arises, she enjoys simple things, life without its complications, usually handled by Clarity, Flower or Lanai. She handles the pool entertainment routines prepared for the passengers of the City of Wellington, and when living in Malibu, she watches the rooftop pool of Stevenson Garden Products. Like the rest of her friends, she is not a heavy drinker, but occasionally, she particularly likes to taste the *sun on the rocks* cocktail drink prepared by bartender Mr. LT in the City of Wellington, a concoction made with 2oz of tequila, 1 teaspoon of sugar, 1/2 orange, and a half lemon.

Montana Sterley: Twenty one year old blond oil heiress, daughter of S Group conglomerate Colorado tycoon Carrelson Sterley, a man who likes to spend time with several women whose name starts with the name of his first wife Kelly Jane. Some of his current girlfriends include Kelly Caroline, Kelly Ann, and Kelley Shelley, the latter being a candidate for the name of a new Subway Combo sandwich. Montana comes from Fairplay, Colorado. She is outspoken, rebellious, mischievous, good looking, well educated, well traveled, and favorable to the idea of emulating the jet-setting lifestyle, versus following her father's business footsteps, or simply being well-behaved. She enjoys adult films, her large allowance, and being naked in good hotels such as Abu Dhabi's Park Hyatt, but her down-to-earth personality prevents her from attaining some of the more subtle knowledge that Clarity observes inside Scafarel's **Church of the Holy Flower**, a spiritual outfit for the affluent woman.

Jenna Likeway: Twenty three year old surfer and diver fond of the Acapulco diving spot, La Quebrada, found on the City of Wellington, before the search for **The Acapulco Cocktail** took place. Simple, genuine, and introvert, with long blond hair, she often does more than she says.

Cynthia Stevenson: Twenty two year old pom squad cheerleader from Pepperdine University, good friend of Clarity, gave Clarity her TAG-Heuer Aquaracer watch for her birthday. Cynthia is the well-to-do daughter of the owner of the Stevenson Garden Products company, established in Malibu, the first clothing optional corporate outfit worldwide, to our knowledge, a fact well deserved and established when Clarity and her friends took on officer Packwood during [The Malibu Case](#), along with its clothing implications.

Cynthia has fun as long as everything goes well, but has difficulty overcoming difficulty, any slight adversity that is. Problems and dealing with them, are simply not part of her daily routine or among her interests. She likes to dress elegantly and swim naked on summer evenings in any pool with her friends. She is a frequent guest of the [Areolas clothing optional resort](#) for adult couples and women in Palm Springs, where she likes the Egyptian linen sheets available in the om room and the complimentary cream color *Keralan Mundu* offered, a garment made with cotton by *Creme de l'Ayeryarwady*, worn around the waist in the [Tulu Nadu](#) region of *Kerala* and in the *Maldiv Islands*.

SUN ON THE ROCKS – AMUSEMENT TEN

THE MARBLE TOUCAN

Chapter One

Driving along the Mayan Riviera, Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico

From her seat in the back row inside the artisan-modified bus driving down route three zero seven, south of the Mexican vacation resort of Cancún, Clarity Nice scanned the people around her and smiled at the older woman seated a few rows in front of her. The woman kept staring at Clarity and her friends Lanai, Cynthia, Jenna, and Taimi, because they were comparing bikinis frivolously. Most of those traveling with her on the guagua, whose rooftop was filled with unsold crafts, were inhabitants of the small village of Miradorcito, a less than prosperous place numbering less than one hundred autochthonous members, where her other friend, ethnographer Flower Parkwood, was going to work on her first official mission with renowned Egyptian archaeologist Akhris Zephairi.

She placed the head of Flower, who was sleeping with her head resting on her own shoulder, gently against the seat of the bus, and took a piece of paper out of her pocket. The invitation sent to Flower to her hotel room in Cancún came from Zephairi's Alabastriah foundation, the organization paying for their trip. The piece of paper just said '*permiso de arqueología A-29, región de Campeche*'. It was a permit from Mexican authorities which allowed Zephairi and his crew, to work in the region looking for artifacts, such as Mayan statues, called stelas, or pottery, valued by collectors and museums.

They followed the main road south driving past the ancient city of Tulum and the aquatic theme park of Xel-ha to Chetumal, continuing west on route one

eighty six, then south, and then finally turning east on a narrow trail leading to an isolated area a few miles north of the Belize border, in the province of Campeche, rarely seen by tourists, because there was nothing to see there.

Zephairi welcomed them when they reached Miradorcito. He was in his early fifties with an energy level that rivalled the most versatile Black and Decker drill. Unable to sit in one place for more than five minutes in a row, Zephairi liked to inquire around the places where he was working until he could get hold of some type of object, a trophy he could bring back to the Egyptian authorities in the museum of Cairo, who paid for some of his expenses. Zephari walked straight towards Flower, waving at her.

"Were you informed of our mission here?" he asked.

"No, I got your message, but you didn't say anything other than it was a mission of utmost ethnographic importance for Egypt and the Egyptian government." Zephairi nodded and glanced at Clarity and her friends, stepping out of the bus with small trolleys.

"These are my archaeological assistants," said Flower, shaking dust off her long hair.

"Wait a minute," said Clarity, "we never said we worked for you, we just came because we've never been with an Egyptologist."

"She works for me, you work for her, that's how life is," said Zephairi, looking at Flower and at her backside. The Egyptologist placed his hand on Flower's shoulder. Clarity and her friend Lanai followed them. Behind them, Jenna and Taimi and Cynthia were deciding how to drag the trolleys along the dirt trail leading to the entrance of the village.

"Our mission is very important, you know that already."

"What are we looking for?" asked Flower.

"A Mayan pyramid which looks like an Egyptian pyramid."

Clarity looked around the few run-down homes in the village. A few hundred feet away, she could see the jungle and a river splitting the north and south of Miradorcito in two. Certainly, there was no trace of any pyramids there. She followed Zephairi to their camp, and the place where they would sleep, a Coleman six person instant tent that Zephairi had picked for its superior ease of use and comfort. The head of the village, Ms. Lidia Morales, was letting Zephairi settle for a few days and explore the village because he had promised to buy some crafts from the artisan of Miradorcito, a local named Kish Chunab who owned an old, traditional loom, which he used to build a variety of textiles, shawls and blouses among them. Her friends Jenna, Lanai, Taimi and Cynthia settled with Clarity inside the tent. Flower informed them that the head of the village was Ms. Morales.

"The lady that kept staring at us in the bus?"

"Yeah, she sort of heads things around here."

"Sort of?"

"I mean, my patron says she has all the authority here, she keeps the papers which describe births and deaths and marriages, and all the property titles of the land here in Miradorcito. She's the one who approved the archaeological permit of Zephairi." Clarity took out a sleeping bag and unfolded it.

"Your patron, your patron is Zephairi? Just refer to him as Mr. Zephairi or Zephairi."

"I like him as Zeph."

"I hope Zeph doesn't make us work too hard."

After changing into more comfortable clothes, Clarity got out of her tent and listened to a heated discussion between Ms. Morales and a man she'd noticed

inside the bus, named Duldu, shabbily dressed in worn denim pants cut one or two sizes too small and narrow for his ankles. Duldu carried a level with him, a device normally used to build a road, and Ms. Morales, a woman of strong build, wasn't happy at all to see him use the instrument.

"Are you with Mr. Zephairi?"

"No, I came on my own."

"What are you doing?" asked Ms. Morales.

"I'm looking at how the new road will look here, it's important that the road be straight," said Duldu. He placed a plastic helmet normally worn by construction workers on his head.

"What road?"

"The one that will be built where I stand, if the dam around here is strong enough to withstand the rainfall during the rainy season."

Duldu pointed to several run-down homes behind him and moved both of his arms in front of him, aligned, towards the jungle and some crops, as he looked into the level. Were a new road to be built, thought Clarity, it certainly meant several homes would be levelled and destroyed, along with some crops.

"There are no plans to build a road," says Ms. Morales.

"The only good plans are those which are not foreseen."

"Who sent you here? We dislike foreigners." said Ms. Morales.

"A powerful person in the region."

Ms. Morales walked towards Duldu, blocking the view of the self-appointed road building worker. She told him he wouldn't build a road in Miradorcito. According to the strong woman, Miradorcito didn't need a bigger road that would destroy people's homes and crops. It was self-sufficient, had been for generations, and would stay like that for generations to come.

"How many generations?" asked Duldu.

"Many," said Ms. Morales.

"You better worry about this generation, I don't think you'll be living here by the end of the month."

"I dislike your helmet, take your level and leave please."

"I'm just following orders Maam."

"Well, you're not working anywhere close to here."

"I'll be back Maam, my boss is diligent."

"Your boss is not welcome here, and neither are you." Duldu took his level and walked away. He waited for the bus headed for Chetumal to stop by the trail which led to road one eighty six and left the village.

Ms. Morales invited Clarity and her friends for tea inside her modest home, a palapa. Clarity noticed that she was purportedly joyful, smiling a smile, which was there to sustain a sense of courage around the big mess that was Miradorcito. The village was barely self-sufficient. The normal array of tourists didn't travel as far as Miradorcito, which lied just north of the border with Belize, housing only jungle. There was no activity which made money for the village and Ms. Morales feared a recent article on *Diario de Quintana Roo* and *Días de Yucatán* by the governor of Campeche, which spoke of bringing a renewed sense of wealth to traditional run-down areas which were not blessed by western flocks of tourists coming from the U.S. or Europe.

"Bringing wealth is good, someone will think of Miradorcito to rebuild the homes here."

"No, the governor wrote of the need for relocating people living in poor areas, he's ashamed of places like Miradorcito." She stood towards a chest of drawers and pulled out a wooden toucan out of one of them.

"This is our only hope now."

Clarity stared at the bird with the long wooden beak. Clearly, it was a totem for the village, an item adopted for its spiritual significance as emblem.

Chapter Two

That night, Clarity woke up around three in the morning, awakened by the shouts of Kish.

"There's a flood, the village is full of water."

Clarity donned some clothes and got out of her tent, pointing her flashlight at the water around her. Miradorcito was flooded, and Clarity's trekking shoes were soon drenched with mud. Kish carried little credibility in the village, although everyone liked what he made with his loom, traditional shawls, colorful blankets, blouses, table runners and purses. He was one of the few if not the only inhabitant of Miradorcito with an entrepreneurial instinct, but no one listened to him or believed him when he said that he could bring prosperity to the village. This time, the craftsman had not exaggerated. Clarity clashed against Ms. Morales, who was wearing knee-high fishing boots and the three of them met on a trail filled with mud.

"What happened, what were you doing near the dam?"

"A mosquito got inside my hut, and I went after it all the way up the river to the Rosarito dam. It's broken, there's a huge hole in it."

Among her friends, only Flower, who slept lightly, had awakened. The rest of the women were sleeping soundly. Ms. Morales pointed her flashlight at Flower and at a large head emerging behind her, the head of Zephairi. Clarity followed them, and they all followed Ms. Morales and Kish to the source of the disaster area. After an hour of walking around the flooded area, they made their way to the dam, a large cement structure one hundred feet wide. The main role of the dam was to store water, but there were plans to add a hydroelectric facility that would provide electricity to the village. Miradorcito relied on small, thousand watt power generators made by Honda or Kohler, filled with less than

a gallon of gas, and Ms. Morales wanted more modern equipment for the village. The head of the village pointed her flashlight at a large hole thirty feet in diameter that let water from the river flow through it.

"This wasn't done by nature, the crater is round, perfectly round."

"Someone used explosives," said Zephairi, "only explosives would leave this type of damage to cement." His voice trailed off. They were standing on a hill overlooking the river and the embankment dam, and the soil beneath Zephairi was giving way, moving him away slowly from the rest of the group. The Egyptian archaeologist grabbed the branch of a fallen tree and pulled himself out of the unstable clay area, as the others watched only, for fear of being drawn into the muddy area near the river as well.

"Are you all right?" asked Ms. Morales.

"I wouldn't be had I not found this branch." Flower hushed to Clarity.

"My patron is resourceful," said Flower, looking proudly at Zephairi, as he struggled to lift himself near the large branch he had found, encouraged by Kish. Kish meant well but he was thin and his lack of strength prevented him from doing chores, which he considered menial, and so he often replaced doing them by encouraging others to do what he couldn't do.

"Can you help me?" asked Zephairi, calmly but firmly.

"No," said Kish, with equal intensity, "you're doing fine."

Zephairi breathed out a sound similar to a tapir, and extracted himself back on firm ground after several minutes of effort witnessed by Kish. Clarity took some photographs of the damage, and they returned to the village. All the farming land of Miradorcito was flooded. Ms. Morales walked through the mud in the village to the farming area behind her home, whose thatched roof was made with palm trees, plant stalks and foliage. She picked up a shovel and

opened the door to her garden. The garden acted as farming area, where she grew tomatoes, lettuce, peppers, jicama, carrots, achiote, beets, and pepita de calabaza. All of this was sold at the market near the tourist areas of Tulum and Xelha, and that was a large part of the livelihood of the village. Ms. Morales had created a local cooperative, run by and for their members, and taught others to grow their own vegetables. As a result of that idea, the members of the village decided to elect her the head of Miradorcito. The farming area was damaged considerably, and the vegetables were buried under a pile of mud. Zephairi appeared behind her.

"Well, the village is finished, we can begin the excavations now a lot more easily."

Ms. Morales lifted her shovel and threw a glare of disbelief and retained anger at Zephairi.

"What did you say?"

"I said the excavations can begin now here in Miradorcito, there's nothing much you can grow with all this water." Ms. Morales shook her head.

"We have to talk." She pointed Zephairi to her palapa home, and the Egyptologist followed her finger, stepping forward towards the entrance.

"She only says that when she gets angry," said Kish. Clarity could sense that Kish was worried. He grabbed the arm of Clarity, pleading for some reassuring support from the Malibu teleoperator.

"I see, I'm not sure what she meant or what the topic of the talk will be." She paused. "Can you let go of my arm?"

"Your arm is important to my sense of reassurance," said Kish.

"My arm is not that strong, certainly not as strong as your need for reassurance," said Clarity.

"My reassurance won't hurt your arm."

"My arm is not your reassurance."

She shook her arm loose from Kish's grip during a moment of distraction of the craftsman. Kish was in his mid thirties and he disliked precarious situations. He was used to working alone and had been taught from an early age to persevere in whatever endeavor he was pursuing on his own. But his own industriousness and sense of pride turned against him when events became overwhelming, because nobody could solve absolutely every single big problem on his or her own. He wasn't used to reaching out to other people for help or assistance, and he wasn't comfortable doing it when he had to do it. He stood still before Clarity, unsure of what to do next.

"Let's walk inside to hear Ms. Morales home to hear what they say." Kish nodded, opening and closing the fingers of his hand, which were cramping slightly. Ms. Morales stood at the entrance of her palapa, writing on a piece of paper the equivalent of a guest list.

"What are you doing?" asked Zephairi.

"Keeping track of those coming into my home, this is an official village talk, I want to take the minutes of this talk, and I want these people to be witnesses. She pointed to Flower, Clarity, Kish and Lanai, who had slipped into the palapa.

"What's happening?" asked Lanai.

"The village is flooded, looks like someone placed explosives on the dam, and the dam is damaged."

Ms. Morales cleared the dining table and brought some chairs. Zephairi sat down and began his talk by claiming property of the village on behalf of the Egyptian government, drawing a square with a few small branches. Miradorcito was part of a recent, obscure bilateral agreement between Mexico and Egypt and

one of the results was that Zephairi had been authorized by the governor of Campeche to explore Miradorcito, checking for the presence of Mayan ruins and artifacts underneath.

"I've told you before, there are no ruins below Miradorcito," said Ms. Morales, "nobody here has seen any ruins."

"There may be a whole Mayan city underneath your feet, you may be standing on very valuable archaeological findings," said Zephairi.

"If so, the artifacts belong to Miradorcito, not to the Egyptian government."

"The Egyptian government is being very generous, it is bringing all of its archaeological knowledge to this area in Mexico. In return, we'd like to benefit from any findings." Clarity watched Flower writing the minutes of the talk. She liked to act as secretary when the information given out in a meeting was important, or relevant to her ethnographic purpose, understanding various cultures and why they behaved in certain ways and not other ways, more similar to her own ways of behaving.

"Are you the representative of that Egyptian knowledge?" asked Flower, turning to the Egyptologist.

"Yes." He took out a small piece of paper, similar to the one Flower had given Clarity, the *permiso de arqueología*, and placed it inside the improvised square made with twigs.

"Oh good, I made the right choice in following you then," said Flower.

"You can sell Miradorcito to me and use the money to settle somewhere else," said Zephairi, turning to Ms. Morales.

Based on previously done geological studies, Zephairi kept thinking that the pyramids possibly standing beneath the earth of Miradorcito would bear some similarities with Egyptian pyramids. Similarities, which had remained

unobserved for hundreds of years. Archaeological synergies were bound to be found, and an Egyptian discovery could be claimed for Egypt. Zephairi wanted the glory of that discovery and he genuinely thought that he held an archaeological gold mine with Miradorcito.

"I'm not selling this land, my family owned this land before me, this is my home." Flower raised her hand.

"Do you mean to say you're almost part of the environment?"

Clarity saw Ms. Morales ignore Flower, who had another question. She turned to Zephairi.

"Would you be personally buying the land or is it the Egyptian government who would buy it, were Ms. Morales to accept this transaction?"

"The Alabastriah foundation, my sponsor, would buy the land of Miradorcito, on behalf of the country of Egypt and the Museum of Cairo."

Clarity's Hawaiian friend, Lanai, objected to Ms. Morales reasoning, arguing that it might be interesting to look for Mayan ruins, because they were part of the tradition of Miradorcito and of the culture that Ms. Morales was defending. Ms. Morales was intrigued by Lanai's statement, but she shook her head.

"No, we want to stay here just as we are, there's nothing underneath Miradorcito."

Chapter Three

The work to drain all the mud from the village was tiring. Ms. Morales was scrambling on a borrowed cell phone to find a village nearest to Miradorcito that could provide drainage pumps. Zephairi had sent his crew to block the dam's crater with large branches, but the water continued to pour from the river towards Miradorcito, albeit with a lesser volume. After several hours of clean up work with only a shovel and buckets at hand, Ms. Morales decided to break for lunch. She opened the door of her palapa, followed by Clarity and Flower, and stepped inside, exhausted from all the work done. She wanted a good meal, and the feeling of uneasiness that the flood had created in her mind, showed on her weary face. She opened the drawer of the chest where she kept her toucan, but her hands didn't find the familiar feel of the wooden bird. The toucan was a talisman and very few people understood how it worked or why. Kept by her family for generations, Tokal, the name Ms. Morales had given to the toucan, was about ten inches tall. It was made of heartwood and had a four inch bill painted yellow whose tint had worn over the years. She opened the chest drawer wider, but there was no sight of the object that according to her experience, provided a sense of protection to the village, promoted safety, and to some extent, removed obstacles. She came to the conclusion that Clarity feared.

"The toucan, it's not here, it disappeared." Ms. Morales always kept her totem in the same spot, and it was clear that someone had come in and taken the bird. This was a disaster worse than the flood, because her precious totemic item acted as a strong emotional support. Its mere presence bolstered Ms Morales' conviction that there was room to preserve Mayan traditions in the modern world facing Miradorcito. Tokal came from another era, the era of her ancestors, and with it present at her side, she felt strong inwardly despite the

poverty surrounding her and facing the village. Its presence convinced her that she could confront the cultural gringo disintegration brought by Coca Cola and alcohol facing the Miradorcito *zona indigena*, its indigenous population, which included herself and Kish. Traditional healers considered the toucan as a way to enter the spirit world and Ms. Morales spread the idea that as a result of its sociable, colorful personality, it was a bird of good augury for the village. Touching the keel-billed wooden bird every day kept her inner strength intact, and she cherished it as one of her most precious possessions. Flower stepped forward, eager to comfort the head of the village.

"I saw Mr. Zephairi walk near your home a couple of hours ago, he thinks the Mayan ruins hidden in Miradorcito might be underneath this hut."

While Ms. Morales kept searching for the village totem inside her home, Clarity walked to the area where Zephairi and his crew of assistants had settled. Zephairi didn't travel alone, he had brought with him to Mexico a group of eight people coming from Egypt who were deft at locating, recording, collecting and interpreting archaeological facts during the various phases of any project, which included survey, testing, excavation and laboratory examinations. Clarity walked past Zephairi, who was using a hand shovel and bucket, and other digging tools such as a hand pick, a hand brush, mini hand mattock, and a hand tray looking for rocks, soil samples, or bones, that would indicate Mayan presence hundreds of years earlier.

She approached his *Parthenon* eight person tent and looked around, before stepping inside. The 'mansion style' six foot high tent was spacious, offering several features meant to add comfort, including mesh sidewalls to allow for ventilation during warm weather and a removable divider wall which split the tent into two rooms. Placed behind the vestibule, there was a table with a large

map of the area, half-folded. Clarity walked towards the table and began reading the map, which depicted various Mayan sites in the Yucatán peninsula, Chichen Itza, Coba, Uxmal, Tulum, and the lesser known Etzna, Sayil, Becan, and Kabah.

On the table lied a luxurious, Venezia, scritto leather zipped Berluti agenda, which held a notebook planner inside. Clarity flipped the pages of the agenda to the current day, and noticed Zephairi had marked an appointment for that day with a person scribbled as Lever Fahibian. She heard the brushing noise of outdoor pants approaching the entrance of the tent. Caught on the spot, Clarity reached for the area behind the divider and hid inside.

"Mr. Fahibian, step inside will you, we have several things to put in place."

Clarity saw the square face of Zephairi with a man in his late fifties showing gold hair. Lehver Fahibian was a real estate developer coming from Belize, he was considered a driving force behind the recent bilateral agreement between Mexico and Egypt. Clarity pushed aside the mesh of the divider slightly to peek inside the front part of the tent, and saw Fahibian's girlfriend Casey, winner of a Miss bodybuilding pageant and of several mud wrestling championships as well, standing near her. The woman was like Fahibian's shadow, never leaving the developer on his own, since their wedding a few months earlier was cancelled at the last minute by a business trip as a result of the bilateral agreement. Fahibian owned a full-service beach resort in northern Belize called the '*Moneghetti Suites*', named after one of the districts in the ward of La Condamine in Monaco. Casey had arranged their resort bedroom in the island of Ambergris Caye like one permanently for newlyweds. Bent on pulling Fahibian towards the idea of marriage, Casey ensured that their room was always bright and well lit, that curtains and walls of the room were not painted pink, because it was said to cause a feeling of agitation and insecurity, that the bathroom door did not open

directly to the bed, and that there was no stereo on the headboard, because sound affected the mind according to the mud wrestling competitor, and possibly the quality of sleep. Fahibian often listened to Mozart before going to sleep, and Casey disliked classical music, and so she had convinced her husband-to-be that he should listen to music in the mornings, with earphones, getting rid of his need for a stereo on the bed's headboard.

"Ms. Morales drove Duldu out of the village, I hear," said Fahibian. Zephairi nodded.

"Yes, I haven't gotten an archaeological permit for him yet, but we're working on it." Clearly, Fahibian had sent Duldu to Miradorcito, and Zephairi knew of him, thought Clarity.

"What did she think of the damage to the dam?"

"She thinks it might have been caused by someone, I'm leading her towards the hypothesis of explosives."

"That's like incriminating ourselves, you should have been less obvious."

"No one saw your retainer Duldu place the explosives, it puts me out of suspicion with her. Where is he now?" Fahibian extended the crumpled map of the region in front of him, taking a seat on a table, with his girlfriend looking over his shoulder.

"He's around, checking the damage of the flood and seeing whether an aerial cable car can be installed here across the large trees."

Clarity was appalled to know that Fahibian had created the flood in Miradorcito purportedly, and that Zephairi condoned the act. She heard the sound of the tent's zipper at the entrance open. Ms. Morales entered the Egyptologist's tent, ill-humored. The head of the village walked to the table, facing Zephairi. The reason for her anger was Duldu. As she was draining her

garden from mud, Duldu had walked right into it, asking her what she thought the damages of the flood would be, and whether she would object to a cable car built over her home.

"Mr. Zephairi, do you know this man in the village whose name is Duldu? He's asking very strange questions, but they all relate to the damage done by the flood and the future of the village. If you know who sent him, please tell me, he makes me nervous."

"Duldu Kehlver is my employee," said Fahibian. The real estate developer stepped forward to shake hand with Ms. Morales. Zephairi introduced Fahibian while Casey stayed in the background, walking dangerously close to the divider, checking its mesh. Fahibian began speaking of their pleasant trip from Belize to Miradorcito, before continuing through to the reason for his presence in the village.

"Ms. Morales, we like Miradorcito, we like the land here, we want good things to happen for the village, to build a new resort that will bring business to the area."

"What kind of resort?"

"A gambling resort, something like the Princess Casino in Belize, or our own Moneghetti Suites, but more elegant, an integrated resort where gaming is one of the parts but not the only one."

"Integrated with Mayan pyramids and a falafel stand," added Zephairi.

"I don't like falafel," said Casey.

"The falafel stand is part of Egyptian life and there has to be something from Egypt in this resort," said Zephairi. Casey's eyes widened.

"I don't understand why there's a need for pyramids in this new Moneghetti II resort, it's a waste of money to pay for archaeological work."

Fahibian calmed her, stroking the forearm of her girlfriend who was wearing a sweater made of cotton.

"The presence of pyramids may move the resort towards a different segment of leisure, one that will make gaming in the resort a big source of income, more tolerable and acceptable to the community."

Ms. Morales could not believe what she was hearing.

"I dislike gambling and this notion of easy money that comes with gambling. If there is no work involved in the living you are making, there is something wrong and what you're doing cannot be properly called work. This project is not going through here."

Fahibian ignored her body language, in particular her index finger moving sideways, meaning no.

"You can make a lucrative deal with Mr. Zephairi and myself," said Fahibian, "you can sell the land of Miradorcito to Mr. Zephairi's Alabastriah foundation, who will then lease the land to my real estate development company '*Mangrove Barrier Resorts*'. We'll pay you a sizeable amount in exchange for agreeing to sell the land."

"No," said Ms. Morales. She shook her head in refusal.

"Is that a definite no?" asked Zephairi, "you might like falafel a lot more than you think. The Museum of Cairo, majority shareholder of the Alabastriah Foundation, will use the rental income derived from the sale of Miradorcito land to Mangrove Barrier Resorts, to fund other archaeological projects. The money coming from the new resort will be put to good use."

"There are no pyramids here, we don't want to sell our land or see a gambling resort, we want to keep the village as it is."

"Well, currently it's flooded," said Zephairi.

Clarity heard a noise behind her near the backdoor of the tent. Flower came inside, noticing Clarity, who quickly told her to hush by placing her finger on her lips. Behind Flower, Clarity noticed Lanai, Cynthia, Taimi and Jenna, opening the mesh of the tent's backdoor, sneaking inside the tent as well. The second room of the tent was getting filled and agitated with feminine energy. Clarity hushed the line of the argument spoken by Ms. Morales and Fahibian to Flower, who whispered it in telephone line style to Cynthia, Taimi and Jenna. Casey, hearing some noise, opened the mesh divider, nearly colliding her face against Clarity's nose.

"Who are you, this is a private conversation."

"We're assistants of Mr. Zephairi," said Flower. Fortunately, Flower knew how to stay casual in compromising situations. Zephairi got up and walked towards the far end of his tent, asking Flower what she was doing. This time, it was Lanai who spoke first.

"We came to bring our support, we think it's a good idea to build a gambling resort here," said the Malibu librarian, changing the subject, "it's going to bring jobs to the community here." Cynthia, Taimi and Jenna nodded.

"It's going to be like Vegas in the jungle, it's cool," said Taimi.

Flower and Clarity disagreed, thinking the resort would create unruly gamblers and a slew of problems for the local environment, like polluted waters.

Fahibian stood up and led his girlfriend to the entrance of Zephairi's tent. Zephairi turned to Ms. Morales, who was leaving also.

"Think about this proposal Ms. Morales, there will be trouble for the village if you don't sell this land to us."

Chapter Four

Flower and Clarity woke up early the following morning. They stood outside of their tent combing their hair as the pleasant warmth of the sun brushed their faces. The girls watched as a group of cows owned by Ms. Morales, was led to a grazing area outside the area of the flood. Lanai had declined to get up with them, saying that she felt tired after all the drainage work the day before.

"I can't believe that Lanai actually thinks gambling can be good for a community," said Flower.

"Many people think like that, anything that brings jobs is thought to be good."

Flower walked away from Clarity to have some breakfast inside her tent. Clarity saw her stumble and fall head first into the mud. Cursing the flood, Flower examined a large stone that had emerged after some mud had been lifted from the area, causing her fall.

"Clarity, come here, I think I found something."

Flower's finger was pointing at an inscription etched on a slab of limestone. Clarity rubbed the mud off the engraving and read the epigraph. It said *Xuleiha*. The stone was part of a stela, a sculpted shaft that depicted Mayan kings and recorded their deeds. Flower used a brush to lift some mud from the limestone, uncovering a nose and eyes.

"This is an altar, it's usually at the top of a pyramid, the top of a Mayan pyramid. It's the face of Yuknoom Took Kawiil, a Mayan ruler from the year 731."

Flower knew of a similar stela, known as Stela 51, kept in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico.

"What do we do now?" asked Clarity.

"Tell Ms. Morales, it's her village."

"And Zeph?"

"Zeph will have to wait."

They walked to the palapa of Ms. Morales, excited about the discovery. Ms. Morales was hoping that the two women had found her totem, and she was slightly disappointed at hearing about the archaeological discovery. She walked with them to the area where Flower had discovered the engraving and examined the epigraph carefully. She had mixed feelings about the altar found. If Flower was right, it meant that there was an authentic pyramid, which lay beneath the earth of Miradorcito. On the one hand, a pyramid was part of her tradition, for she was a descendent of the Mayas. But in this case, it also meant that Fahibian would use the finding to build a gambling resort disguised with the reassuring presence of an authentic Mayan archaeological site, and that bothered her, because Fahibian did not believe in preserving Mayan heritage.

They couldn't keep the discovery to themselves for long. Zephairi inquired and found out quickly about the stela find, gathering his crew to survey the area. Kish, Ms. Morales, Flower, and Clarity, and several villagers followed, to observe Zephairi's reaction.

"I knew that there was a pyramid here," said Zephairi, "this place is more or less midway between the sites of the Peten jungle in Guatemala, and those north of here like Chichen Itza." Zephairi rubbed his hands with a look of satisfaction brightening his face.

"What are you going to do?" asked Ms. Morales

"I'm going to call in the excavators and pair Miradorcito with the Egyptian village of Kom Ombo, it is an agricultural town like this village."

"Do they like colorful shawls in Kom Ombo," inquired Kish, always on the lookout for new markets.

"This is not Egypt," said Ms. Morales.

"This is a project involving Egypt that is improving bilateral trade relations with Mexico."

"You cannot start digging, you don't own this place."

"I have an archaeological permit to be here, and Mr. Fahibian has received a license from the governor of Campeche, to build a casino resort here, and that license is funding my work."

For three days, Ms. Morales pleaded for 'no digging' of the site, and for three days Zephairi ignored the appeal. Clarity and Kish carried a banner to Zephairi's tent, which said *'keep Miradorcito genuinely Maya'*, but Duldu ripped it and used the tissue to clean some of Zephairi's digging tools. Three days after this struggle, a large convoy of trucks drove into Miradorcito, carrying hydraulic excavators built by Caterpillar, the 350 D, by Komatsu and by John Deere. Duldu acted as foreman and ordered the levelling of several huts, to the dismay of the villagers, who began using tents set up by Zephairi. The tent area established by Zephairi grew to accommodate the fifty construction workers hired and paid by Fahibian to excavate the village and dig the foundations of the new casino resort.

"Isn't there someone you can call to let them know about this bullying?" asked Clarity.

"I can try the governor's office, but bureaucracy is slow here in Mexico, nothing gets done very quickly. And technically Zephairi is right, Fahibian has a license to build a resort here, I was just trying to delay construction works by allowing Mr. Zephairi to do some archaeological work."

"Tell them you think someone created the flood."

"I can't think without my toucan."

Ms. Morales called the governor's office, relaying the bullying that was leading to local people leaving their homes, but the clerk answering the phone said that all the papers of Zephairi and Fahibian were correctly filled and had the appropriate signature. The governor gave an order to Fahibian to fix the dam, and twenty men began working up the Rosarito River to fill the dam's crater. Ms. Morales pleaded to the clerk, expressing concern about their precarious living conditions.

"What are we going to do? Where are the people here going to live?"

"You should negotiate all of that with your local contact, Mr. Fahibian, this project has been negotiated with him directly, the government of Mexico has given Mr. Fahibian a concession to exploit the land in Miradorcito."

"What is Mr. Zephairi doing here? He's not from Mexico."

"Mr. Zephairi represents the interests of Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History, they don't want the land of Miradorcito in private hands. The 1931 charter says private interests should be subordinate to the community."

Ms. Morales blew a sigh. Her fourth generation ancestor, Fernando Morales, had bought the land of Miradorcito to create a small plantation. Since then, the Morales family had been considered the '*shepherds of the land*' in Miradorcito. Ms. Morales was fourth generation keeper of the area, and was considered a 'clan mother' who helped many in the local population. Ms. Morales ended the phone conversation with the governor's clerk and summoned an urgent meeting in her palapa, which had not been levelled yet Fahibian's crew. Kish, Clarity, Lanai and Flower gathered around her table.

"I think you should accept the idea of creating an ecovillage," said Clarity.

Flower had shared the idea of the ecovillage with Clarity, running across it during her ethnography studies and reading an article on it from a local Mexican newspaper printed in Mérida. It basically meant the creation of a community whose members sought to live according to ecological principles, with as little impact on the environment as possible. Ecovillages were known as planned, intentional communities with the goal of becoming socially, economically and ecologically sustainable. The governance of the ecovillage was democratic, embodied by consensus decision-making. Ms. Morales shook her head.

"No, I think the village can do fine as it is, with its cattle, its crops, and its crafts, there is no need for any reform. It's not a good idea."

"You don't have much leverage here, no one seems to care about this place or what happens to it," said Clarity.

"I care about this place."

Lanai stepped forward to give her opinion.

"In fact, what's important is that the dam has been fixed, so that there are no more floods."

"The dam has been fixed? No one has told me that, yes that's important," said Ms. Morales.

Lanai kept asking questions to Ms. Morales about the way she raised cattle and cultivated crops, and how the loom of Kish was used to create shawls. Within a few days, Ms. Morales, with no friendly allies to counsel her, had forgotten that Lanai favored the gaming resort. Clarity's friend had filled a space as the head of the village's confidant, and the Malibu librarian began to assist Ms. Morales with daily chores, helping her clean the house, sell her cattle to a

meat distributor in Chetumal, and mourn the loss of her toucan. All of this alleviated the physical work of draining the water from the flood and excavating the site, which Lanai found annoying and boring. Although Lanai kept saying that the divergence in opinion with Clarity about what the village should become did not change their friendship, the fact of the matter was that she wasn't sharing much with Clarity about what she was doing during the day, talking instead for hours with Zephairi's crew about the various artifacts coveted by the Egyptologist. Clarity began confiding her observation to Flower.

"I think she's up to something," said Clarity.

"No, she's just curious about what we ethnographers do, and she may just have her own views on the way the village should be led."

Flower looked at her watch. "I have to get back to work, Zeph expects me to be with him, we're working on the stela to see whether we can find a codex underneath or inside."

Lanai convinced Ms. Morales that what the head of the village needed to restore her confidence, was to own the Mayan artifacts that Zephairi was trying to find, among them a codex, similar to the Dresden codex, kept at the Royal Library of Dresden, which read like a boustrophedon, depicting the region and several aspects of the Mayan culture related to the Mysteries. Like Clarity, Lanai was fascinated by the Esoteric Mysteries that had surfaced in different cultures, and she was keen on knowing more about them. She had a hunch that Ms. Morales knew more than what she said on the Mayan Mysteries, and that was one of the reasons for becoming closer to the head of the village.

The librarian pulled Ms. Morales aside on the terrace of her palapa, while Clarity examined Ms. Morales' title of property of the land of Miradorcito, to see

whether any argument could be found to change the decision of the governor to give the land to Fahibian.

"What you want to show is that you know more than Zephairi about the Mayan tradition," said Lanai, "then you can become the conservationist of this site, even if it becomes a tourist or a gambling resort. You'll be able to defend the Mayan tradition and heritage from that position." Ms. Morales tapped her finger slightly against her nose, a sign that she was listening closely to Lanai.

"How are we going to do that, I'm not an archaeologist?"

"By working with Zephairi, and letting me work with his assistant, Flower. I want to know more about the boustrophedon of Xuleiha and where it may be."

Chapter Five

In the days following, Zephairi uncovered another stela, which he named stela B and which depicted Tlaloc, the Mayan god of rain. The statue was wearing a miter and was surrounded by two guacamayas. Following counsel from Lanai, Ms. Morales questioned Zephairi. Trying to make sense of the interpretation that the Egyptologist assigned to the finding, and whether according to him, the statue depicted a god or a priest.

"The guacamayas represent chastity," said Lanai.

"How do you know?" asked Ms. Morales.

"There is a Mayan section in a book I'm reading called the 'Book of the Adept', which explains the symbols used to represent chastity, and birds are depicted as one of those symbols. The book is also called Decadence, but I don't pay attention much to that part."

Zephairi began giving orders to his crew to take the stela near his tent, but Ms. Morales stopped him.

"I have to invoke the god of rain to stop floods here, it's important to preserve the Mayan tradition."

"Will you leave the village earlier if you do that?"

"I won't leave, but I'll let you take this stela."

Zephairi sighed. "All right, do what you think is traditional."

Ms. Morales reached inside a bag for a headdress she considered sacred, and placed it on her head. She kept all of her devotional items inside her chest along with her toucan, and the headdress was an essential ornament for any ritual. With it firmly placed above her head, she began a long series of bows in front of the statue of Tlaloc.

"May all floods leave Miradorcito and may the misfortune caused by the crater of the dam leave as well." She prayed for more than ten minutes, repeating the sentence in Yucatec Maya language. For some reason, Clarity wasn't connecting with the prayer and instead was rubbing the stone of the statue, caressing the head of the guacamayas. Deep down she thought it was superstitious to pray for something bad to disappear out of one's life. In her experience, it was better to confront a bad situation or person right away, instead of wishing it would go away. To some extent, she thought that Ms. Morales was using the ostrich method of burying her head below the ground to ignore the problems facing her. She shared her thoughts with Lanai, but her friend disagreed.

"No, prayer may work," said Lanai, "it brings your consciousness out of a bad area into proper ways of thinking. Things may actually get better in Miradorcito as a result of this prayer." Ms. Morales approved of what the librarian said, nodding and appreciating the support.

"I guess," said Clarity, unconvinced.

Within a few weeks, all the huts in Miradorcito had been levelled by the excavators used by Zephairi's crew, except the palapa of Ms. Morales, and the fenced home of Kish, which stood in the middle of the village. The inhabitants of Miradorcito were expropriated out of their home and told to settle in the tents prepared by Zephairi's Alabastriah foundation. The living conditions in the tents were more precarious than those of the village itself, and only Clarity's friends found it fun, like a taste of living in the wild for a short period.

Opinions of discontentment began spreading among the villagers, questioning whether Ms. Morales should remain the head of the village. Ms. Morales chose to ignore the rumours, but they were clearly beginning to affect

her, although she remained firm in her decision to continue living by herself in her palapa, claiming that she wasn't going to move or let anyone destroy her home until the governor of Campeche himself showed up, asking her to leave. The line of argument of Kish was different. He claimed that his home was a traditional Maya home, and could become a tourist attraction by itself, without changing anything of it.

A cornfield and a stacked-stone fence surrounded the thatched hut belonging to Kish. The indigenous weaver's home had no plumbing and no electricity, and Ms. Morales had argued with him for several weeks, until he finally accepted to adopt a generator that powered a single light bulb, which he rarely used. Kish disliked being eco-friendly because he viewed the notion of a modern ecovillage with all the amenities of the western lifestyle, as an intrusion into his own way of life. He knew that nature could be cruel sometimes, and he accepted it. What he was looking for was to work his loom in peace and sell his crafts at local markets; things like tablecloths, napkins, and rebozos, a long flat garment similar to a shawl, prominently worn by women such as Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. Clarity marvelled at the old loom and how the various parts interacted to create a weaving pattern.

"Don't touch," he said.

"I like the feel of wood," said Clarity.

Kish sometimes worked with a backstrap loom, which included sticks that were placed horizontally as a mat to hold the woven thread, rope, and a strap worn by the weaver around the waist. Using this simple design, a weaver could produce fabric with a plain weave, doing an over-under-over-under pattern. Kish enjoyed making mats and huipiles, a traditional garment worn by indigenous women of Yucatán and Quintana Roo, like a loose-fitting tunic made

of two or three rectangular pieces of fabric joined with ribbons or stitching, and which showed colorful embroidery depicting flowers. The back-strap loom allowed the weaver to include elaborate brocade patterns that gave Mayan weaving its distinctive character.

He asked Clarity about the plan Zephairi had in mind.

"I'm not sure, but you should probably be thinking about moving to another home," said Clarity.

"There is no other home built nearby, they want us to move to tents in the camping site they arranged for us. I dislike tents, water from the rain can get inside." Kish offered Clarity a portion of Ti'sik, smoked pork with Maya radish and sour orange.

"Do you plan to stay here? Your home is sort of standing out along with the palapa of Ms. Morales."

"My fence is not moving and my home is not moving either." He brought his chair closer to Clarity.

"Have you seen the papers of the real estate deal that Fahibian has negotiated with the governor of Campeche for Miradorcito?"

"No," said Clarity. Kish knew that the members of the Miradorcito community were not getting their proper share of profits from the planned site and resort envisioned by Fahibian. He mistrusted Zephairi and disliked Egyptian pyramids.

"Egyptian pyramids are less functional than Mayan pyramids," said Kish.

"How so?"

"Egyptian pyramids house dead people, Mayan pyramids were made to perform live rituals, a lot more fun."

They heard the loud noise of an engine outside the hut. Clarity saw Kish peek through the window, and she saw Duldu attempting to break into his garden fence with the goliath of excavators, the giant five hundred feet long, one hundred feet high G-Earth. Originally designed to remove overburden, waste or spoil, or rocks lying above a coal seam, the excavator was being used to lift heavy stones from Kish's fence. Duldu placed the stones inside two of the eighteen buckets of the excavator, which together, could hold close to six cubic yards of overburden. Kish ran outside his home waving his hands, and he began climbing into the pilot's cabin.

"Stop," said Kish.

"Why?" asked Duldu.

"It's time for lunch, we have some pork today, come in, you must be tired from lifting so many stones and removing the earth."

"Well, I don't lift the earth myself, but yeah, it's rough work. All right, but I'll continue my work afterwards."

"That's fine, we all work to make a living," said Kish.

The weaver entered his hut before Duldu, and whispered in Clarity's ear, telling her to get the keys of the excavator while Duldu was having lunch inside his hut. He pointed towards the backdoor of his hut, which he used to step out into his cornfield.

"Get out this backdoor, before he sees you."

"What do I do with the keys?"

"Simply lose them."

Clarity walked into Kish's cornfield and climbed the fence surrounding the hut. Approaching the G-earth carefully, she climbed twenty feet slowly on a staircase onto the pilot's cabin and took out the key of the giant excavator from

the keyhole. Ensuring no one was looking at her, she stepped down into the ground and walked away from the village, finding the river. She threw the keys into the water and walked back to Miradorcito, satisfied. It was important to preserve the hut of Kish from the effects of western civilization. He found Kish in the doorstep of his backdoor.

"Done," she said, "he won't find them, that bulldozer is finished."

"Good, good, something's working in our favor, finally," said Kish. He went back into the living room area followed by Clarity. Duldu was sitting on the table, waiting for lunch to be served.

"Is the excavator parked all right, are you sure it won't move on its own?"

"Yeah, positive," said Duldu, "I'll go check the brake is on though, pretty sure it is." Kish and Clarity laid their heads on a windowsill, looking out at Fahibian's assistant walk out of the craftsman's property and stepping into the excavator's cabin. An expression of surprise became a scream of anger. Duldu was cursing the giant excavator from its pilot cabin because he couldn't find his keys. Kish opened the window of his home, eager to ask about the nature of the problem.

"I'm sure I left the keys of the excavator here, someone took them. Can't stay for lunch, I have to find these keys." Kish walked out towards the fence of his home, barely able to hide a wide grin.

"You're welcome for lunch anytime," said Kish, looking at him twenty feet below. Duldu glared at the craftsman.

"You have something to do with this. I'm going to find a job for you outside this village when all of it is levelled and you'll start at the bottom like me."

"How did you begin at the bottom?"

"I started as bellboy before Mr. Fahibian saw all the potential I hold to be his professional assistant. That's what you'll be soon, a bellboy in Belize, in Mr. Fahibian's resort there."

"No, I work on my own, I have my own business." Clarity noticed that those words Kish had spoken made Duldu extremely angry. There were only a handful of things which made Duldu angrier than hearing someone as poor as him say he or she had their own business, for having a business of his own was outside his reach, he thought. Fahibian's right hand person stepped out of the excavator, and began searching for the lost key.

Clarity saw Lanai walk toward Kish's hut. Her friend wanted to see his loom. Clarity felt sidetracked by her friend, who wasn't sharing with her what she was doing with Ms. Morales in her palapa, talking about Mayan invocations apparently. She couldn't reconcile the fact that Lanai favored the gambling resort, which would create upheaval in Miradorcito, and the preservation of Mayan traditions, but Lanai had a view different from her on how to be practical for a community and at the same time stay in touch with the deeper aspects of her emotional self. Clarity did the dishes to thank Kish for sharing a meal with her, while Kish showed the way his loom worked to her friend the Malibu librarian. Clarity wanted to show her friend that introducing gambling in Miradorcito was not a good idea, because the influence of gambling on someone poor was very negative. Where she lived in Topanga canyon in California, the run-down house next to her own lower middle class home, housed a near homeless man named Joe Falkenrich, who was poor. And he became poor because he went to Vegas too many times to gamble, each time spending the weekly salary of his construction work. Clarity returned to the loom working area, where Lanai was trying to convince Kish that gambling was not risky.

Gambling was risky only when you spent a large fraction of your money, thought Clarity, and that tended to happen by thinking you could recover losses with a win. But Lanai had a different view on the argument.

"If you make ten pesos, you can spend one peso gambling, and you can return to your normal life without bearing any financial burden or losing your job."

"Why would you risk your money, which is so difficult to make?" asked Kish. Lanai pointed to his loom.

"Because you still have the loom to make a living, you're not risking anything," said the librarian. Kish shook his head.

"No, if you gamble away ten percent of what you make, you're working ten percent of the time for someone else without getting paid. That's not owning your business, that's almost working for someone else who's taking advantage of you."

"You still own your business," said Lanai, "no one is taking advantage of you."

"Owning your business is owning your profits, and you're not getting ten percent of your income because of gambling, that means fewer profits, it also means you worked to get that ten percent, but it's not part of your business anymore. It belongs to the resort, assuming you lose at gambling, which is most of the time. So you're not owning that ten percent of what you made anymore, the gambling resort has got it, it is the new owner of that money, and they did no work for it, made no effort to get that money but knew it was likely that you'd lose while gambling. That's why they're taking advantage of you. Of your work. They're getting the reward from your effort, they're getting your money, ten percent of your income, and hence a small part of your business, without

engaging in any effort, without adding any value, all of it knowing you're nearly certain to lose that money during gambling. Gambling is not a legitimate way of making money, in my view. It deludes you into thinking you don't have to work to make money, and that is simply not the case, should not be the case. I don't want that business in Miradorcito, I want only honest work here, even if profit is small."

Chapter Six

Clarity woke up and stepped out of her tent, walking towards the portable shower shelter set up by Zephairi. Its five gallon reservoir supplied clean water to the inhabitants of Miradorcito who were living at the camping ground north of the Rosarito River. To prevent animosities, the Egyptologist had settled his tent and crew in the opposite side of the village, south of the river. Clarity rubbed her eyes and noticed the shower was busy. After a few minutes, Lanai got out wearing a robe. Clarity extended her hand.

"Soap, please." Lanai gave her a bottle of shower gel bought in Cancún.

"Soap."

After breakfast, Clarity decided to confront Lanai on why she had become distant.

"You haven't spoken to me in the last few days. I don't understand why. I'd like to know the reason."

"Well, we just have different opinions on things. You're very practical, and I know you mean well for the community with this idea of the ecovillage, but that's not what I'm looking for here."

Lanai had notes from the Book of the Adept, on the Greek boustrophedon that they had seen in the island of Eleuthera in the Bahamas. She began showing a passage of the book to Clarity. According to the Malibu librarian, the Book of the Adept, also known as the Book of Decadence, depending on how you interpreted it, indicated that there were links between the various esoteric Mystery traditions, among them the Western Mystery, Egyptian and Mayan esoteric traditions.

"What are you thinking?"

"Ms. Morales is not who she says she is. There is a reason why she engaged in the ceremony to honor the god of rain the other day."

"Who is she?"

"A shaman or a priestess, I'm unsure. I've learned from this book that the roles of shaman and priest overlap in the Mayan tradition."

Lanai showed Clarity a page depicting a Mayan priestess, wearing a feathered adornment on her head. According to Lanai, Ms. Morales knew about calendrical divination, dream interpretation and spiritual healing. In anthropological studies, the ceremonial and healing roles of shamans and priests were considered distinct. Whereas the shaman adopted spirit possession and ecstatic trance, the priestess healed by establishing a connection with deities and ancestors, using offerings and prayers to effect the desired change in the community.

"So what do you make of all this?" asked Clarity. "It doesn't solve the problem of the community, there is no more Miradorcito if you look around, and the rumour is that Ms. Morales cannot really perform as head of village anymore, that she is not prepared to assume the role."

"I know we disagree about this, but the new gambling resort will solve the lack of jobs here. And restoring the spiritual traditions of the Mayas here will preserve the continuity of their values so that the people living in Miradorcito don't engage in gambling that will create problems for them."

Clarity was not convinced by Lanai's argument. They continued walking over the small wooden bridge that crossed the Rosarito River, as Lanai looked around ensuring no one saw them. She leaned closer to Clarity and whispered in her ear.

"I think Zephairi is up to something."

"Well, he wants to get rid of the village, that's clear."

"He's looking for something, and I think I know what it is."

"A pyramid, he likes pyramids."

"No, it's a book. A book that explains how the Mayas disappeared, it's called a codex. The codex of Xuleiha, I don't know exactly what's in it."

"Let's make a deal, an alliance of sorts then. I'll help you find the codex of Xuleiha, if there is such manuscript, in exchange for you letting me know what Ms. Morales teaches you of Mayan traditions. She shares that only with you – she seems to like you."

"That's because I've given her a role here in the middle of all this upheaval, I think she should be the conservationist of the new resort which is being built."

"That won't work, Zephairi and Fahibian will never agree, they want her out of here," said Clarity.

They were reaching the area of Zephairi's crew, where Flower had been allowed to set up her tent. They saw Duldu walk inside his own tent. Nearby, an excavator was hiding Zephairi and Flower doing some digging work. Clarity had a hunch about Duldu, who had been named by Zephairi the unofficial head of security in the campground. She walked towards his tent, and peeked inside from a mesh, which acted as window. Inside, she saw the crew man brought by Fahibian holding the small toucan statue of Ms. Morales, cleaning the smooth red hue of the heartwood with a piece of cloth. The toucan was made of Chakte, a type of wood found in Belize, Guatemala and the Yucatan peninsula. Exposure to light and air dulled the brilliance of the wood, but cleaning it restored the original color.

Duldu did not own many things and for some reason, he liked the wooden toucan that he'd found in the palapa of Ms. Morales. It was a trophy for him,

proof that he was doing his job right, his own reward in exchange for doing all the hard work of unearthing the pyramids of Xuleiha. Fahibian had instructed him to inform him of all belongings of Ms. Morales, and also of all the papers she kept referring to ownership of the land of Miradorcito. His boss had managed to draw enough alliances to overrule the private property title of Miradorcito land, and claim to the governor of Campeche that the area was not properly maintained. That had resulted in his earlier mission to '*alter the calm mood*' of the village, and becoming *agent provocateur*, by letting Ms. Morales know that soon, there would be a genuine asphalt road in Miradorcito. Duldu rejoiced, for the road built meant that he was doing his job well, and that meant a promotion when he returned to Belize to work at the '*Moneghetti Suites*' in Ambergris Caye. His new role there as receptionist ranked a solid notch higher in pay and status than his current position as bellboy.

"Stay here," said Clarity, turning to Lanai, "it'll be just a minute." This was her chance to get closer to the head of the village. Clarity alerted Ms. Morales that Duldu had her wooden toucan and the strong woman reacted immediately.

"How do you know? Are you the one who took it?" The comment took Clarity by surprise.

"Not at all, I'm telling you Fahibian's hired worker has your toucan." Ms. Morales wanted to see it for herself and walked with Clarity towards Duldu's tent. Lanai was standing near the entrance of his tent, ensuring no one got in.

A few feet away, Zephairi was excavating a deep area with Flower.

"We've got another stela," said Zephairi. He shouted. "Duldu, come over here."

Duldu got out of his tent, seeing Ms. Morales walk towards him.

"My toucan, I want my toucan," she said.

"There is nothing I have which I don't own."

"Let me check your tent."

Zephairi walked towards them, gently pressing his hand on the back of Ms. Morales to lead her away from the tent of Fahibian's henchman.

"Leave Duldu. Come here, Ms. Morales, we found a new stela depicting a priestess. According to my indications during a trip I made to the side of Copan, this is the stela of an important priestess." Ms. Morales followed the advice of Lanai, using the opportunity to gather additional knowledge about her own tradition. She lifted a finger towards Fahibian's employee.

"I'll find it, I'll find my toucan."

"There's nothing to find. You're the one who owes me the keys of an excavator."

"Keys, what keys? I don't have any keys."

"You know you do lady, keys don't just disappear."

"You're not the head of this village Ms. Morales, you have to begin facing that," said Zephairi. Ms. Morales said nothing.

Duldu crossed his arms defiantly and remained at the entrance of his tent, until the group walked towards the new finding, which Zephari was labeling stela H, following a previous set of stelas found in other Mayan sites. Clarity saw Flower used a brush to sweep dust off the features of the priestess, who was not wearing a miter. A heated debate arose between Lanai and Flower as to which stela was more important. Stela B, the one depicting a mythical god of rain, or stela H, depicting a real person, a goddess incarnate as high-relief sculpture, dating back to the end of the Mayan influence peak around seven hundred A.D. Stela H was thought to embody a long twenty year cycle, the *k'atun*, and a soul-like essence associated with the divine. On the face opposite the five foot-high

priestess, a series of twenty glyphs and thirteen numbers showed the *tzolk'in* calendar, a cycle of time linked for the Mayas to the growth of corn and to the gestation period of a baby, both of them spanning close to two hundred sixty days, the result of multiplying twenty days by thirteen numbers of the *tzolk'in*.

Zephairi began taking photographs of the statue, made of grey stone, at close range. Ms. Morales claimed that the statue belonged to the village, and that she was the representative of Miradorcito. Zephairi showed her his permit to do archaeological work and his mandate on behalf of Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History as caretaker of the site. Ms. Morales grumbled, but had to accept that she wasn't the one in charge at Miradorcito anymore.

That night, Duldu mounted guard near stela H, making a fire to keep warm. At the same time, he ensured no one got inside his tent to take his precious toucan from him. In the far distance, he saw the palapa of Ms. Morales, wondering what the former head of the village was doing there.

Inside the home of Ms. Morales, Clarity and her friends had enjoyed a pleasant dinner. Ms. Morales lived on her own, and so she enjoyed the company of these younger women. Kish had decided to go to sleep early, preparing for a new assault on his fence by Duldu the next day.

Flower showed Clarity the photograph taken from her smartphone of the lower part of stela H. They admired the image of the priestess holding a sceptre, and an engraved x-shaped cross that looked like the cross of St. Andrew, which they were used to seeing in the flag of Scotland. Clarity didn't see the linkage with the esoteric Mysteries that Lanai was trying to point out to Ms. Morales. According to her friend, in other esoteric traditions, the cross was often illustrated with a rose at the crossing point, becoming the rosicross. There was a

code word in the book of Decadence that Clarity was still investigating, the word rosebud, and with Lanai's theory of cross-linkage across Mystery traditions, it looked like her friend was on her way to interpreting one of the meanings of the word.

"The rose is the logos, and the logos stands for reason and judgement," said Lanai.

"It could be, I don't know about the Western Mystery traditions," said Ms. Morales.

Lanai, who liked sharing her interpretation of the Western Mysteries with Ms. Morales, had the approval of the former head of village to raise questions that would be considered inappropriate by other people. She questioned the strong woman of Mayan descent about the difference between a priest and a shaman.

"The shaman works for individuals, the priest works for the community."

Strengthened by Lanai's words of encouragement, Ms. Morales began telling a tale of a Mayan priestess, *Lady K'ab'al Xook*, who lived during the Classic period in the old city of Yaxchilan, in what was now Chiapas, in Mexico. Lady K'ab'al ordered the making of a lintel depicting her motionless in front of a large snake standing on its tail. According to Ms. Morales, Lady K'ab'al was a high ranking member of a religious hierarchy called 'ah kinoob', meaning 'those of the sun', headed by a chief priest or priestess, referred to as the lord of the serpent.

"The snake represents water and fecundity, doesn't it?" asked Lanai.

"Yes, but there is another reason for that snake."

"What is it?" asked Lanai. Clarity glanced around and noticed that her friends Cynthia, Jenna, and Taimi, were not paying attention to Ms. Morales,

preferring to talk about how good Zephairi's crew members looked, and whether they could get used to living in Egypt with any of them.

"The meaning of the snake is kundalini energy."

"That's an Indian term, isn't it?" asked Clarity.

"Yes, it's the energy of the gods. It's meant only for those who want to be swallowed by the serpent, and then reborn."

Chapter Seven

The following day, Clarity saw Duldu check an assortment of rails and a cabin that was brought on a large truck to the site of Xuleiha. The items came from a failed Colorado ski resort, which had closed its doors due to lack of profitability. Zephairi instructed Duldu to build an aerial cable car attached to a group of various tall Ceiba trees rising over one hundred and fifty feet tall, and stretching across the village. Some of those trees produced a light and strong fiber, kapok, used to make tapestries, mattresses, and pillows. The seed was used to make soap and fertilizers. The Maya considered Ceiba to be a sacred tree, and Zephairi was convinced that he could use the trees to create an aerial gondola that would allow tourists to see the Mayan site of Xuleiha from the tree line.

Within two weeks of additional work, four sets of aerial cable cars carried soil and stones from one area of Xuleiha to another, as a total of four pyramids were uncovered below the ground of Miradorcito. Duldu was often seen during the day, riding the cable car over Kish's home and surreptitiously dropping large stones on the craftsman's garden trying to dissuade him from staying in what was now the former village of Miradorcito. One day, Zephairi found the remains of an ancient Mayan ball game court precisely where Kish's house was standing. The ball game was allegedly a Mayan blood sport, and was also considered sacred then. The game, known as Pok-a-tok, was part of religious ceremonies and most likely included prisoners, captured in battles from other Mayan cities. These warriors were then pitched in a 'gladiator' battle of Pok-a-Tok, whose goal was to carry a hard rubber ball with elbows, knees or hips, into a ring made of stone.

After the ballgame stadium was unearthed, it was clear that Kish's home could not stay where it was, because it clashed with the rest of the ancient court found, between two raised temple areas over twenty feet tall. Kish received a visit from Zephairi and Duldu riding the cable car, which was flying unusually low above his thatched roof.

"Are you going to leave your home?" asked Zephairi. "We have a great tent set up for you in the neighboring camp and you can bring your loom inside if you want." Zephairi lowered a set of papers for Kish to sign, which would acknowledge the sale of his land to the Egyptologist's Alabastriah foundation. Looking at the cable car from below, Kish jumped several times to reach the papers, attached to a rope and pulled down by gravity and a small stone underneath the papers.

"No, I'm not selling, you're violating my air space." Zephairi shouted to the craftsman that the presence of the gondola was officially approved.

"The aerial cable car is part of the new resort, it's in the report on the environmental impact of turning Xuleiha into a gambling resort area, that *'Mangrove Barrier Resorts'* has written to the governor of Campeche."

Clarity witnessed the scene, sitting with Lanai on the stone fence of Kish's home. They needed that report to make a case against the resort that Fahibian was trying to build. She told Lanai that the dangers of gambling were probably written in that report, but the Malibu librarian belittled and trivialized the dangers, disagreeing with Clarity. Bringing new jobs to Miradorcito was really the important issue, and the resort was a good thing for the village.

"What would you do if I was a problem gambler?" said Clarity, "What if I had lost a large sum of money?"

"I'd spend my money to cover your losses and learn a better way to play."

"That would create two money problems out of one, and two problem gamblers. I can't be friends with someone who likes to gamble large sums."

"Large sums?"

"Like fifty dollars, fifty dollars is a large sum."

Lanai replied that there was nothing wrong with losing a few dollars playing poker, and that she'd be Clarity's friend regardless of how much money the Malibu teleoperator lost, but that her rigid attitude was making it difficult to be her friend.

"You're not letting me help you with your gambling problem," said Lanai.

"My hypothetical gambling problem. No, you're helping me by worsening my gambling problem, it's different, you should be steering me away from the gaming table." Disappointed by her friend's stubborn belief that gambling was simply a form of entertainment, Clarity withdrew to her tent. Shortly after, Lanai dropped by asking for socks and some underwear. The librarian was short of some clothing and was moving to the palapa of Ms. Morales at the request of the former head of the village.

"You're not staying with us anymore, in our tent?" asked Clarity.

"We're figuring out what the various discoveries here mean for the Mayan tradition. Ms. Morales wants to know more about the Book of Decadence, and I can help her with that, and possibly with finding the codex of Xuleiha that Flower and Zephairi are trying to find. I'm also thinking that I may want to experience the feeling of kundalini energy. I might as well move in with her, I'm nearly certain now that she is a shaman." Clarity gave her friend who was standing close to the line of being a former friend, a pair of socks and one of her bikini panties.

"You may be swallowed by the serpent."

"If I don't try it, I'll never know what the serpent is."

Clarity and Lanai walked over to the palapa of Ms. Morales, who ignored Clarity's suggestion to look for the environmental impact report. The woman was busy figuring out how to get rid of the air pollution created by the construction material brought in by Fahibian's crew. Complaining that she was finding Miradorcito, or what was left of it, somewhat noisy. The only artifact that she had managed to bring to her home while Duldu was busy quarreling with Kish over his property was a stone panel with some glyphs. They were addressed to future inhabitants of the area, depicting an expensive version of a toucan sculpture. As a keeper of the Mayan tradition, she was working with Lanai to decipher the meaning of those glyphs, but neither of them knew enough Maya pictogram language to understand them fully.

"Why is it that you dislike what I propose? I think I'm helping you and the village with all of what I'm doing." Ms. Morales placed the stone panel from stela B on the table.

"You're coming in trying to impose your view on us of how the village should look. Your idea of the ecovillage is not feasible here. No one cares about bringing renewable energy technology to this area. It's expensive and difficult to install."

"I think the idea of a sustainable economy is worthwhile. You're not facing the reality dawning on this village."

"We can solve all of our problems on our own."

Lanai sided with Ms. Morales, downplaying her favoring of the gambling resort and replying that preserving Mayan traditions was the direction needed by the village, in addition to re-enacting the Mayan Mysteries. Clarity saw Ms. Morales as a motherly figure, and she resented the fact that somehow, she was landing on the enemy side of the head of Miradorcito.

Kish interrupted their argument, knocking on the door of the palapa. Waving his hands up and down, then left and right, he pointed to all four cardinal points saying that a bus carrying a crew from Unesco's World Heritage Center was interested in the site of Xuleiha, to evaluate whether site met the criteria to become a world heritage site. They walked to the entrance of the village, where Zephairi was blocking the entrance with a two hundred ton payload capacity haul truck. Five people, weary from their trip, stepped out of the World Heritage bus. They were inspectors coming from the *International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property*, a group based in Rome, Italy.

"What's the problem?" asked Ms. Morales.

"I'm in charge here," said Zephairi. He stepped towards the inspector leading the group, Mr. Owenbach.

"We'd like to see what's being discovered here," said the inspector, "someone called us from the governor's office in Campeche saying there was a new Mayan site worthy to be considered a World Heritage Site."

Zephairi shook his head, pointing to another bus, labeled with an ad for Egyptair, the Egyptian airline flag carrier, whose driver was honking relentlessly to drive inside the site and park.

"No, the Egyptian authorities are taking care of all the excavations. This is not that big of a site, there's nothing that special here. We have a permit from Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History."

Zephairi explained his grand project of dismantling one of the pyramids uncovered at Xuleiha, the large one, and of numbering each of its stones with chalk into an enormous pile ready for plane transportation onboard an Egyptair Airbus plane. Zephairi was seriously considering transporting the stones and all

of Miradorcito's inhabitants onboard the same plane. In Zephairi's view of the site's urban refurbishing, the villagers would be moving to Egypt without giving their explicit consent, becoming a live tourist attraction there, as authentic descendants of the Mayan culture. Along with the villagers settling in Egypt, the Xuleiha pyramid would be rebuilt there, with the possible add-on of a small sphinx statue at the top, to show that the Egyptian people and its government had adopted the Mayan pyramid.

"We're not relocating to Egypt," said Ms. Morales, "the people of Miradorcito are not part of a circus that can be shown around."

"The villagers will relocate because Egypt is a good place, and because there is nothing to do here. In Egypt, there is work for them, we're just waiting for the final approval from the Egyptian government to rebuild the large Mayan pyramid found here in Xuleiha, near Cairo."

While Zephairi and Ms. Morales were arguing, Clarity walked near the second bus and noticed it was empty. The bus with the Egyptair ad was meant for the inhabitants of Miradorcito, who would be driven away from their village to a foreign place, somewhere in Egypt. Zephairi stopped arguing with Ms. Morales when the car of Fahibian approached at slow speed, stopping behind the Egyptair bus. Zephairi walked away from Ms. Morales to meet Fahibian.

Left without anyone to argue, Ms. Morales inquired with Mr. Owenbach about the criteria that Miradorcito had to meet to become a World Heritage Site. Among the requisites, Miradorcito had to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance, representing an example of outstanding biological ecosystems, and be directly or tangibly associated with events, living traditions, beliefs, artistic or literary works of outstanding universal significance.

"There is a codex which meets that criteria, but we're still searching for it," said Ms. Morales.

While Ms. Morales spoke with the representatives of the World Heritage Center, Clarity walked towards Fahibian's car from behind, outside the view of both passengers and of Zephairi. She kneeled down and grabbed the rear bumper of the car, sliding along to the driver's side, to overhear what Fahibian was saying to Zephairi on the other side of the car. In the passenger seat, Fahibian's girlfriend was trying to read a map of the area, making plans to stay for a few days in the Xel Ha sanctuary of marine life, '*the place where the water is born*', according to the local Mayan language translation. She wanted to swim naked in one of the lagoons, but the real estate businessman was not too keen, letting her know instead about the selection of cocktails in one of the resorts and the open bar available.

Clarity listened to the conversation taking place with Zephairi. According to Fahibian, within a few days, an Egyptair plane would land in Cancún to take the inhabitants of Miradorcito to Egypt, with the whole move viewed as part of Mexican exports, counting in the calculation of Mexican gross domestic product exported to other countries.

"The governor of Campeche has just approved the license for two hundred fifty gaming machines and thirty table games. Is the site ready to open?" Zephairi stared at him in disbelief.

"Are you kidding, we're still excavating, we found a total of four pyramids, and it took us two weeks to set up the aerial tram and unearth the ball game court. You're bringing in tourists already?"

"Just some high profile people, actors, actresses, sports people and singers. My advisors in Belize are investing a large chunk of their money offshore, and they would like to gamble away some of the rest."

"Well, except for two homes, there is no more village. It's going to feel rural for them, we'd have to put them in tents."

"That's fine, as long as there's gaming here. Drive away these people from the World Heritage Center, will you, they are a pain, and we don't want anyone to oppose the new resort idea, we simply want the pyramids as a side attraction. Drive them to other Mayan sites you've been examining, but not here."

"That stupid employee of the governor of Campeche called on the World Heritage Center after Morales called to plea in favor of keeping the village as it was. He believes in the restoration and preservation of the Mayan identity." Fahibian looked in the distance at the site of Xuleiha in front of him, with all the excavators and haul trucks busily displacing large amounts of soil to reveal the four pyramids found and the new ball game court.

"This place is not that magnificent, it's simply that the land is cheap," said the real estate developer. "Cheaper than around Cancún and the Mayan Riviera."

It could also provide an additional credential as an important Mayan archaeology site, thought Zephairi, who had his mind on becoming the head of the Alabastriah foundation. Fahibian shook hands with Zephairi and got inside the driving seat of his car, not noticing the abounding mud on the side of the road, where Clarity had just enough time to hide by lying horizontally in a small crevasse.

Chapter Eight

Zephairi led Mr. Owenbach to the first pyramid uncovered by Flower. The large pyramid of Xuleiha was certainly bulky because of its size, but Zephairi compared it unfavorably with the ones found in Chichen Itza, and influenced the thoughts of Mr. Owenbach and his peers on the recently discovered site. After serving all the inspectors a copious lunch, Zephairi managed to shape their opinion on the pending assignment. As a result, the members of the World Heritage Center committee agreed unanimously to abandon the idea of considering Miradorcito as a possible World Heritage Site. They left the village and its new Mayan grounds, going instead to a less frequented tourist area on the East Coast of Yucatan, the biosphere reserve of Sian Ka'an, a World Heritage Site holding tropical forests and marshes, and over a hundred species of birds and mammals such as the jaguar, ocelot and tapir.

Clarity began coaxing Ms. Morales about the idea of turning Miradorcito into an ecovillage.

"What exactly is an ecovillage?" asked Ms. Morales. Clarity didn't know the official attributes of an ecovillage but she knew that it was a community idea, and that she had to provide an example of what was being done in other places to gain Ms. Morales' attention. She turned to Flower.

"I just remember that the cost of building an ecovillage is about one hundred thousand dollars," said Flower.

"We need our land back first, but I'm not so sure that we can find one hundred thousand dollars to build anything. We're better off recovering our crops," said Ms. Morales.

"That's not that difficult. Once the project has a good advocate, the land will be donated back to those who live in Miradorcito," said Clarity.

"Where are we going to find this advocate?"

"We need to see the environmental impact report that Fahibian's Real Estate Development Company wrote to the authorities of Campeche," said Clarity. Ms. Morales grumbled that Zephairi was a self-centered person interested exclusively in getting all the glory for his discovery of Mayan ruins in Miradorcito. He would never accept sharing the report. Clarity decided to investigate Zephairi's tent while the Egyptologist was busy having lunch with Kish aboard the gondola that swayed every day above the craftsman's house. Zephairi was hoping to convince Kish of leaving his home, offering the craftsman a post to operate the gondola and a spot to sleep in one of the tents. Kish wasn't at all interested in abandoning his loom or his hut, he simply agreed to climb along the ladder dropped from the gondola, in order to enjoy a free lunch provided by Zephairi. Clarity saw Duldu holding an induction balance metal detector in Kish's garden, looking for the keys to the giant G-earth excavator, which was still stranded near the home of the craftsman.

Ensuring Zephairi's crew was also having lunch at a picnic table, Clarity stepped inside the Egyptologist's tent, finding his laptop on a white plastic garden chair. She turned it on and looked for a folder or file labelled with the word ecovillage. She found a report titled '*Environmental conflicts in Mexican conservation*', and printed a page that spoke of a ecovillage in a very small town of New Mexico, Chamisal, with a population of three hundred ten people, as blueprint for future projects to be carried out in Mexico.

The Rural municipality had donated the land to carry out the ecoproject, which included an energy efficient restaurant built with straw bales and timber from an out-of-use grain elevator. The restaurant used fryers, convection ovens, griddles, icemakers, and hot food holding cabinets that displayed the energy

star label, saving twenty to forty percent in energy costs amounting to about two hundred dollars per year in utility bills, and also using less water. The buildings were heated using geothermal technology and solar panels, and an environmentally friendly golf course planned for business executives had been built. The golf course boasted limited pesticide use, a habitat specially designed for endemic wildlife, solar-powered carts, an all-organic course, limiting the use of chemicals used on turf grass. Mexican authorities had seen the project of Chamisal and were looking for ways to implement the idea in Mexico.

Clarity moved the cursor down a few pages to read the name of the authorities favoring the project in Mexico, but the name was not visible, as Zephairi had taken the precaution of erasing it. Hearing the noise of canvass being lifted behind her, she turned around and nearly collided with Duldu, who was lifting his metal detector towards her.

"What are you doing here?" asked Duldu. His eyes darted towards Clarity, who was caught off guard. Duldu prevented Clarity from stepping out of the tent, and called the man who was replacing his boss, the Egyptologist, on his cell phone, asking him to come return immediately to his tent. Clarity kept her nerve and found an excuse in those few seconds. She managed to speak calmly.

"Just checking how the construction work is moving along on a chart prepared by Mr. Zephairi." She turned off the computer and sat down on a second garden table, until Zephairi came into the tent, leaving Kish checked by the metal detector of Duldu, who was bent on finding the excavator keys.

"What are you doing here? You should be working with your friend," said Zephairi.

"I was looking for you," said Clarity, "I was wondering why the people from the World Heritage Center have left so quickly?"

Zephairi led Duldu outside the tent and sat down near Clarity. He didn't like Clarity meddling with his archaeology project, but knew that the Malibu teleoperator could be a nuisance if he brushed her aside too quickly.

"I think the World Heritage Center has some good ideas," she added.

Speaking confidently, she spoke her mind to Zephairi, telling him that he was not engaging in the right approach with his support of the Xuleiha gambling resort in Miradorcito. In fact, he was better off leaving, taking some of the findings uncovered, like stela B, and letting the inspectors of the World Heritage Center perform additional due diligence to decide whether the ruins of Xuleiha were worthy of becoming part of the monuments included in the World Heritage List. Zephairi led her outside the tent.

"Come here, look, we can do better than the World Heritage Center."

Clarity stepped outside the tent and saw Zephairi's crew taking measurements of the large pyramid, which was going to be dismantled and taken to Egypt, replaced by one of the wings of the new gaming resort. A second crew hired by Fahibian was installing night lights for the site's ballgame court, which was becoming a large amphitheater for tourists looking for evening entertainment.

"You're not leaving, then?" asked Clarity. She knew the answer but she thought that her discovery of the ecovillage report was safe as long as she kept distracting Zephairi.

"No, I'm not leaving, I like this place, I'm the keeper of all the findings here."

Clarity saw Ms. Morales and Lanai walk towards them. Duldu lifted his metal detector towards Ms. Morales, to check whether she held the excavator's missing keys. Ms. Morales pushed away the detector, which landed on a metal

clamp holding one of the poles of the tent in place. Duldu attempted to lift the detector, but the device held on to the clamp.

"Check the home of Ms. Morales, Duldu," Zephairi ordered. Duldu lifted the metal detector off the tent's pole and walked away towards his tent to leave the device.

"My home? You can't do that, he can't do that, it's my home," said Ms. Morales.

"All the land here belongs to us, Ms. Morales," said Zephairi, "we can step anywhere in this place."

Ms. Morales was appalled that Zephairi was planning to dismantle the large pyramid. According to her, the finding belonged to Miradorcito. The Mayan Mysteries were older than the Egyptian Mysteries, and the Mayans had brought their religion and wisdom to Egypt. Therefore, Egyptian pyramids came from Mayan pyramids.

"No, let me show you how it happened," said Zephairi.

Zephairi led Ms. Morales into his tent, followed by Lanai, Kish and Clarity. The Egyptologist drew a map on a blank sheet of paper, explaining that America was geographically united at some point in the past, with the Old World, Europe and Africa, through a lost continent known as Atlantis. According to him, the Egyptian Mysteries were older, and Egypt had spread them to Mesoamerica, the land between North and South America.

"We disagree, Mr. Zephairi. We disagree strongly, we were here first."

Flower came inside Zephairi's tent, holding a marble toucan similar to the one that Ms. Morales owned, and joined the conversation. She enjoyed her work, digging below stela B to find any trace of a Mayan codex, but she didn't enjoy it when Zephairi wasn't working as well to encourage her.

"Are you explaining the Egyptian-Mayan relationship that we hope to find in the codex here?" Zephairi glared at Flower, who was not expected to share their findings with others on the site.

"What codex?" asked Ms. Morales.

Zephairi said nothing of the manuscript he was trying to find in the soil of Miradorcito, one that was mentioned in another well-known Mayan manuscript known as the Tro-Cortesianus codex, or Troano Codex. He was looking for a finding that had eluded archaeologists and ethnographers ever since British-American antiquarian Auguste Le Plongeon had photographed and documented entire Mayan buildings at Yucatan sites Uxmal and Chichen Itza. Le Plongeon had attempted to translate the Troano Codex, and believed that there were links between the Mayas and the lost continent of Atlantis, itself a link with the pyramids of Egypt. Le Plongeon's theory had survived over one hundred years in alternative beliefs derived from occult knowledge and theosophy. This particular fact, Zephairi was not sharing with anyone, for no one would give credibility to an archaeologist who believed in the occult, and Zephairi was such a man.

Zephairi scratched his head, wondering what to say next. He believed the opposite of Le Plongeon's theory, thinking that Egypt was the cradle of civilization, which had then spread to the Mayas through Atlantis. In any event, he thought that the Mayan codex of Xuleiha, mentioned in the Troano codex, held one of the secrets of the Mayas, why its civilization had suddenly vanished. That was a discovery worth making, and one that would put him and Egypt on the map of archaeological fame and fortune.

Ms. Morales pressed the question of the Codex on Zephari, but Duldu stepped inside the tent with the wooden toucan, completely burned by fire, the beak displaying a charcoaled black color.

"I found this," he said proudly.

"My toucan, my God, it's completely burned."

"This is what happens when keys don't show up."

"Well, truth be told, he took the toucan, he stole it," said Clarity.

Lanai looked at her friend as though she was saying something crazy. In Lanai's opinion, it was crazy to face Zephairi or Duldu directly, for they were far more powerful than them. Duldu stared at Clarity, looking briefly in the direction of his detector, but refraining from taking it.

"Well, you can still use it to do prayers with it," said Duldu, looking at Ms. Morales.

"It's not the same," said Ms. Morales, "it's just not the same."

Clarity saw a look of powerlessness emerge briefly on the features of Ms. Morales. She turned to Flower.

"I want this marble toucan instead."

Zephairi took the bird made of stone from the hands of Flower, and gave it to Ms. Morales. He knew that there was a way to diffuse the conflict, as long as Duldu was not too close to the one creating it.

"You can have the toucan."

"It's my first finding," said Flower, "I was looking forward to keeping it."

"No, Ms. Morales is entitled to keep something from here, then she will leave the village and follow our generous proposal to live in Egypt."

Ms. Morales tapped on the marble toucan impatiently, shaking her head, meaning a definite no. Flower pouted briefly, wondering why everyone was in

such a bad mood. Clarity mentioned the idea of the ecovillage to Ms. Morales, thinking that it was an appropriate time to discuss it in the presence of Zephairi.

"The ecovillage is not a good idea, there is no money and no advocates, stop bothering me with it," said Ms. Morales.

Holding the marble toucan close, Mrs Morales took one last look at the burned wooden toucan and left the tent. Clarity, Lanai and Kish immediately followed. Her rift with Ms. Morales was deepening, thought Clarity, brushing aside the metal detector, which Duldu was moving too close to her backside. She noticed that the local keeper of Mayan traditions, Ms. Morales, was weathering all hurts without being withered by the adversity of the situation. Despite being rejected and turned down as confident by Ms. Morales, Clarity admired the former head of the village. She longed for that kind of resilience in the face of deep problems, and wondered where Ms. Morales received such inner strength.

Chapter Nine

Flower changed clothes inside her new private tent, which had a tunnel leading directly to the Zephairi's tent. The Egyptologist was happy with her work, in particular, her use of the brush to get rid of the dirt covering the artifacts she had found, which included a jade mask thought to represent a Mayan priest, a stone ax in the shape of corn, stone protective gear worn during the sacred ballgames, and a three legged vessel depicting the afterworld used to drink cocoa. As she made the discoveries, she typically showed them to Lanai before showing them to Zephairi, because the Malibu librarian was keen on learning more about the significance of each finding.

Zephairi was particularly interested in a pendant with a hieroglyphic inscription of a ritual that took place towards the end of a king's rule. Flower was proud to see that he loved the pendant. She could tell because shortly after she'd unearthed it, he'd given her a promotion in the form of a new tent, which was pitched very close to his. Flower took a small round mirror and took off her shirt, leaving only a yellow bra covering her breasts.

"Flower!"

The call from Zephairi startled the half-dressed ethnographer. She donned a rough canvass shirt bought in a shopping center in Cancún and placed the mirror back in place on the small cabinet that acted as dresser.

"Do you have that pendant?" Flower nodded, pulling it out of her neckline.

"I want to search the altar of the large pyramid tonight. I'd like you to come with me," he said to Flower.

"At night?"

"At night."

Not on your life, thought Flower. Or more exactly, maybe with her friend Clarity. She gave an indefinite 'maybe' to Zephairi, and walked over to seek Clarity in the poor tent area, with all the village people. Once there she spotted Clarity, then pulled her by the arm and brought her to her tent.

"Sure, I'll go with you," said Clarity. "Did he tell you why he wants to search the altar?"

"No. All right, I'll tell Zeph that you're coming with me."

That night, Clarity followed Flower up the steps of the large pyramid of Xuleiha. There was a near full moon out and the air was cool. They found Zephairi at the top, preparing an omelette. The girls had not eaten, and they were hungry. The Egyptologist also prepared a fire, and after a lavish meal that included honey-glazed Egyptian goose, and fresh black olives appreciated by Flower in particular, he explained that he had chosen Flower as an Egyptologist, because she was familiar with the idea of sexual alchemy, a way to modify the body and even emotions by performing the sexual act. He showed Flower the resume that she had used to apply for the position of assistant, which mentioned some of the practices that Lady Scafarel used on her in Bahrain aboard the Owens & Owell jet, the Air Fashion Jet.

He pointed to a large stone near the fire. Clarity could see four lines around the stone, representing the forces of creation. Zephairi explained that the name of God often had four letters, one for the woman, one for the man, one for the phallus, and one for the uterus. During his previous visit to one of the Mayan sites, a raider of tombs named Cole Gambi de Trot had mentioned a name he ignored, *exiohari*, saying that its meaning was held by a stela in another Mayan site yet undiscovered. That site could be Xuleiha.

"You think that the Mayas carried out practices of sexual alchemy?"

"Let's figure out what they did, by recreating the practice of the Adi-Buddha, the unknowable and unmanifested. To do that, we have to be naked, but we cannot see the others naked." Flower began asking questions.

"Are you sure the Adi-Buddha is Mayan?"

"It's all connected dear, at some point it is." He pointed to a column where Flower and Clarity could take off their clothes.

"Is this part of work?" asked Clarity.

"Yes, of course," said Zephairi, "learning how an adept thought and practiced the spiritual ritual of arousing the fire in them."

"I don't want to be an adept," said Clarity, whispering to Flower. The Ethnographer whispered back, while she took off her bra.

"I don't know what an adept is, but this is turning me on."

Once naked, Zephairi gave instructions to think about the four forces. The study of the eternal one eventually led to the ninth sphere, the sphere of sex. Clarity could tell that Flower was getting a tad too excited by her new facet of work, because she was letting go and fantasizing about a Mayan God depicted in the column which hid her from the view of Zephairi. Clarity felt a breeze flow through her most intimate places, and wondered what the meaning of the word exiohari was. They looked at the stone again and Zephairi, covered only by a small piece of cloth, which covered his genitals, pulled out his ipad and began to compare hieroglyphs from a stela in Copan with the stone in front of them.

"Look, the four lines in the stela of Copan translate as the crossing of the sexual cells of man and woman, I'm convinced that that's the meaning of exiohari."

According to Zephairi, the meaning of the philosopher's stone, sexual transmutation, couldn't be far from where they were. It was becoming clear to

Clarity that Zephairi was looking for the missing codex of the Mayas, which was also the equivalent of the Taoist canons, books containing instructions for esoteric sexual practices.

"And so the meaning of the guacamayas in stela B is sexual," said Clarity.

"Yes, my dear, yes."

Clarity was beginning to feel cold. She donned a shirt, followed by Flower. Zephairi had no other choice but to follow what the two women were doing.

"Let's go back to our tent," said Clarity.

"Let's go back to our tent," said Zephairi, drawing an indecent look to Flower.

"I think I'll go back to my own tent," said Flower, "which is different from your tent."

The next day Fahibian came for a second visit with her girlfriend Casey at her side. The former champ of twelve mud wrestling belts was interested in seeing the large pyramid because it could become an interesting wall to climb. Casey was a rock climber, and Zephairi agreed with Fahibian to build a rock-climbing wall on one of the walls of the pyramid, before dismantling it. Clarity saw Kish overhear the conversation, and the craftsman immediately reacted.

"This is appalling. A rock climbing wall is not a traditional Mayan pyramid, it's a joke to our ancestors," said Kish. Fahibian snapped his fingers and called on Duldu, who brought Kish to his fence.

"This is where you live, this is your home. Your job as bellboy is ringing closer," said Duldu, "you are headed for Belize."

"My loom is my guarantee, and my home is here." Feeling somewhat unsure and unsafe, Kish looked at his home, which looked like an ideal target for the several excavators that were hovering around it. The shade of the gondola

carrying soil flew over him, as if confirming what was going to happen to the home he had known for decades.

Fahibian dropped a piece of paper and Clarity picked it up. The letterhead said *Mexican Institute for Ethnoconservation and Ecology*. Fahibian rushed to lift the paper out of Clarity's hands, nearly shrivelling it inside his pocket. Clarity knew she had found something important. She rushed to Flower's tent during her lunch break.

"I need access to the web," said Clarity. Flower turned on her ipad, which Zephairi had provided as part of her salary as assistant.

Clarity quickly drew a series of web searches on the Institute. According to several articles by local journals on the web, the Institute for Ethnoconservation and Ecology was not on good terms with Fahibian's real estate company '*Mangrove Barrier Resorts*'. It was the Ethnoconservation group, which was behind the idea of the ecovillage in the private Environmental Impact Report that she had seen in Zephairi's tent. They needed the support of that group to carry out what seemed impossible: to turn a commercially viable real estate project into a sustainable ecovillage, whose project was being kept secret from the local inhabitants of the village which was perfect for it. Another report interviewed one of the members of the Ethnoconservation group, who was casting a doubt upon the honesty of the award procedure of the project to *Mangrove Barrier Resorts*.

Clarity sought Ms. Morales and found her listening to Kish complaining, while she examined the marble toucan that Flower had found. On the belly of the toucan, there was a wheel depicting a small Mayan calendar, which had indications on them, indications which only Ms. Morales, a genuine shaman, could understand.

"This sign here means that the pyramids found here should be preserved."

She pointed to an oval shaped depiction of several cities.

"All these cities were linked at some point. This point here is Tikal and this line connects Xuleiha with it."

Clarity peeked over the shoulder of Lanai to look at the pink marble toucan.

"Are you saying there was a road between Tikal and Miradorcito in earlier times?" asked Clarity.

Ms. Morales nodded.

"Yes, and that's what our ancestors want us to build, a road linking the Costa Maya and Mayan Riviera with other Mayan cities in Guatemala and Belize."

Clarity apologized to Ms. Morales about her attitude to change things without getting her or the rest of the village completely onboard.

"I think I may have been too insistent on the idea of the ecovillage."

"It's not an easy idea to carry out."

Clarity explained that she had found the name of the advocate that Miradorcito needed. Her eyes beamed because it was a real avenue for sustainable change. But Ms. Morales remained stern.

"It's all nice and good," said Ms. Morales, "but the project here has been allotted to Fahibian's Real Estate Company. I don't have any power to change the mind of the governor of Campeche and Zephairi has an official permit."

Ms. Morales looked discouraged. Clarity knew that the woman had the strength to change the course of events at Miradorcito, but she ignored how to let her know that she was stronger and more resourceful than she thought. Ms. Morales left with Kish to meet the rest of the village. The villagers were growing restless because food supplies were scarcer as a result of a bottleneck created by

Duldu, the official gatekeeper of food and water. According to Duldu, the stock of food had to last weeks, because of stringent cost budgeting adopted by Fahibian's development project. Ms. Morales had only a few pesos with her, but she used the money to buy food outside the village, at the local market in Xelha, and brought some food back to those who had chosen her as head of the village. Clarity noticed that her strength came from her integrity, and her integrity came to her from the previous head of the village, a peasant known as Kino, the man who arranged the building of the dam in exchange for some land upstream, which was sold to the province of Campeche.

"These people are so poor," said Flower, "I could never be so poor."

Clarity was dismayed at how insensitive Flower could be at times. For the first time, she saw clearly how attached to comfort her friend was. She wasn't planning on staying in Miradorcito all of her life, she liked her own comfort and she did think that the villagers and Ms. Morales deserved better than what they had. Did money really rule the world to such an extent; she wondered?

Following Flower's suggestion, Clarity had begun reading the seven laws of money by the founder of MasterCard, and she knew that money was, among other things, a store of value. The ecovillage was a possible source of value for the village, and to her, its potential way out of poverty. That night, she slid inside her sleeping bag thinking of ways to fund the ecovillage of Miradorcito, which was now the archaeological site of Xuleiha. After several minutes, she dismissed the idea, letting her mind yield to the fact that she didn't have access to any significant source of funding.

Chapter Ten

Over the next few days, Zephairi examined the altar of the large pyramid closely, climbing up and down the stairs every single day, in the hope of finding a clue that would lead to the codex. Clarity helped Flower with the task of attempting to examine every single stone of the large pyramid and turn it over if there was any visible sign or symbol on it. One day, just before lunch, tired from climbing the pyramid, Flower sat at the bottom of the stairs on a stone looking at the East side of the site. The stone moved slightly and the motion took Flower by surprise.

"Clarity, this stone has moved. Come here." Clarity placed her hand on the stone that had moved, and it moved again when she pushed inwards towards the pyramid.

"Let's tell Zeph, he'll know how to deal with this." Zephairi came and used a large tree trunk to push the stone further inwards. After several hours, an opening could be seen from the outside. It was a side entrance to the pyramid.

Zephairi took a large flashlight and pointed it towards the dark passage before him. He began exploring the corridor, followed by Flower, who was wearing a mini skirt, and by Clarity, who preferred to wear shredded denim shorts and a baggy t-shirt. A few minutes later, they reached the entrance of a larger room. Zephairi checked a drawing of the pyramid, which emulated other pyramids in Palenque. Clarity glanced at the vaulted stone ceiling, which showed no decorations or paintings.

"This is a burial chamber," he said. Filling nearly all of the ten feet by eight feet area was a sarcophagus made of limestone, which was closed by a stone Zephairi called his crew, who lifted the lid of the sarcophagus a mere seven

inches after twenty hours of work. Inside, there was a woman lying on her stomach, covered with pearl collars, figurines and ear spools made of jade.

"The Queen of the golden disk," said Zephairi. Clarity bent closer to the head of the skeleton, noticing a disk made with gold, which was placed at earlobe level.

In front of the head, there was an old manuscript, rolled. Zephairi carefully lifted the book, made with amate paper. All known Mayan codices were made of that kind of paper. The pulp was extracted from the bark of the wild fig tree, which was boiled in water until it became softer. The bark was then cut into strips, aligned on a piece of wood. Then, the strips were left to dry in the sun and a lime coating was added. The strips were kept together with glue made from orchids.

"The Xuleiha codex," said Zephairi triumphantly, "all the mysteries of Mayan sexual transmutation are here for us to interpret." The old book read boustrophedon; it was undoubtedly an important discovery of pictographs, which could also shed light on the Maya almanac depicting various long cycles. While Zephairi and Clarity made their way back to the exit, Flower stayed a few more minutes to examine the adornments of the Queen of the golden disk. Following hieroglyphic indications, she entered a narrow corridor, different from the exit. A few minutes later, Clarity tapped on Zephairi.

"Where is Flower?"

"She'll be out in a second," said Zephairi, busy keeping the codex rolled in place. Clarity looked at her watch.

"Let's go find her." They walked back into the burial area and yelled the name of the ethnographer. A faint voice reached them from another corridor.

"I'm here."

Clarity used a flashlight to reach Flower, who was inside another area used to carry out rituals, depicting Xibalba, the name of the underworld for the Mayas, ruled by the gods of death, in particular Hunhau, lord of the underworld. She found her friend bending over a stone, showing her bum beneath the mini skirt.

"It's all so strange, why would you honor death?" asked Flower.

"Probably because the Mayas realized eventually everyone ended up there."

"I could never be an adept and follow anyone spiritually. Good thing no one does any human sacrifice rituals these days." Clarity nodded.

They walked out of the burial area and reached the outdoors again. They could see Duldu engaged in an argument with Kish, regarding the use of the ballgame area found. The game between competing teams symbolized the struggle between the gods of the life and fertility, and the lords of the underworld found by Flower. The underworld for Kish was Duldu himself, who was preventing him from reaching the cabin of a bulldozer that threatened the craftsman's home, fence and garden.

"My home is staying and no bulldozer will run it down. Now that you found this ballcourt, I want it to be an authentic Mayan ballcourt, one that will pitch your boss, Fahibian, against Zephairi. The loser will die in a ritual sacrifice," said Kish casually.

"That's harsh, there are no human sacrifices today," said Duldu "no, your home is in the middle of this court, it should be you against Ms. Morales, that way we'll know with certainty that one of you won't annoy us anymore refusing to leave this place. Anyway, this place is going to be an entertainment area that will be used for night shows."

"A ritual area, maybe not so harsh as to carry out human sacrifice," said Kish.

"Entertainment," said Duldu.

"Ritual," said Kish.

Confirming Duldu's statement, a crew of ten workers approached the ballcourt and began installing poles with metal halide fixtures providing one thousand watts of light each. Additional workers brought thirty truckloads of sod brought by refrigerated trucks, and installed the rolls of natural grass on the ballgame court. Clarity noticed another crew of twenty men getting past Zephairi, who checked for their work permits. They were bringing over two hundred video lottery terminals and electronic gaming machines to the ballcourt. Working during five days, they covered them in a large tent made with canvass, leaving the home of Kish surrounded by all the terminals and their noise.

Clarity was impressed by the efficiency of the workers, and she walked closer to one of the terminals, noticing they were being powered by large generators feeding five machines. The gaming terminals allowed gamblers to bet on the outcome of popular video games which had been pre-played, games like *Call of Duty*, *Grand Theft Auto*, *Imperium*, *Age of Empires*, and *Assassin's Creed*. Instead of playing the games themselves, gamblers had to foresee the outcome of the scenes. Clarity occasionally played some of those games on the PlayStation or the X-box, but she found some of them particularly violent, and she felt that all the power and the riches offered in the games was short lived. The artifice of it left her with a sense of outright loss, and a feeling that her life was not as glamorous as that of the characters in the games, or that it was not as

successful or attainable in any way. For some reason, she didn't connect with those games.

Clarity checked the money of her purse, and noticed it had less than one hundred dollars. She wasn't making much money as teleoperator, and she valued experiences, which either broadened her way of thinking or led her to make better choices with the money she had. It struck her that human sacrifice rituals allegedly carried out by the Mayas had evolved into some of those games. Personally, she preferred games based on trade and commerce, where the goal is to discover new products, find ways to transport them, or delivering commodities to make money. Clarity's friends thought differently, and she saw Jenna, Cynthia and Taimi throw themselves on a Lord of the Rings video lottery terminal, checking out the basic play instructions and the pay table showing the number of coins paid out when a particular pattern showed up onscreen.

"Tonight is the inauguration of this amphitheater," said Duldu, "the Xuleiha gaming resort is a reality. Kish will have to leave or begin gambling." Clarity walked to the home of Kish, followed by Flower. The craftsman was not working on his loom, he was building a board to play Bul, or Puluc, a traditional Maya war game involving two players, where the goal was to reach the enemy base, by throwing corn kernels, or 'buls', painted black or yellow.

"What do you want to do?"

"I want to challenge Fahibian or Zephairi to a game of bul. It's our only chance of recovering Miradorcito."

"I doubt they'll want to play," said Clarity.

"They'll play because I'll put my home at stake if I lose," said Kish.

"And your loom?"

"Not my loom, just my home will be at stake. If I lose, I'll leave Miradorcito with my loom."

Clarity touched the beautiful loom that Kish prided himself in knowing how to work. She was sad for the craftsman, who barely had time to defend his home from the bulldozers brought in by Fahibian. If the risk of losing his home in a game wasn't exactly gambling, it was certainly close to being so for Kish. The all-or-nothing duality of winning or losing was precisely what got all gamblers in trouble and Clarity sensed that a sudden change in circumstance could bring someone, anyone, to the dangerous conclusion that Kish was reaching. Kish cursed the excavators and Western civilization, not understanding how the civilization of his ancestors had disappeared.

"This wouldn't be happening if they were still here, if Miradorcito was still a Mayan city."

"Maybe climate played a role," said Flower, "I've read a report that says that an increase in aridity led to the collapse of Maya enclaves."

"What does Zeph say?" asked Clarity.

"That it was war among rival cities which caused the disappearance of the whole civilization."

"I'm not disappearing," said Kish.

At eight thirty that evening, Fahibian and Zephairi hosted an official dinner for the crew who had been working for weeks on the site. They served the items that one of the slot machines, the *Atkins Diet* gaming terminal offered, which was ham, bacon, sausage, eggs, and cheese. At ten PM, several buses reached Miradorcito with a flock of tourists coming from the Hard Rock hotel in Punta Cana, the Renaissance Curaçao Resort and Casino, and the Occidental Grand Aruba. Tourists began playing on a large number of video lottery terminals,

which were similar to slot machines. Lanai glanced at Clarity, who was amazed by how emotional and absorbed people were by the gaming terminals.

"You see, people are having fun," said Lanai.

They reached a couple coming from Nevada, who was deciding on the best method to gamble on, based on a par sheet detailing the payout probabilities of each outcome. The husband argued that pulling on a lever didn't mean that every spin was necessarily random, that the payout probabilities were non-zero, and that they should play to align the icons, which showed the highest probability on the par sheet. The wife did not look too happy; she was looking at their bank account balance on her iPhone, saying that their savings were limited and that they possibly could not spend more than two hundred dollars that night. Lanai asked the wife how she felt about their gambling activity.

"All right," the woman replied.

"But you feel perfectly safe, right?" Lanai pressed. "Like everything will be back to normal tomorrow?"

"No, I have to watch out with him and keep watching him. He'll spend a thousand dollars if left on his own, and then he tends to think he can recover the loss. I'd much rather be in Cancún or sun tanning on the beach or swimming in Xelha."

"But I mean, the gaming is not threatening the relationship," said Lanai.

"No, we just mentioned divorce a couple of times, and I coaxed him into letting me handle the bank account with our joint salaries."

"You'll have to agree that an ecovillage doesn't lead to these problems," said Clarity, it doesn't ruin a relationship." Clarity kept thinking about Joe Falkenrich, who had lost several thousand dollars on the *Atkins Diet* slot

machine, betting on the ham icon and the bacon instead of the Buffalo wings. Lanai nodded and began questioning that gambling was a riskless activity.

Clarity and Lanai ran into Ms. Morales, who thought the place was becoming too noisy. The former head of the village also began considering Clarity's idea, the building of a new ecovillage, as a way out of the nightmare of living in a casino resort area. Pulling the plug out surreptitiously on the gaming machine that was being used by the couple from Nevada, Ms. Morales realized that some flexibility and a sense of compromise could actually improve the situation of the village. Based upon the existence of the environmental impact report, there had to be at least a scoping process to solicit public comment on the issues and concerns of establishing a gambling resort in Miradorcito. Flower rushed inside the large tent holding the gaming terminals, looking for Clarity with an excited look on her face.

"Clarity, you got email."

"You looked at my email?"

"Yeah, I figured you'd be busy here." Clarity sighed and accepted the fact that she had no privacy anymore. She read the news and found that one of her ex-boyfriends, Brock Cheevers, a human resources executive working at Stevenson Garden Products in Malibu, wanted her to return to Malibu to work as teleoperator. Clarity's fingers began tingling at the thought of being with Brock, and she nearly pulled on one of the slot machine levers out of joy. After her recent travels to Acapulco, Cayman, Bahamas, Abu Dhabi, Cuba, and the British Virgin Islands, she felt uncertain that she would fit back in Malibu enough to settle there. Brock believed in stability and was busy exploring the investment options of his 401k plan, whereas she was beginning to think that the world offered avenues to make a living she had never thought even existed.

To some extent, it was early to think about settling in Malibu, but she missed jogging near Surfrider beach in the early hours of the morning getting all sweaty, before getting to work at Stevenson Garden Products. She saw Duldu speaking with Zephairi a few feet away from a *Money Surge* slot machine.

"Ms. Morales wants to create a scoping process to prevent the resort from being built," said Duldu.

Zephairi pondered the statement for a few seconds, scratching his chin. He then began making some calls to the Cancun airport inquiring about the arrival time of an Egyptair plane from Cairo landing in Cancun the next day.

Chapter Eleven

That night, walking the aisles of the outdoor gambling amphitheater, Ms. Morales had an exasperated look on her face. The noise of the lottery terminals and gaming machines was deafening, and the severe lighting illuminating the area was blinding, ruining her view of the sky. As she looked up, she felt drained; she was tired of speaking to tourists in the amphitheater, tired of trying to convince them that gambling was not good for them. Every time the former head of village tried to speak to a different tourist, in order to understand why they liked gambling so much, Clarity saw several members of Zephairi's crew lead Ms. Morales outside the gambling amphitheater, annoyed by the woman who was interfering with the guests' proclivity to gamble. Duldu kept informing Zephairi of the crew's activity with the stubborn woman. The Egyptologist was in his tent examining the intricate hieroglyphs of the Xuleiha codex, and a vase found inside the burial ground. Around eleven PM, after being driven out of the ballcourt 'gambling' amphitheater, Ms. Morales busted in, she was impatient and irritated, holding her arms in the air.

"I need to cool down," said Ms. Morales. She found Lanai looking at her, carrying the pink marble toucan that she had been studying. The former head of the village began talking to the librarian from Hawaii about all the problems she was facing and the pressure to lead a village on her own. Lanai listened without saying a word, whereas Clarity tried to comfort her, which made Ms. Morales feel worse. Ignoring Clarity, Ms. Morales took Lanai by the arm.

"Let's go to the *temazcal* to relax," she said. Clarity felt unsupported by Ms. Morales and she followed them from a distance to a domed structure nine feet in diameter that had been miraculously left untouched by Zephairi's crew. It was made of volcanic stone and mud. The *temazcal*, or '*house of heat*', offered a

steam bath coming from heated volcanic stones, which purified the body after a battle. Clarity observed both women get inside the structure, aroused by the thought of sharing a sauna with an authentic keeper of the Mayan Mysteries. She warmed her hands on the round roof of the structure, listening to any noise, but hearing only silence. She led her hand towards her mound of Venus. The tingling in the neighboring area told her it was time to engage in her favorite way to cum, without caressing herself with her hands, simply thinking of an arousing fantasy. The fantasy lasted three hours, and the moaning's of Lanai from inside helped in sustaining the arousal, which became a kind of trance. After several satisfying orgasms, which led her back from her altered state of consciousness to ordinary consciousness, Clarity saw the head of Lanai emerge from the stone bath, breathing fresh air. The marble toucan was wrapped in a cloth because it too, was hot from the steam.

"Did you get naked?" asked Clarity. "Is it hot in there?"

"Yes, we both got naked, it's pretty hot, takes some time to get used to it."

"And?"

"Ms. Morales is staying inside for twenty more minutes, but I can't tell you anything else, Flower told me you don't want to be an adept, the sweat lodge is a sacred ceremony, and it's only for those who want to be an adept."

Clarity acknowledged that sustaining her spiritual independence sometimes meant that she had to work harder to know the esoteric secrets she was trying to uncover.

"I don't want to be an adept, but tell me something about what happened, I shared my underwear with you a couple of days ago, it's as though we had been naked together in there, there are no secrets between us."

"Well, it was a spiritual experience and it was a physical experience, it has to do with the chakras and how the toucan is used. I've been reading the Book of the Adept, but you're not that familiar with these correspondences, it's not easy to explain."

Somewhat annoyed by the secrecy of her friend, Clarity walked back to her tent and slid inside her sleeping bag. She slept well, comforted and validated by the long orgasm next to the warm walls of the stone sauna.

Ms. Morales got up early the next day to speak to the villagers of Miradorcito staying in the camping site, in order to propose the idea of the ecovillage in a referendum to them. She went from tent to tent. People liked the idea of fighting to recover Miradorcito as a traditional village, adding elements of a sustainable economy, and modern amenities. Satisfied with the result of her poll, Clarity noticed that her legitimacy as head of the village was restored. She saw Zephairi speak on his cell phone for long periods of time, and around mid-day, after lunch, a van drove into the newly found Mayan site, and the two large buses labelled with the Egyptair sign opened their doors for the villagers of Miradorcito.

Zephairi looked at his watch. According to him, all members of the Miradorcito community were expected to leave in the buses, going to Cancún first, and then flying to Egypt. They were helped by Fahibian's crew of construction workers and by Duldu, who led all security measures. Zephairi began giving new Egyptian passports to the members of Miradorcito, along with a small sum of money, which he said, would become larger in Egypt. Explaining that would happen as soon as, the Mexican tourist attraction of Miradorcito, including its dismantled large pyramid, was in place. It was all to be managed by Fahibian's *Mangrove Barrier resorts* mobile tourist unit. Zephairi then added a

small bag of food for each member, containing genetically modified maize made by Folsanto, one of the sponsors of the Alabastriah foundation. Economic interests merged with the tourist value of exporting a genuine Mayan pyramid to Egypt, along with authentic Mayan descendants. Relocation was considered simply a minor cost of carrying out business.

"You can't do this, you can't make everyone leave, it's the end of the village," said Ms. Morales. A tone of voice with a higher pitch than usual showed the feeling of desperation she was trying to hide.

"The money I receive to make archaeological findings depends on a successful tourist venture for Mr. Fahibian, and Egypt will welcome all members of the Miradorcito community," said Zephairi, "the governor of Campeche likes to see improvement in people's lives. You should consider leaving as well."

"Give me half an hour to think things through," said Ms. Morales. She called a meeting in her palapa, and with all of her constituency getting ready to leave, the only attendants were Lanai, Clarity, Flower and Kish. The head of the village didn't want to leave her former village, and her dishevelled hair showed the disarray of seeing Zephairi carry out his plan of dismantling everything she liked about her place.

"Is there a way to stop this gambling madness according to you?" asked Ms. Morales.

"I'm not leaving, I've worked too hard to build my small textile business and I like this place," said Kish.

"You should consider the idea of the ecovillage," said Flower, claiming that an ecovillage would be less noisy.

"We need to find someone from the *Institute for Ethnoconservation and Ecology*," said Clarity. Ms. Morales kept saying that she didn't know anyone at

the Ethnoconservation Institute and that the cement foundations of the new gambling resort were already built, making Clarity's idea futile. For fifteen minutes, the former head of the village argued that they should march against the office of the governor of Campeche in protest.

"Zephairi has all the permits, that won't work," said Clarity, "we want to engage substantial change." Ms. Morales glared at Clarity, who she felt; somehow, always saw a problem where she saw an avenue of survival for the village. Lanai insisted that accepting the gambling resort and the position as conservationist of the site, working under Zephairi, would be a wise choice for Ms. Morales. They heard a knock on the door of the palapa. Ms. Morales opened it, and Zephairi stepped inside.

"It's time you decide," said Zephairi.

Zephairi showed Ms. Morales the papers allowing him and the Alabastriah foundation to provide work permits and to hire the whole population of Miradorcito as the '*Xuleiha Maya tourist attraction*'. Clarity looked over the shoulder of Ms. Morales; seeing that the papers were the equivalent of a legal contract to work for Zephairi indefinitely, also giving the Alabastriah foundation a concession to exploit the land of Miradorcito. Ms. Morales shook her head, convinced now that the future of Miradorcito lay with the building of an ecovillage.

"Think about everyone in Miradorcito, their lives will improve, they will have jobs now and easy food. They won't be subject to floods, they will enjoy sunny weather," said Zephairi.

"There are floods in Egypt," said Clarity. Ms. Morales threw a look of appreciation for the first time to Clarity. Clarity could see that the woman she

wanted as mentor of the Mayan Mysteries was not considering her so much as a gringo meddling in the local affairs of the population.

"No, everything is under control, the Nile is part of the prosperity of the country," said Zephairi.

Clarity saw the head of village look inside her pockets. There was no more money in them. It was one thing to fight for the future of Miradorcito, but another to decide where someone else wanted to live if you could not provide a living for them. If the members of Miradorcito wanted to go to Egypt to work there, it was their choice. She agreed to sign the papers on the condition that she and Kish retain an option to recover the concession to exploit Miradorcito as an ecovillage, which could be exercised if they found an investor before the resort was built.

"And if you don't find the investor before we're through?" asked Zephairi.

"Then, Kish and I will leave Miradorcito," said Ms. Morales.

"I'll give you a week," said the Egyptologist. The eyes of Ms. Morales widened, while Zephairi was scribbling the added clause with a pen.

"I need a year, you can't find this kind of investor in a week."

Ms. Morales complained for several minutes about the unfairness of the deal, but Zephairi didn't budge. She signed the papers reluctantly, adding her name and the name of Kish as the only exceptions to the rest of the inhabitants who would be allowed to stay in the new resort, retaining an option to recover Miradorcito as an ecovillage, an option that would last and remain open for a week.

Still, by agreeing to Zephairi's proposal, she was buying some time and ensuring the possibility of a new, kinder reality for Miradorcito remained. The notion of time among the Mayas included resilience, and waiting for a cycle to

complete was essential to the effectiveness of prayer, her experience of ritual with the toucan had taught her that. Signing papers was not changing anything in her mind.

Following Lanai's suggestion, Ms. Morales proposed a job for herself as assistant conservationist of the new Xuleiha site. Knowing that he would have more leeway to get rid of Ms. Morales with most of the village in Egypt, Zephairi accepted the new conservationist role for the strong woman, although she wasn't his first choice. In his mind, he was set on replacing Ms. Morales after a few months with a more convenient conservationist from Egypt, leaving the former head of village in charge of something less important, showing the pyramids as guide for instance, or taking care of gardens, or bringing flowers to the resort as decoration. At some point, he wanted her out of the resort, taking her complaints and demands somewhere else. Clarity looked at the new asphalted road paved for the buses, watching the members of Miradorcito step on them.

"What about Kish?" asked Ms. Morales.

"He'll supervise the gambling machines area, and will be in charge of ensuring all of the gaming machines work. It'll be a regular eight hour day job."

"He won't like it."

Duldu came to speak with Zephairi. He showed the Egyptologist the duplicate keys of the G-earth excavator, which was ready to crush the home of Kish. Fortunately, there were gambling tourists and over two hundred video lottery and gaming terminals acting as protection for the thatched home of the loom craftsman. Kish refused several times to gamble any of his hard earned money, hidden under a wood lath below his loom.

"His new job as bellboy at the *Moneghetti Suites* is ready," said Duldu, glancing at Kish. The craftsman needed time because there was no space for his loom on the Egyptair buses, and he didn't like the idea of being a tour guide in Egypt of his own dismantled pyramid. He refused to leave the site, he along with Ms. Morales, were the only members of Miradorcito remaining.

Zephairi challenged him to play Bul. The winner would decide the fate of Kish's home.

"So if I win at this game, your home is mine, and you leave," said Zephairi.

"I don't leave, but the home is yours, and if I win, I can stay in my home, and my home can stay where it is, and my loom can stay in my home," said Kish.

"It's not a good deal, he should be a bellboy," said Duldu. Zephairi saw opportunity where Duldu saw a problem and an overly astute way of delaying the levelling of the craftsman's home. The Egyptologist entered the home of Kish and began learning the rules of the ancient board game.

"When are we playing?" asked Zephairi.

"Tomorrow night."

"Let's do it over dinner," said the Egyptologist.

"All right, in my home not in the gondola, I'll cook," said Kish.

Zephairi left Kish's home with Duldu. Clarity left through the backdoor of the craftsman, following them from a distance. She could see Duldu holding a vase given to him by Zephairi, and receiving a piece of paper, but couldn't hear what they were saying.

"Prepare a mixture inside this vase for the craftsman according to the ingredients in this piece of paper. We'll bring the vase to him as gift, and you'll pour some of this liquid in his drink while I distract him with the loom," said Zephairi.

"What is this liquid?" asked Duldu. The henchman of Fahibian looked at the list of ingredients, which he'd never seen before.

"Something I found listed in the hieroglyphs of the codex, a drink that will change his thinking, it will make him lose the game he wants to win, the odds will be in our favor."

Duldu smiled at the astute plan of the Egyptologist, thinking that once the dogged local craftsman who was refusing to leave was thrown out of the gambling site, he might one day become the head of security of the whole Xuleiha resort. That is a promotion he would like. Mr. Fahibian would be impressed, and Duldu would watch out for all keys, keeping them at close range. Kish would pay for having lost the keys of the G-earth excavator.

Chapter Twelve

The next day, Ms. Morales got up early and called another meeting among her allies, Clarity, Lanai, Flower and Kish. Meanwhile, the rest of Clarity's friends, Taimi, Jenna, and Cynthia, were learning to play electronic baccarat from an attractive croupier brought in from Belize. Ms. Morales caressed the beak of the pink marble toucan inside her palapa, feeling reassured that there was something in the environment she could control. She was beginning to consider Clarity a genuine supporter, and just as she was saying that Kish's plan to invite Zephairi for dinner would save them some time, but wouldn't solve the underlying problem of Miradorcito, how to make a living in it. Clarity came up with an idea, and she asked for Flower's laptop to search some information on the web. A few minutes later, the idea took form in Clarity's mind. They had to go to Mérida, to find the advocate who would help them turn the site of Xuleiha into an ecovillage.

"There's a bus going to Campeche in about forty five minutes, we can make it, but we have to leave now," said Ms. Morales. Clarity turned to Flower.

"Are you coming with us?"

"No, I'm not going, I have a job to protect, Zeph will wonder where I am," said Flower. Clarity turned to Lanai, who shook her head.

"I'm not going, I think the gambling resort will lead to jobs for Miradorcito, you're going to run into big problems if you go against the interests of Fahibian. I'll take care of the marble toucan."

"That leaves me, Ms. Morales," said Clarity, "I'll go because I want to see a prosperous Miradorcito and because I don't believe a gaming resort is good at all for the local community."

Clarity explained her plan to Ms. Morales, who nodded, intrigued by the sheer audacity of it.

"Well, you may find it difficult to leave this place," said Flower.

"Why?" asked Clarity.

"As a result of the incident with the World Heritage List committee, Zephairi has set up a turret at the entrance of the site, with a sentinel guarding the post leading to Xuleiha. No one is leaving this place without his permission."

Clarity and Ms. Morales walked to Kish's hut and the craftsman agreed to distract the guard while Clarity and Ms. Morales left the site. They walked to the entrance of the village and stood behind a tree, letting Kish walk to the exit of the village, where an asphalted road had replaced the trail leading to Miradorcito.

"Stop. Where are you going?"

Kish turned towards the small turret made of wood, thinking it was actually a comfortable space compared to his own thatched palapa. He walked to the side entrance of the turret, meeting the sentinel, a local farmer from Calakmul who thought people who lived in the neighboring forests as dangerous.

"I'm taking a walk in the forest."

"There's nothing in the forest, only *duendes*." The guard referred to spirits that some locals associated with the forest or Mayan ruins. Kish continued the conversation with the guard, telling the story of a man lost in the forest, who according to him, found his way back to his village, thanks to a 'brother', a friendly duende or alux spirit. Clarity led Ms. Morales past the guarded post and then they reached road one eighty six, where a bus going to Escárcega picked them up. From there, they took road two six one north to Champotón and

Campeche, and then they changed buses to get one owned by *Unión de Camioneros de Yucatán*, driving along road one eighty, to Mérida.

Mérida was the capital of the state of Yucatán, housing nearly a million people; the twelfth most populated area in the region. The *Institute for Ethnoconservation and Ecology* kept an office in one of the wings of the Museum of Anthropology located across from the *National Institute of Anthropology and History*. They were responsible for allowing Zephairi to do archaeological work in Xuleiha. Clarity showed Flower's *permiso de arqueología* to the receptionist at the museum's entrance. Then they were shown into a waiting room on the first floor of the Beaux Arts style mansion, which was once the home of a general.

A jovial man wearing round glasses greeted them with a smile. Mr. Gonzalo Cervera, assistant to the *National Institute of Anthropology*, pointed to the door to his office. "Come in, you are members of Mr. Zephairi's crew, welcome to Merida. I was waiting to hear from him about the recent discoveries found at Xuleiha."

"He couldn't make it, he's excavating a new stela," said Ms. Morales, walking behind Clarity into Cervera's office.

Following Lanai's advice, Ms. Morales had taken interest in the findings of Zephairi, and she spoke for several minutes about the stela of Tlaloc, the finding of the large pyramid, and the burial ground holding the Queen of the golden disk inside. Mr. Cervera was pleasantly surprised to hear that the money of the Institute was being put to good archaeological use. He inquired briefly about the gambling resort, and Clarity found out that Fahibian's *Mangrove Barrier Resorts* had donated a large sum to the Institute, which had recommended building the resort to the governor of Campeche.

"What do you think of the effect of gambling on the community?"

"Well, I suppose that there are better ways of engaging economic growth in a poor area, but that is what needs to be done to uncover our cultural treasures. It's expensive but... Good, good, what else can I do for you?" asked the Institute employee.

"Mr. Zephairi thinks that there may be additional ruins below the forest neighboring the site of Xuleiha. Felling forests requires a permit and we wanted to meet one of your neighbors here at the *Institute for Ethnoconservation and Ecology*. They have an office across your own here."

"That's fine, I can introduce you to them, let me make a few calls."

A few minutes later, Mr. Cervera led them to the neighboring institute and introduced them to Ricardo Parmerin, one of the directors of the *Ethnoconservation Institute*. As soon as the introductions were finished and Cervera closed the door, Ms. Morales went into high gear.

"Have you written a report on building an ecovillage in Miradorcito?"

Parmerin opened a drawer with several files and took out a brown folder.

"Hmm, Miradorcito, yes, we're taking part in the project to bring new avenues of economic growth to the area. Our experts wrote a section on the environmental impact report that was brought to the attention of the governor of Campeche, we're waiting for the municipality's decision on it."

Ms. Morales jumped on Parmerin.

"Why haven't I been informed of this report? I am the head of Miradorcito, acting mayor of it for the last twenty years."

Parmerin looked surprised and Clarity could see that Ms. Morales was fuming.

"Our files show that the next step is to assess the viability and impact of creating a gambling resort in Miradorcito by *Mangrove Barrier Resorts*. We are firmly against that proposal and think that an ecovillage will bring a more sustainable economy to the area. It is the members of the community of Miradorcito who will decide what to do with their community."

Ms. Morales could barely speak. Clarity grabbed the arm of Ms. Morales, letting her know that she should calm down. The teleoperator from Malibu explained to Parmerin that Zephairi's crew and Fahibian had bullied the inhabitants of the village into settling in a precarious camping area and that excavations had begun weeks earlier at short notice, with all required papers apparently in place. Parmerin believed Clarity and Ms. Morales and closed the brown containing the proposal of the ecovillage for Miradorcito.

"I want to see this in person, there's something strange in all of this, this project is not following official procedures."

"Come with us, we'll lead you to Miradorcito so you can see all of this for yourself," said Ms. Morales.

Parmerin followed Clarity and Ms. Morales to the bus station, where they took the first bus leaving for Campeche. By nightfall, they reached Miradorcito, and they came face to face with the guard blocking the entrance. Parmerin showed his identification card from the Institute and the guard called Zephairi, who came running to the entrance, followed by Duldu. The Egyptologist glared at Ms. Morales and Clarity, and breathed out as loudly as a buffalo exhaling, then began addressing Parmerin.

"I am in charge here, this is a private area, what do you want?"

"My name is Ricardo Parmerin, I am a member of the *Ethnoconservation and Ecology Institute of Mexico*. We have been involved with the economic

development of this area through a project favoring the building of an ecovillage. There seems to be a problem here, these two members of the local community tell me that a gambling resort is being built by *Mangrove Barrier Resorts*."

Zephairi quickly explained that all permits were in place and that Parmerin should speak with Fahibian, the real estate developer of the site. Parmerin tried to step inside the site, but the guard prevented the conservation official from entering the former village. Zephairi apologized profusely saying that he could do nothing else, and that unfortunately, Mr. Fahibian could not be reached at this moment. Parmerin lifted his finger towards Zephairi.

"This is going to national newspapers, if an injustice is being carried out against the inhabitants of Miradorcito, our Institute will consider litigation with the representatives of *Mangrove Barrier Resorts*."

Zephairi looked at his watch.

"Look, I have to go to dinner, if you will excuse me, you can settle in one of the tents in the neighboring camping area. My assistant Duldu will lead you to your quarters."

Ms. Morales volunteered to assist the official and explain to him the extent of the excavations at Miradorcito, which was now being called Xuleiha. Clarity felt her stomach rumble. She was hungry and she was expected at Kish's house for dinner before the game of bul. She walked over with Lanai and Flower, and they settled around the table. Kish had prepared *ceviche*, raw fish marinated in lime juice, and served with onion, chillies and cilantro. Kish had also made *papadzules*, tortillas made with a filling of hard-boiled eggs, and *pavo relleno negro* made with turkey and sauce cooked from charred chillies.

Zephairi brought in the vase discovered in the burial ground and offered it as a gift to Kish, who accepted it and filled it with water to serve his guests. Zephairi congratulated Kish on his work with the loom and he got up, requesting a demonstration of how the loom worked. Kish got up from the table, and everyone followed, paying close attention to Kish as he explained the intricate parts of how the loom worked, allowing the various stripes of textile to form a huipil.

Clarity noticed that Duldu stayed behind near the table, and she saw the henchman pour some liquid from a small bottle into the vase that had been given to Kish. She told Flower and Lanai to distract Duldu, and the two friends began asking the man in charge of security about life in Belize, living in Fahibian's resort, and how rough you had to be to live there. Clarity used the time to pour the liquid from the vase in Zephairi's glass, then cleaned it out with some fresh water, and poured some mineral water in it instead. After a few minutes, everyone reconvened around the table and Zephairi proposed a toast before beginning the game of bul that Kish had built. The craftsman set the board game in place on the dining table, explaining that it was better to quarrel like this, playing a board game, rather than offering someone for sacrifice.

Kish gave eight square stones to Zephairi, and kept eight rounded shaped stones for himself, which the craftsman then placed on his side of the board. The overall goal of the game was to capture the enemy's stones, making it a war game. Stones moved according to the roll of four dice, called 'bul', made from corn kernels painted black on one side, yellow on the other face. The number of yellow faces showing after the throw of the bul, determined the number of spaces a particular stone could move. If a friendly stone landed on an enemy stone, the friendly stone placed the enemy stone underneath, and could send it

back to the base. At the base, the enemy stone was removed or 'killed' and the friendly stone could return to the board to chase after additional enemy stones. Once a player dismissed all enemy stones from the board, that player won.

"To the wonderful new archaeological findings of Xuleiha, may some of them find a new home in Egypt," said Zephairi. His eyes darted towards the vase that Kish was holding.

"To Miradorcito and all the wonderful things we can find here, including this Mayan death vase," said Kish, pointing to the vase Zephairi had given him. The craftsman smiled politely to Zephairi and drank from the vase that contained the water Clarity had changed. Meanwhile Zephairi drank several gulps from his glass that contained the mixture Duldu poured from his flask. Clarity saw the expression on the face of the Egyptologist change from fake smile to revulsion.

"This water tastes different," said the Egyptologist. Zephairi became flushed and within minutes his pupils had dilated and he was breathing heavily. He lied down and began shaking, asking Duldu to bring in more bulldozers and place Kish atop the large pyramid dressed as a Mayan priest.

"I'm not a Mayan priest," said Kish. Zephairi insisted, pointing out that Kish should wear a Mayan mitre during his ritual, an elaborate headpiece that looked like a diadem and covered the ears.

"He's in a state of trance," said Kish, "I've seen the effect on someone else, he could be like this for hours."

"What mixture was supposed to be in the vase?" asked Clarity, turning to Duldu.

The comment took Duldu by surprise. The effect of the liquid was showing on Zephairi instead of Kish, and he didn't understand the reason for the

Egyptologist's odd reaction. Scared by the look of his Egyptian ally, who was having grand visions of thousands of gamblo-tourists visiting his site, Duldu showed the list of ingredients that Zephairi had requested for Kish's vase.

"It's a mixture made with Ololiuhqui, *Turbina corymbosa*, a hallucinogenic substance also known as 'seeds of the Virgin Mary', which brings out visions in those who drink it," said Kish.

Chapter Thirteen

Zephairi spent the night rambling, delirious in his trance, thinking that the God of rain Tlaloc was asking him to build a rainproof roof for the gambling amphitheater. Clarity watched Zephairi get up several times, and the Egyptologist attempted to reach for an imaginary miter above her head. Clarity, who didn't want to upset Zephairi, let him think that she was a Mayan goddess who had learned to speak English. Zephairi was satisfied with Clarity's answer and lied down in his bed. *Turbina corymbosa* was a powerful mixture that led to delusion, not very pleasant thought Clarity. Zephairi's words of nonsense made Clarity aware of how fragile a person's inner balance could be, and as a result, she became more lenient towards the shortcomings she perceived in others or the disagreements, which could arise between her and her friends. In a whim of generosity, Clarity decided to forgive her differences with Lanai and donate the underwear she had lent to her friend. For some reason, she thought that it would allow Lanai to share more confidences about the knowledge kept secret by Ms. Morales, and that it might get rid of their disagreements regarding the effects of gambling on a person.

"No, I don't want to keep it, I'll give it back to you," said Lanai.

"You don't have to," said Clarity. The head of Zephairi lifted upward with his arms reaching for Clarity's head, looking again for her imaginary miter. Clarity used the palm of her hand to press Zephairi's head down on his pillow.

"I don't want to owe you anything," said the librarian.

"I don't like disagreeing with you on things, it's creating a rift between us. This gift of underwear is like bonding for me, I'll feel closer to you if you accept it."

"No, we'll be all right, disagreement is not a bad thing, if everyone thought the same way it would be boring to talk. I'll return the underwear, no worries."

Clarity nodded, accepting her friend's wishes. She knew friendship was more complex than giving away a piece of intimate clothing to re-instill trust or a sense of closeness, and suddenly felt that there was no need to feel any sense of rivalry with Lanai. It only divided their friendship. However, in the end, sharing a piece of clothing still made her feel closer to her librarian friend. Clarity took a warm cloth and wiped the sweat off of Zephairi's forehead and began thinking about the next stage of her life. What would come after this adventure in Miradorcito? Lanai had considered returning to Malibu with her, and was hoping to work at the Malibu library, but the head librarian, Mrs. Marples, had informed her earlier that day, during a phone call, that there were currently no jobs available. As a result, Lanai was thinking of staying in Mexico, or possibly returning to working at the City of Wellington, the ocean liner that hired live entertainers to speak with the tourists cruising from Los Angeles to Acapulco.

Clarity enjoyed her work on the ocean liner, but Brock Cheevers wanted her to come back to Malibu and the teleoperator didn't know what to do, whether to return home or work at the City of Wellington again? She liked Brock, and in a sense, he was a mentor in addition to being a friend. Brock was the one who had given her a one hundred dollar voucher for her twenty fifth birthday, and he eagerly offered counsel to her to trade on ebay the gifts she would buy in exchange for the voucher and invest the proceeds on her account in shares of Google, Amazon or Apple. He wanted her attention by showing her how good he was with managing money. But the suggestion of investing the voucher money sort of spoiled things for Clarity, who saw her twenty fifth birthday as a special

occasion to celebrate and buy something she liked, not to invest in a company Brock saw as good. A share of Amazon was worth nearly three hundred dollars, it was unattainable; that sum represented three vouchers, or three years of receiving one hundred dollar vouchers. Investing in Amazon would probably have to wait three years, at the very least, but Brock had taught her to keep money in the back of her mind.

While everyone around her posted photos on Instagram or kept sending messages on Snapchat, thinking only about their social lives, Brock studied the markets. She found that somewhat odd, because Brock wasn't a specialist of financial markets, his line of work was human resources. But apparently, according to him, markets were not that difficult to figure out, and he was simply trying to find a way to turn his money earned at work, into more money. She found the idea of building something over time of interest, and she also found the idea of saving something for a rainy day, wise. That is why she usually listened to what Brock had to say on the topic. On the other hand, she wasn't thinking that much about money, because, at twenty five, she wasn't particularly attached to money, or in turning money into more money. She thought of life more as painting, a picture rather than doing a sum, and she valued her spare time, because her job as teleoperator was not that interesting, it was all right, but also routine, somewhat repetitive.

And so Clarity enjoyed being sociable, she simply didn't like some of the superficial aspects, which came with social networks. People were more than a photo on Instagram, and she wasn't really buying into the whole idea of having followers and creating her own personal micro star system. Still, she needed to make a living, and having people around her as contacts, part of her own social

cum professional network, could be handy at some point in her work; or if she wanted to change her line of work.

Clarity knew that she wasn't making a lot of money as teleoperator, and she agreed with Brock on the fact or idea that money was important, or at least relevant. Brock also offered a future for her, a future in Malibu, possibly as his wife, with a lesser need to make money, because Brock made good money. Clarity found this somewhat unsettling, reassuring that it was a future available and present for her in Malibu, that Brock was there for her, but stifling also in a sense. She wasn't ready to settle down and Brock was a mellow dude, with no interest in traveling outside Southern California. The thought of settling too soon and living a boring life, partly dependent on someone else's earnings unsettled her thinking. Money. All of the problems in life seemed to always hover around the issue of money. Clarity turned her attention to a decrepit closet kept half closed by Kish, holding broken pieces of wood that had belonged to the loom over time. Money was certainly a problem in Miradorcito.

Lanai and Flower kept Zephairi company all night, and watched as Duldu reassured the Egyptologist that the visions he was having, of long queues of tourists at Xuleiha were not real. Neither was an imaginary gambling debt of three million, five hundred sixty three thousand and twenty three dollars that Zephairi kept thinking he owed, after losing the game against Kish. Flower threw a look of worry at her boss every now and then, thinking that her pay as ethnographer was in jeopardy if the Egyptologist didn't recover from his trance.

The effect of the *Turbina corymbosa* mixture lasted several hours, and in the morning, when the effects of the trance had passed, Zephairi became angry that Kish had turned his ploy to lead the craftsman into a trance against him. He began cursing in Egyptian about pyramid stones being thrown to the top of the

pyramids in Egypt even if the whole pyramid crumbled. Kish would not stand in the way of his pact with Fahibian to turn the ballcourt into a gambling amphitheater. Around mid morning, Duldu brought him worse news.

"There's an uproar in Mexican national newspapers, look, Parmerin spoke already."

Fahibian's henchman carried a number of popular Mexican newspapers, and pointed to several articles on *La Cronica de Hoy*, *El Universal*, *El Financiero*, *Vanguardia*, and *El Debate* that featured a profile of Ricardo Parmerin, denouncing irregularities in the Ethnoconservation and Ecology project being carried out by the governor of Campeche.

According to a testimony by a local woman from Miradorcito who had chosen to remain anonymous, said Parmerin in the interview, *the community of Miradorcito has been savagely bullied into abandoning their poor homes in the area, being transferred like a herd of sheep by a ruthless Egyptologist named Akhris Zephairi to a merry-go-round of tourist attractions in Egypt, as if they were performers in a circus. In addition, construction work has begun to build a gambling resort in the area, going against our recommendation to build an ecovillage, which will pave the ground for a sustainable economy. The conclusion of the environmental impact report states clearly that added sewage pollution, noise for the gambling facilities, and the precarious economic situation created by those who do not have enough education to gamble responsibly, make the gambling resort a poor decision. As a result, the inhabitants of Miradorcito should be the ones who decide the future of their community in a referendum that will take place after they are informed of the environmental impact report. The Mexican Ethnoconservation and Ecology Institute will use all of its means to stop this rural bullying and prevent*

foreigners like Mr. Zephairi and real estate developer Mr. Fahibian from preserving our heritage stemming from the great Mayan culture, which has unfortunately disappeared for unknown reasons still being sought and searched by archaeologists and groups like ours worldwide.

Clarity sensed that her initiative to seek publicity and defend the interests of the members of Miradorcito was creating a battle for ownership of the land, and that Zephairi was losing patience with all the unwanted visits his site was receiving. Over the next few days, journalists made their way to the site of Xuleiha hoping to find out more about the anonymous person that Parmerin had met with, in order to obtain interviews themselves. While Lanai was busy listening to Ms. Morales being interviewed by Parmerin for journalists from *Reforma* and *El Norte*, Clarity searched Lanai's diary for clues about the codex found by Zephairi. In the diary, Lanai had written that the codex illustrated a staircase with hieroglyphics, belonging to a smaller pyramid facing the large pyramid in Xuleiha.

Seven days after Parmerin had reached Miradorcito, Flower came into her tent to wake her up with an article in the newspaper *El Informador*.

"Look, the National Institute for Anthropology and History is responding to Parmerin's article."

Clarity read the news, using the Spanish she had learned on her own in Los Angeles, watching Spanish-speaking television stations and practicing with the legal counsel of Stevenson Garden Products, Ms. Lareya Marquez. The article interviewed Mr. Cervera who wrote that *the National Institute for Anthropology and History disagrees strongly with the opinion of the Institute for Ethnoconservation and Ecology concerning the future of the village of Miradorcito in Campeche. Our market studies indicate that the community of*

Miradorcito will benefit strongly from a gaming resort. That it will not only boost the local economy by providing jobs, but also increase the finances of the state of Campeche, through gambling tourism visits to Miradorcito and the Mayan remains found there of the ancient city of Xuleiha. In our view, these benefits far outweigh the costs and problems mentioned in the environmental impact report.

After reading the favorable news, Zephairi and Duldu got up and rallied several construction workers to throw Ms. Morales, Parmerin, Kish and Clarity out of the campground. Their reasoning was that the annoying inhabitants were dangerous for the future of Xuleiha as gaming and Mayan attraction resort. A group of twenty construction workers surrounded the tents. Parmerin was the first to surrender but Ms. Morales and Kish soon followed. Clarity stood by Ms. Morales, while Lanai decided to side with the gambling project and Flower stayed by the side of his boss, Zeph.

"Get rid of the home of the craftsman, Duldu," said Zephairi, "use one of the small excavators."

"My loom," said Kish.

"His loom," said Clarity.

"My God," said Ms. Morales, "I mean my toucan." She reached for the toucan in Lanai's hand, but Duldu stood in the way.

"Your toucan is safe with me," said Lanai, seeing Duldu push her away from Ms. Morales, "it simply favors the gaming resort."

Clarity ran with Kish towards a haul truck nearby and turned the keys to turn on the engine. They drove the truck to Kish's hut, wrecking several electronic video lottery terminals that were being used by Clarity's friends; honking to warn tourists to get out of the way.

"Are you coming with us?" Clarity asked her friends. "An injustice is being carried out against the members of Miradorcito."

"No, we like it here," said Cynthia. Jenna and Taimi nodded, looking intriguingly at a Cleopatra slot machine screen showing three portraits of the Egyptian queen. Clarity glanced away from them and immediately noticed several construction workers running towards them.

"Pull the plugs of the video terminals and throw the machines at them."

Clarity's friends liked the idea of creating a scene with the gaming machines, which according to them, were not working properly, because they weren't giving payouts. They pulled on several plugs and pushed the slot machines against the construction workers. Clarity hauled Kish's loom into the truck and drove backwards to where Ms. Morales was standing with Parmerin, picking them up.

"My loom is safe," said Kish.

"What do we do now?" said Ms. Morales.

"Pick up a few tents and leave Xuleiha, we'll camp outside," said Clarity. She stepped out of the truck and dismantled several tents, picking up the poles and giving them to Kish, who placed them in the haul area of the truck, with his loom. Zephairi was frantically giving orders to prevent the site rebels from reaching his own tent. He yelled to a group of construction workers to begin dismantling the large pyramid and place its stones on large haul trucks prepared to drive to Cancún, where an archaeological cargo plane from Egyptair awaited to carry the Mayan ruins to Egypt. Clarity had no intention to destroy or dismantle anything; she just wanted to leave before things got messy with the construction workers running towards them. She pressed the accelerator of

their vehicle and the truck drove past the sentinel turret and continued for fifteen minutes before stopping in a forest clearing.

That night, Clarity and those who had escaped with her, all slept in the same tent. Clarity slept next to Ms. Morales, who kept reaching for her arm, thinking it was her toucan. The following day, Ms. Morales was stern, she missed her marble toucan and she complained about the savage attack that had befallen on her most prized possession. Everyone had an agenda for the day that differed from the others.

"But we have to recover the marble toucan!" said Ms. Morales.

"I want to do some archaeological research in Xuleiha, there's an important finding in the smaller pyramid I think," said Clarity.

"We need to get back inside Miradorcito," said Parmerin, "and fight for its ecovillage."

"I'll stay here and work," said Kish, as he reached over to his loom and noticed one of the mechanical parts was broken. Without it, it was impossible to make any more huipiles. Kish waved his arms for several minutes, trying to repair the broken piece, but the loom refused to work properly. It was genuinely broken. He and the others spent all day trying to fix it, but after hours of work, the loom was not working.

As the sun dipped below the horizon and the evening settled in, Kish became restless. "My loom is broken, this changes things," said Kish, "I need to get back into the site, right now, into Miradorcito." Clarity noticed that the craftsman's level of courage, bolstered by his animosity, was unusually high.

"Right now?" asked Clarity.

"Right now," said Kish, "or right after dinner, with a full stomach."

After a frugal dinner, Clarity and Kish headed back towards Miradorcito. She pointed the flashlight in front of her, barely keeping pace with Kish, who was impatient to get back to his village. After walking two miles or so, they entered the archaeological site from the west side and Clarity stopped before they reached the tent area of Zephairi.

"What are you looking for?"

"Explosives, I know Duldu used explosives to break the dam, I want to use them as well."

"To blow up Duldu's tent?"

"To blow up the large pyramid before it is dismantled tomorrow. No one touches my loom or the pyramid of my ancestors."

Clarity tried to change the craftsman's mind, but Kish kept insisting that no foreign country would get hold of Mayan remains and no tourists would visit the pyramid while he was out of work. Clarity sighed and breathed out, thinking that the ruins did belong in Mexico. She used a knife to rip through the back of the explosives tent and Kish brought back several blocks of Semtex H explosive and its blasting caps. They ran towards the large pyramid, which was unguarded, and Kish placed the plastic, stable explosive in place on the four corners of the pyramid.

"Can you wait for a few minutes before blowing the pyramid? I have to make a discovery in the pyramid across," said Clarity. Kish looked at his wrist but he had no watch, because he had no money to buy a watch. Still, it was professional to look at a watch before setting off explosives, and he liked the thought of impressing Clarity.

"All right, don't be too long," said the craftsman.

Clarity ran to the smaller pyramid and began climbing the steps. There were thirty steps and atop the last step was the symbol mentioned in the codex and in the notes of Lanai's diary. It was the symbol for zero that the Mayas used and had discovered. Zero, perfection, a cycle, the end of a cycle, what could possibly be meant by it, and why was it at the top of the pyramid? Clarity didn't know, but it was a good topic for a Mayan exhibit, and surely one that could create a job for Lanai at the Malibu library. If Ms. Morales wasn't confiding the secrets of the Mayan Mysteries to Clarity, there was no way that Lanai was getting any more of that knowledge. Clarity's thinking took a bold step forward. She wanted to go home, back to Malibu, and the librarian was going back to California with her, as long as she could convince Lanai and Mrs. Marples that a Mayan exhibit would be worthwhile for the library of Malibu. That would be the end of the feud with Lanai about the future of Miradorcito, and it would mean the recovery of their lost friendship, created by a divergence in opinion about the effects of gambling on people.

Clarity rubbed her fingers along the Mayan symbol for zero, a number also present in the game of roulette reserved for the bank in a betting resort. For the Mayas, the notion of zero may have been associated with perfection, a cycle, and wisdom, but probably not with throwing away money. It was clear to Clarity that many people who gambled were unprepared to play any games of chance, but were led to play away their savings by the glamour of a gambling resort and the lure of some imaginary wealth falling from the sky, or a roulette table. Not exactly a delusion like the ones *Turbina corymbosa* could create, but more like a misconception or misconstruction about the real nature of things. She began a careful descent down the steps of the pyramid, looking across the ballgame court at the large pyramid lined with explosives. Kish was right in defending his

loom, he had the correct logic for Miradorcito, to protect it and lead it away from gambling. His particular view of community suddenly seemed reasonable; as did all the stubbornness the craftsman had shown in refusing to deal or compromise with Zephairi or Fahibian. It had turned him from a passive worker, disempowered by Zephairi, who wanted him to change his line of work and abandon his identity as craftsman, into an agent of change. Kish wanted to change things in order to remain a craftsman, quietly living his life with his loom, but empowered by the nature of his work, and sole owner of his own living and sustenance.

Chapter Fourteen

Clarity ran past the explosives tent to the forest, where Kish was waiting, hidden behind a tall Ceiba tree. The night was cool and Clarity was wearing a thin sweater. She wanted to head for their campground but after fifteen minutes of rubbing her hands to stay warm, there was no explosion. She began thinking that something in Kish's setup wasn't completely right. Of course, what wasn't completely right was that if the explosion took place, she could end up in jail for damage to the cultural heritage of Mexico. But the meddling of Zephairi and Fahibian with a whole community of honest village inhabitants got on her nerves, and she really didn't want to see gambling in Miradorcito, and more Joe Falkenriches walking around. She tapped Kish on the shoulder and shared her thoughts. The craftsman rubbed his hands against the bark of the ceiba tree to warm up and agreed with her.

"You may be right, this delay is somewhat odd. Let's go check, the pyramid should probably have exploded by now," he said.

"You go check," said Clarity, "I'll ensure everything goes well strategically."

"Strategically?"

"Yeah, from a distance, ensuring everything is carried out properly and is in place. For instance, are you sure you want to do this?"

Kish scratched his eyebrow.

"Yes, I can't work with my loom, I don't have a job, and I'm losing my home. Zephairi tried to change my thinking and get rid of me with *Turbina corymbosa*, he bullied the whole village out of its land, so it's not getting the pyramid or any benefit derived from the pyramid."

"All right, that's pretty sound thinking, looks like the strategy is in good shape. Did you set the detonator?"

"The detonator?" Kish paced back and forth several times, somewhat irritated by the question. He answered Clarity after a few minutes of thinking and pointed with his index towards one of the corners of the pyramid.

"No, it's an explosive which is placed over there, should work by itself."

"No, you need a detonator, it's an explosive to trigger the explosive," said Clarity.

"Should be in the explosive tent," said Kish.

Kish grabbed Clarity by the arm and led her to the explosive tent. There was no detonator there, finding instead some detonator cord wrapped around a large reel. They set up the plastic coated cord holding the primary explosive inside, walking to each corner of the large pyramid, lying two hundred feet apart.

On their way to the forest, Kish ran across Duldu, who was going to one of the bathrooms.

"Hi," said Kish.

"Hi," said Duldu, "your face seems familiar." Kish slowed down and adopted a debonair look, placing his hands in his pockets.

"Just taking a walk around the pyramid."

"Take a good look, it's getting dismantled tomorrow," said Duldu.

Fahibian's henchman, half asleep, stepped closer to the craftsman, who was already running away towards the forest. A few minutes later, Kish pulled together the four meshes of the detonator cord, hiding with Clarity behind one large tree, about nine hundred feet away from the pyramid. Finally, they were getting somewhere.

"Do you think it's enough to bring the pyramid down?"

"The explosive looks pretty small, but then again, it is explosive. Do you have the match?" asked Clarity.

"This is not automatic?"

"You need a match to ignite the fuse."

"Hold on, I'll go to our campground and ask Ms. Morales."

Luckily, there was a match inside Ms. Morales' tent, and Kish ran back two miles, breathing heavily, using the match to ignite the explosive a few hundred feet away from where they were standing. The fuse performed according to specified instructions and a loud explosion pierced the silence of the night. After a few minutes, they stepped closer to check the result of their mission, somewhat stunned by the noise and the cloudy fumes left by the shattering. Clarity could see that the pyramid was half as tall, with the foundation blown to pieces. A large stone had landed a few feet away from them. Kish could not hide his satisfaction, he was substantially enthusiastic about the explosion; it was his own interpretation of the Mayan notion of zero, of nothing being left for Zephairi to loot. If his loom wasn't working, the pyramid would not stand, at least not as tall as it was built, he felt vindicated.

"It's half as tall," said Clarity.

"It's my first explosion, not bad, let's go back to the campground, I'm exhausted," said Kish.

The next day, rumors of the explosion reached the local press, and a few calls by Parmerin brought several television crews to the site of Xuleiha. Journalists from *Reforma* and *El Norte* investigated the environmental impact report written by Fahibian's real estate company for the governor of Campeche and they found it fraudulent. There was no evidence of bids submitted by other real estate companies, or minutes stating the scoping procedure that was

required, before a gambling project could be approved by a community. Clearly, the villagers of Miradorcito had no say in what was happening to their community, and in fact, the local inhabitants of the poor Campeche village had disappeared. In any case, the proper contract award procedure had not been followed, and it was likely that the governor had received a bribe from *Mangrove Barrier Resorts*. There was no evidence of a bribe, but in Mexico, it was likely that some money had exchanged hands to allow the real estate development papers to be in place. Within a few days, an investigation to a local bank led to evidence of a wire transfer to the governor of Campeche from a resort in Belize associated with the interests of Fahibian.

Clarity took the bus to the airport of Cancún with Ms. Morales, who wanted the people of Miradorcito brought back to their village before she confronted Zephairi directly in the mother of all negotiations, to recover the right to use the land of Miradorcito for crop cultivation. They walked to the Egyptair counter, and a stewardess told them that the plane carrying the inhabitants of Miradorcito was not in Mexico, it had flown to Egypt. If it had flown to Egypt, it could fly back to Mexico, thought Ms. Morales.

"Bring them back," Ms. Morales said with determination.

"Things are not that simple Miss. We need visas, authorization and proper papers, and also the approval of those travelling," said the woman, "talk with Mr. Zephairi, he should be able to help you or know what to do."

"They are Mexican citizens from Miradorcito, they don't need visas to return to Mexico."

"They are Egyptian citizens now, they need visas to get back into Mexico and become Mexican citizens again," said the stewardess. After an exchange of opinions and counter opinions, Ms. Morales managed to fill out a form headed

for the suggestion box of Egyptair, which the stewardess said would reach the senior managers of the airline, requesting the issuance of visas for all members of Miradorcito living in Egypt.

"When will those managers receive this form?" The stewardess checked her calendar.

"Probably within a month or two, Mexico is not that close to Egypt."

"It's only a few hours by plane," said Ms. Morales.

"This route to Mexico is not that much of a priority I mean, you can fill out another form if you'd like Egyptair planes to fly more frequently to Cancún, so that the agenda of the senior directors can be modified, and so that they can look into this matter earlier."

Exasperated, Ms. Morales filled out a second form, sighed and walked away from the counter. They headed back to Miradorcito, and Parmerin immediately began doing research on the source and use of the money surrounding the project of Miradorcito. He also arranged for the site of Xuleiha to be under surveillance, but from a distance. While he took several photographs of the Xuleiha site, Clarity observed what was happening inside Miradorcito with Ms. Morales. Near the area of the explosion, Duldu headed a crew and began dismantling the remains of the large pyramid. Zephairi was overseeing the dismantling work being done with excavators and haul trucks, and he was hoping that the pyramid was still large enough to attract tourists in Egypt. The Egyptologist saw Fahibian's car approach the camp, and Zephairi made his way past the newspaper and television crews to bring the real estate developer with his girlfriend and the governor of Campeche inside his tent. Unfortunately for Casey, there was no more climbing wall on the large pyramid. Bolstered by the sight of the real estate developer, Ms. Morales jumped over a series of bushes

towards the sentinel turret, coming face to face with Duldu, who was doing his best to keep the journalists and television crews from overwhelming the construction workers charged with security. The perpetrator of the explosion had created a mess, thought Duldu, and his promotion in Belize as receptionist was now at risk. He placed his hand on his head reaching for the cap that said 'security', but found only his hair. The cap was paramount for his authority and credibility as keeper of the archaeological grounds. He noted the need to buy it in his mind, and then raised his hand in a gesture aimed at stopping Ms. Morales from entering the camp.

"We want to see Mr. Zephairi," said Ms. Morales.

"You can't see him," said Duldu, "Mr. Zephairi is talking with Mr. Fahibian and the governor of Campeche inside Mr. Zephairi's tent."

Hearing the statement by Duldu, a queue of thirty five journalists and five television crews made their way past the sentinel turret, invading the grounds of the new resort, filming everything around them, including the gambling amphitheater, which had about one hundred gamblers stuck to their slot machines.

Clarity and Ms. Morales walked towards Zephairi's tent, followed by Kish and Parmerin. They opened the back end of the tent to all journalists and the television crews, who began filming inside. Fahibian and the governor had no option but to face Ms. Morales in front of the media, and Zephairi had no option but to let Fahibian speak. Confronted with a potential bribing scandal and with the scandal of the eviction of Miradorcito's population, the governor of Campeche improvised a press conference and told the news reporters that an unfortunate procedural mistake had been carried out in Miradorcito, resulting

in an unfortunate relocation of its inhabitants. One journalist lifted his microphone towards the governor.

"Will a referendum be carried out regarding the building of the ecovillage?"

"Yes," said the governor. Cameras began to flash, and a thirty year old YouTuber with a channel known as *Carlitos Notifies and Talks to the Community* stood besides the governor.

"When was the first time you were corrupted? Was it before, or after you were elected governor?"

"There is no corruption in Mexico, that is a thing of the past," said the governor. *Carlitos Notifies* notified his You Tube channel viewers of the inaccuracy of the governor statement, replacing the word past with the word present.

"If it becomes a thing of the past, it will be thanks to us," said Ms. Morales.

The governor, Mr. Rodolfo Nobiera, spoke curtly to Zephairi, asking him to bring food inside the tent. A haul truck filled with food and refreshments was unloaded within minutes by Duldu. Ms. Morales was beaming a smile for the first time in weeks. She took Clarity by the arm, taking her aside.

"We got what we wanted," said Ms. Morales, "I have to say your idea to solve the predicament facing the village carried us quite far. Sometimes, it is better to ask for the right help, rather than trying to solve a whole problem on your own. The village is going to look normal again."

"Yes, no more gambling here in Miradorcito," said Clarity.

"I was right in believing in my talisman, the toucan provided the perspective I needed to sustain the threat to the community coming from this belligerent nuisance called Zephairi. I knew there was a way to restore Miradorcito." Clarity whispered in the ear of Ms. Morales.

"I knew there was a way to get rid of Zephairi and his excavation work." A new thought emerged from the busy mind of Ms. Morales.

"Are you sure there's going to be enough money to fund the ecovillage?"

Hearing the word money, a flock of journalists raised their microphones towards Ms. Morales. She felt the support and raised her arms above her head, thanking everyone present.

"It feels so good to speak in front of a crowd like you, soon I'll be able to do the same in front of the original members of the Miradorcito community," said the head of the village.

Ms. Morales spoke firmly in front of the media, arguing that there was an economic rationale to build an ecovillage in Miradorcito that could live off its crafts, its natural charm, and its Mayan artifacts and pyramids, which could be shown to tourists. The path of the one hundred thousand dollars needed to fund the solar panels to be used as heat for new eco-palapas, was more difficult to trace, but Ms. Morales made a good attempt at ensuring the money was there for the village, taking counsel from some suggestions by Parmerin.

"The National Institute of Anthropology and History and the Alabastriah foundation have received some money, more than three hundred thousand dollars from *Mangrove Barrier Resorts*," said Ms. Morales.

"That is correct," said Zephairi.

Fahibian turned to the Egyptologist, surprised by the speed of his avowal. The real estate developer hoped for some additional margin to negotiate his interest. Zephairi was a well known man in Egypt and he wanted to stay away from any facts or rumors, which would taint his reputation or his strong position within the Alabastriah foundation.

"Some of those funds have reached the municipality of Campeche, but they were meant for the *Mexican Institute for Ethnoconservation and Ecology* and for Miradorcito."

Ms. Morales looked at the governor in the eye, surrounded by journalists and television crews, who were incessantly photographing the governor, observing his reactions.

"I am sure my subordinates can explain what happened," said the governor, displaying a poker face resilient to negative opinions of him or his management of the state of Campeche. Ms. Morales stepped towards the governor to speak and a bundle of microphones moved towards her face to listen.

"Well, ensure your explanation comes across for the whole region of Campeche, the situation for Miradorcito has to be as clear as *Chaparrellas* spring water," she said, referring to a national brand of bottled water. A journalist supported Ms. Morales immediately, asking a relevant question.

"The one that has actual mineral water and only has twenty eight chemical pollutants?" Ms. Morales nodded.

"Yes, that one, the rest of the bottled waters in Mexico have seventy three or more pollutants mixed in regular tap water," she said.

Nobiera was nearing re-election period and he wanted goodwill to remain intact so that his voters agreed to elect him for a second term. He agreed to give back ownership and use of the land in Miradorcito to its inhabitants. In particular, he returned the land to its representative, Ms. Morales, who felt vindicated of all the turmoil created by Zephairi and Fahibian. The head of village spoke to journalists and to Nobiera about her marble toucan to illustrate how Mayan traditions were being kept by people like her, to preserve the spirit of community and goodwill.

"This battle has been won through hard work and the stubborn insistence of a few people who understand that values, principles and traditions are more important than crude financial gain, and that it is morally wrong to bully people out of their village, and worse! Out of the country. Thanks to this courageous, intrepid, plucky effort, we know now that those values are alive today; they are not buried inside a Mayan pyramid, which is five hundred years old. My marble toucan embodies those values today."

"It embodies the Mysteries too," added Clarity for the sake of clarity. Kish walked in front of the journalists, grabbing one of the microphones.

"My loom is not a mystery, it is a craft, and I can carry on with that craft and with my work now," said Kish. Ms. Morales stared at him inquisitively, raising her eyebrows, looking for some additional answers from the craftsman.

"Hmmm, yes, I see, I can carry on with my work thanks to the spirit of the toucan belonging to our cherished village head, Ms. Morales, which embodies balance and resourcefulness," he added. He then pointed his hand towards Ms. Morales and the journalists erupted in an uproar of interest and reverence, taking photographs of the mature head of Miradorcito. Ms. Morales turned towards Clarity.

"Can you get me the toucan, Clarity?" she asked.

Clarity nodded and left the tent, looking around for Lanai, who had stayed in Flower's tent, studying the codex in detail.

"Where is the marble toucan?" asked Clarity, "Ms. Morales needs it."

"It's hidden in a safe place, I can only tell Ms. Morales."

"You still don't trust me?" asked Clarity.

"Do you want to be an adept?"

"No," said Clarity.

"Then the principle of secrecy prevails, it's pretty usual with Mystery Schools, they don't reveal anything that has to do with the egregore."

The egregore was an occult concept representing 'thought forms' or the mind of the collective group, a psychic entity influencing the thoughts of people.

"It's kind of a group mind," said Lanai, "when people act together with the same purpose in mind, in this case our purpose is preserving the knowledge of the Mayan Mysteries represented by the toucan."

"The group mind is basically you and Ms. Morales," said Clarity.

"For now, yes, for now it is."

Clarity sighed, somewhat annoyed by Lanai's reaction, but glad to hold on to her spiritual independence. They stepped out towards an area filled with a few bushes, behind the tent of Duldu. Lanai used a round head shovel borrowed from Flower's archaeological equipment to dig a small hole. The marble toucan reappeared intact, hidden beside one of the tent poles, twelve inches below the ground. They walked back to the tent with the journalists, where the press conference was being held, with Lanai holding the talisman, which had apparently performed its duties correctly. The librarian from Hawaii gave the precious small statuette to Ms. Morales, who grabbed it triumphantly, holding the figurine's beak in front of Nobiera's nose, somewhat similar in shape and size. Clarity found Kish requesting the repair of his loom, and Fahibian making some statements about his company's position and role in the development of Miradorcito. *Mangrove Barrier Resorts* was changing its role from real estate development company, to sponsoring agent of a sustainable ecosystem in Miradorcito that would allow it to keep its real estate reputation intact in Mexico, and open to future projects.

"We'll sponsor a few solar panels here," said Fahibian. "Our slot machines will be brought back to our gambling resort in Belize. There needs to be more education on gambling to make it viable in this part of Mexico."

Flower entered the tent; whispering immediately in Clarity's ear that Zephairi wasn't paying attention to her, or to her work. That lack of mentorship had led her to the gambling amphitheater area, and to keep company with Clarity's friends.

"Do you know how to play electronic baccarat? Cynthia and Taimi are challenging me."

Clarity thought about how her friend Joe Falkenrich was kicked out of a Las Vegas casino after trying to get inside a large jackpot box made of transparent plastic and leave with a bag of coins. Clarity knew what was good for Flower, or at least she knew what wasn't good for her. Even though her friends had the attitude or the strength to withstand some gambling, Clarity saw that Flower could not deal with a large gambling loss. Although appearing strong, the ethnographer often needed support, and Clarity understood her better than other people.

"No, you're doing fine, believe me, you don't need gambling at this point."

"Just for fun," said Flower.

"No," said Clarity.

"For learning how to play?" Flower persisted.

Clarity remained firm. "No, you're a great ethnographer."

"Thank you," said Flower, "now I don't have to learn how to gamble."

Chapter Fifteen

Additional journalists were coming to Miradorcito, and a National Geographic crew headed by a lost explorer on assignment was told that the burial ground of the queen of the golden disk, was not available anymore. When prompted for the reason that their cherished ground was not there anymore, Clarity told the crew that an explosion inside the large pyramid had turned the remains of the queen to ashes because of a local worker's conflict with a loom that needed repair. Pressed by the journalists of *Reforma* and *El Norte*, governor Nobiera declared that the agreement between the Alabastriah Foundation and Ms. Morales that gave use of the land to Zephairi and Fahibian indirectly was now void. Instead, a new agreement returned the land to the members of the Miradorcito community.

Ms. Morales was named conservationist of the new ecovillage of Miradorcito, and a large sum of money was transferred to a local bank, to pay for eco-friendly construction work. The governor began talking more calmly to the press and the TV crews about an economic renaissance for the area of Campeche. Clarity glanced at Ms. Morales standing with Zephairi in front of the large pyramid, observing the carefully orchestrated damage inflicted by Kish. She touched one of the stones on the stair leading to the altar, creating a minor stone avalanche. Zephairi insisted that even the half-pyramid that was left after the explosion was a decent monument for Egypt.

"Why are you so bent on bringing this pyramid back to Egypt?" asked Ms. Morales.

"The French came to Egypt at the time of Napoleon to re-discover the meaning of hieroglyphs, now Egyptologists like myself, can use their knowledge to understand the links between the Egyptian and the Mayan Mysteries."

Clarity reminded Ms. Morales that the citizens of Miradorcito were still in Egypt, stationed by Egyptian authorities at the Multinational Force and Observers south camp near Sharm El Sheikh, on the tip of the Sinai Peninsula. Fortunately, a civilian contractor, Culver and Namkins, was turning an otherwise daunting stay in a barbed-wire military camp, into a pleasant experience. The company provided amenities found in a small town, like a dining facility, laundry, hairdresser, bank, library and a few social clubs for nightlife. Free transportation to Cairo was available on weekends. All of the assorted items and daily supplies including shaving cream, clothes, stationary, and snacks, were provided by an expat living there, and he was becoming popular with the inhabitants of Miradorcito.

With a few phone calls to the Egyptian embassy in Mexico City, the governor of Campeche requested the issuance of Mexican passports for all members of the Miradorcito community, who were flown on an Egyptair flight back to Mexico, then to Cancún, before stepping inside a bus that led them back home. Ms. Morales held an official referendum and the idea of the ecovillage was approved by a large majority of the villagers, who kept their Egyptian work permits intact, in case some unforeseen event created job problems in their new Miradorcito ecovillage. Kish spent a few weeks repairing his loom, and began working again on the making of colorful huipiles for women from an improvised workshop. Haul trucks hired by *Mangrove Barrier Resorts* took all the electronic video terminals placed in the outdoor amphitheater back to a warehouse near Fahibian's resort in Belize. The G-Earth excavator was put to use to build new homes for the inhabitants of the community, instead of unearthing Mayan remains, which although having undeniable historical and archaeological interest, had no immediate practical use.

Ms. Morales began accepting that tourism for Miradorcito, managed correctly, was not such a bad thing for the community, because it brought money to it. The large pyramid of Miradorcito, its remains, were dismantled and taken to Chapultepec Park in Mexico city, inside the premises of the National Museum of Anthropology, where it was renamed as the pyramid of Xuleiha. In its place, in Miradorcito, a pyramid made of glass was erected, and inside, Kish and the various craftspeople of the community performed their work in front of two large fountains, which added a touch of water and elegance to the Mayan artifacts exhibited for tourists. Within a few months, new solar powered ecohomes were built with private patios, artistic wood lamps, and colored sofas with local textiles made and designed by Kish himself. Except for the large pyramid, the site of Xuleiha was preserved, offering a picturesque series of artifacts and ancient buildings, blending with the rest of the village and its inhabitants, who were the official keepers of the traditional ways of life of the Mayas.

"Where is all this money coming from?" asked Clarity.

"Grants from private funding sources and some public funds as well. The money granted to Zephairi wasn't being properly channelled. In my view, too much government money was being spent on archaeology, and not enough on the actual development of a real community," said Ms. Morales.

Clarity nodded, thinking that the money in Mexico worked in mysterious ways. They waved good-bye to Parmerin, who returned to his office in Mérida to defend the office space turf of the *Institute for Ethnoconservation and Ecology*, coveted by Cervera's *National Institute of Anthropology*. One official group favored the interests of the local indigenous community of Mexico; the other favored the preservation of Mayan ruins to promote tourism and museums. As

Clarity had seen, although it was possible to reconcile both aspects of national identity, a struggle for influence prevailed within the higher spheres of the Republic of Mexico and its associated bureaucracy. Clarity drew her own conclusions from the experience at Miradorcito, some of them based on observing the situation of Topanga Canyon resident Joe Falkenrich.

"Gambling does not bring jobs, Lanai, it brings only problems," said Clarity.

"Vegas is doing pretty well though," said Lanai.

Clarity chose to ignore the reply, because even she reluctantly had to accept that she enjoyed her stays at a place like the Bellagio resort at times. After having recovered the marble toucan that Lanai had hid in the temazcal stone bath, Ms. Morales finally thanked the librarian for her interest in the Mysteries, saying that the librarian was not ready to understand the full meaning of them. Lanai insisted but the head of the village was firm: No more knowledge of the Mysteries for her.

"I'm not ready, can you believe she said that?"

"Well, she knows more than you," said Clarity, "swallowing the serpent may be more dangerous than you think." Clarity appreciated Lanai's interest in the Mysteries, but the Malibu teleoperator was glad that the door on that had finally closed. It was time to move on. Thinking about the future, Clarity was ready to go back to Malibu, and the prospect of being back with Brock Cheevers was exciting. Still, she was very much hoping that her librarian friend would be joining her, and Clarity thought of a way to ensure that could happen. She took a closer look at the notes written by the Hawaiian librarian: observations about the meaning of the Mayan calendar, about the codex discovered at Miradorcito, along with photographs Lanai had taken of the site, and about the pages of the codex itself. It was an impressive collection and one that was probably going to

bring a flock of tourists to the renovated village. The codex had been carefully enshrined in a glass box that was now on display inside the glass pyramid that had replaced the tall pyramid. Clarity closed Lanai's journal and dialled the library of Malibu in California. She convinced the head of the library, Mrs. Theodora Marples, that the Malibu library and community would benefit from an exhibit on the Mayas' codices, and that Lanai was the perfect person to do that because she had material coming from primary sources. After a few minutes of coaxing the head librarian, Mrs. Marples accepted to hire back Lanai.

After lunch, Fahibian's crew left Miradorcito, and Duldu was seen complaining to Fahibian about his promotion.

"Well, you lost the keys of that excavator, we'll see about your promotion as receptionist. First we have to take care of the slot machines and the electronic gaming terminals, and bring them back to Belize," said Fahibian. His girlfriend wasn't happy that he had lost money in Miradorcito, and she wanted a rock climbing wall built on the premises of the *Moneghetti Suites* in Ambergris Caye. Flower came to talk to Clarity about her future plans.

"Zeph wants me to go to Egypt with him," said Flower, "he says he's going to study the origin of the ancient cult of the crocodile there."

"What are you thinking?"

"I've never been to Egypt, I think I'm going to go, I need some additional experience in my ethnographer CV."

Clarity and her friends met inside their new temporary quarters, a nice ecohome with rustic décor, on loan for a few days, before a flock of tourists from Texas and Los Angeles was due to arrive and stay in them. Cynthia and Taimi wanted to go back to Malibu for a while, liking the idea of returning home, and Jenna wanted to return to Acapulco, to work at Señor Frogs, or work on the City

of Wellington, the ocean liner which felt like a second home. As usual, the main problem for them was money, how to get back to Malibu. The City of Wellington, the ocean liner which made the trip from Los Angeles to Acapulco, was leaving the Mexican port of Acapulco within a few days, and Jenna had convinced the captain of the ship, Captain Harvey Opreim, that *Sun on the Rocks*, the synchronized swimming act that Clarity and her friends had put in place before their stay in Acapulco, was ready to perform again for another trip. The group agreed to board the City of Wellington and pay for their return ticket to Los Angeles by working on the ocean liner.

Thanking them for their work in Miradorcito, Ms. Morales paid for Clarity and her friends' flights from Cancún to Acapulco with money provided by the Alabastriah foundation. Clarity enjoyed the Mexican tourist resort, and also the idea of boarding the City of Wellington again and seeing Mr. LT, the barman who made the most exotic and sometimes spicy cocktails.

After a few days of sun tanning in Acapulco, Clarity and her friends boarded the large ocean liner, which was ready to take them home. Captain Opreim was on the local television news and on a You Tube channel, explaining that the City of Wellington was virtually a floating city. Artfully answering the questions of an attractive anchor-woman, the captain added that the ship was planning to tour world festivals and resorts, with a mix of passengers wanting to meet new people, along with some residents who valued privacy, but lived on the ship year round. Some of the residents of the City of Wellington, which was considered ocean-front property, were members of a private club on the ship, and enjoyed elevators with access only to their rooms. Over one hundred shops added a lively atmosphere to the ship, along with several nightclubs, a casino, a tennis court, a golf course, and a golf simulator, which the captain particularly enjoyed.

Yes, thought Clarity, with a waiting list to get onboard, and a showroom in Beverly Hills on Rodeo Drive ensuring people knew of it, the City of Wellington was doing well. Now she wondered, how on earth could someone like her, a teleoperator with a moderate understanding of how capital and large sums of money moved from one place to the next actually make some serious money? Or build a prosperous place or business like the City of Wellington, or the ecovillage at Miradorcito? That was a question that she hoped her level-headed friend Brock Cheevers would help her answer in Southern California. She breathed deeply, enjoying every bit of air filling her lungs. Her fingertips were warm, shaking with a sense of anticipation and in some ways relief. She was returning home to Malibu and to her job at Stevenson Garden Products, the only clothing optional company in the U.S., where all of its teleoperators worked together, and sometimes also clothed together.

Chapter Sixteen

SUN ON THE ROCKS amusements for adults, in Banana humor order.

THE MALIBU CASE.

THE ACAPULCO COCKTAIL.

THE CAYMAN AIR BANNER.

THE BAHAMAS LOTION.

THE ADULT CHANNEL.

THE OOL BRODERIE.

THE BELLAGIO WIKILEAK.

THE CUBAN RENEGADE.

THE SUGAR BABY.

THE MARBLE TOUCAN.

Crafted by Somers Isle & Loveshade.

Sun on the Rocks is genuine banana humor, fresh, trivial,
easy to peel, and easy-going, like the fruit.

All fictional characters are adults at least twenty one years of age.

Chapter Seventeen

Compound Interest Calculator Clarity keeps close, for retirement purposes (savings plan is in the Cayman Air Banner):

<http://www.investor.gov/tools/calculators/compound-interest-calculator>

Careers and Professional Designations to consider:

Chartered Financial Analyst: <http://www.cfainstitute.org>

Chartered Wealth Manager:

http://www.financialcertified.com/chartered_wealth_manager.html

<http://www.financialcertified.com/certifications.html> (other certifications)

Certified Financial Planner: <http://www.cfp.net/>

Institute for the Certification of Computing Professionals:

<http://iccp.org/certification/designations/ccp>

Wealth:

Think and Grow Rich: http://archive.org/details/Think_and_Grow_Rich

Napoleon Hill's classic book on wealth.

How to Make Money (free pdf book from 1859):

<http://archive.org/details/HowtoMakeMoney>

Educational sites and global news:

Khan Academy: <http://www.khanacademy.org/>

Visual Thesaurus: <http://www.visualthesaurus.com/>

Visual Global News: <http://www.newsmap.jp/>

Featured universities:

Bermuda College: <http://www.bercol.bm>

University College Cayman Islands: <http://www.ucci.edu.ky>

Free online university classes: <http://www.coursera.org/>

Ohio State University: <http://www.osu.edu/>

University of Arizona: <http://www.arizona.edu/>

University of Hawaii: <http://www.hawaii.edu/>