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Blurb for QUEEN BEE by RF Salazar Nader

Clement Justus Zurvanian, a boy of the privileged class, was born in an apiary in Mexico and grew up learning the secret traditions of the ancient Maya. During his initiation ritual in a hidden cave, he is shaken by the premonition of a harrowing personal destiny; he is to become a modern-day Utnapishtim, forewarned of the intentional destruction of the entire world, fated to lead a small group of survivors into an uncertain future. QUEEN BEE is the modern, pre-apocalyptic coming-of-age tale of a new hero – or anti-hero – who is called upon to act on behalf of humanity.

As a child in Oaxaca, Clement has various character-forming friends and experiences, grooming him from a young age to accept his inevitable fate. As a young man in San Francisco, California, he meets Enos and Cyrus, two extraordinary individuals with astounding ambitions, who will introduce him to his destiny. As they recruit him to their cause, he surmises that to thwart their apocalyptic plans, the Queen Bee, the metaphoric Mother of our civilization and ruler of the known world, would have to be sacrificed. To save humanity, the Queen Bee must die!

QUEEN BEE is the debut novel of RF Salazar Nader. It is a literary work of speculative fiction with commercial viability. It addresses current day issues by exploring ancient lore, such as the Mayan and Sumerian, as the foundations of modern culture. It is a multifaceted story with developed characters transferable to other media like film and graphic novel. The polished manuscript of 97K words has been professionally edited in English and translated into the German language.

RF Salazar Nader is an American author based in Germany since 2004. A true product of globalization, RF was born in 1970 in Colombia and has lived and worked in many countries and continents around the world. RF has self-published various books of literary and mystical fiction, in both prose and verse. He is currently polishing those works for commercial publication, as well as developing further stories for future projects. RF considers writing to be his calling and aspires to be a recognized voice of our times. He finds time to write next to family, friends and work. In his free time, he likes to think. He lives in Wiesbaden with his wife and daughter.

Impressions of QUEEN BEE:

“I must reiterate that this strikes me as a really significant achievement.”

Martin Ouvry – Writer, Editor, Musician. Author of *The Cost of Loving*

“Die Geschichte ist wirklich faszinierend und so geschrieben, dass man gar nicht aufhören kann zu lesen.”

Elke Keilhofer-Schmidt – Übersetzerin

“Writing is how I can best contribute to society.”

RF Salazar Nader – Author

Synopsis of QUEEN BEE

Send author email for synopsis and anything else.

Prologue + Chapters 1 to 5

PENNYROYÅL presents:

QUEEN BEE

A H.Å.L.O. Joint
in conjunction with
Å & Ω Productions
and
God is a Geometer Enterprises

by
R.F. Salazar Nader

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Prologue

Hurra, die Welt geht unter

The man donned his dry suit slowly. He was pensive, aware that his grim task was making him anxious. The night was balmy, the moon just a sliver; it was important that the moon not be large, to keep his actions and movements covert. A full moon would have helped his enemies. He had planned his mission for months, and these were the perfect conditions in which to get the job done.

His thoughts were cold, detached, calm, but his heart was beating fast and he could feel the adrenaline coursing through his system. He was good at recognizing the different chemicals which were created and consumed by the body, resulting in different moods and feelings. He knew that how humans experience life is basically a result of our reactions to these chemicals, which are set loose by perceptions. Happiness, sadness, fear, love, jealousy, envy, excitement, good moods, bad moods – chemicals. All chemicals. He fought the chemicals by focusing on his breathing and thinking about his planning, about his lost family, about his friends, about beauty, love, loss, redemption. He thought about life and death, about the world into which he had been born, the world which had treated him such that it had led him to be where he was now: preparing, sweating, calculating, worrying and not worrying.

Thoughts of love allowed him to carry out his mission. Without thoughts of love, the reason faltered. Love for life, for progeny, for man, woman, child, for God, for peace, for justice, for mercy. Murder. He did not believe in it. He would never have been able to join some violent movement, some *Hasta la victoria, siempre* rah rah bullshit that purported to help man by killing man, like so many movements which were thinly veiled masks to justify human ignorance, cruelty and avarice. Men like to kill, and they like to justify their killing – justice, revenge, religion, righteousness, freedom, whatever. The fact of the matter was that man is an avaricious animal that loves to exert power over weaker entities, and the greatest exertion of

power is the decision as to whether another should live or die. Thumb up thumb down. An animal that loves to kill.

And here he was, standing on the other side of the divide, preparing to kill, like so many other thugs. What was the justification? Why was it okay this time, when all other instances were wrong? Love. This would be the killing to end all killing. Men were drones. Drones were ordered to kill each other, at the Leader's bidding. Drones killed and killed and killed. Drones were heartless beings that were born to kill and to die. Where was the beauty in life, where was the honor, the dignity, the valor? No! Love for man, to save man from himself. But no. This was not the killing to end all killing; this would be the one to commence the slaughter of the mindless drones.

What would happen as a result of this killing was pure speculation. The man did not know if peace would come, or chaos. It didn't matter anymore. Life was a gift; a gift from the Grand Architect of the Universe, from the Force that bound Matter to Energy in order to know Itself. It was love that mattered, not fear. Love of life, of the drones, of the Self, was more important than fear of death, fear of retribution for this act, fear of ignominy and death itself. To kill a drone, a puppet, a developing being still on the quest for the Self, innocent yet guilty, would not be possible. Death would have been preferable to the killing of an innocent. They should be forgiven for their sins, they should be taught, they should be told who and what they really are: Interstellar Beings, Universal Truth. A reality of the cosmos.

Drones were not fair game. But there were others, guilty, not innocent: the puppeteers. It was different to kill a puppeteer. That would be justice. That would be merciful. How much harm had the puppeteers caused on this plane of existence? Puppeteers killed thousands of drones at a word. Puppeteers did not actually assemble or drop the bombs – that was the drones – but the puppeteers were the ones who pulled the strings, who commissioned and financed the designing, building and dropping of the bombs. They were the ones who knew what they were doing, blindfolding, hoodwinking humanity en masse and covering their tracks through simple propaganda.

They had captured their minds; man had been thrown off the tracks to himself. The puppeteers knew what they were doing, had been doing it for a long time. It was total. It was everything, driven by media, by science, by academia, politics, religion, history and, most importantly, by conventional wisdom. The drones had been brought to propagate the myth themselves and they could not see or accept that they had been duped; they were too proud for that.

Those puppeteers, those were the ones that the man wanted to eradicate. Those were fair game. Well, he thought, it was justifiable to himself, but he would never be able to tell anyone else. There was no glory in it. Not his father, his mother, his friends. Nor would he probably ever get a chance to. They would know nothing of it. And here, in London, no one knew who he was or why he was here. He had arrived a short while ago and immediately begun preparations, making superficial friendships with the unsuspecting suppliers of the equipment he would use this evening. His planning foresaw an escape after the deed, but he

was ready for any eventuality, including his own death. If caught, he planned to swallow his own tongue and to suffocate.

Tonight was not going to be a challenging dive, if he could keep his nerves in check. He was no longer asking himself if his actions were justified or not; he was just thinking about life, and his motivation: Love. Not for any man or woman, but love for justice and for humanity. He chuckled to himself. *Hasta la victoria, siempre*. Fuck Che Guevara: he killed drones.

All these thoughts he had while donning his dive gear. He was sitting near Duke's Meadows, roughly five miles upstream from where he would hit the target. He knew the area well by now. The world-famous yacht had been sailed from Scotland to London early, in preparation for the birthday celebration. It was heavily guarded, but he had still been able to dive around it dozens of times. He loved harbor dives and had worked as a hull cleaner for years, when he had been a younger man. He chuckled again, connecting the dots in his head, how he had ended up here. He had been diving the Thames for several months now, up and down the river, checking the temperature, visibility, speed of the current, depth, swirls, swells, everything. He had tested lots of equipment, including tank sizes, weights, oxygen mixtures, underwater propulsion machines. And he had spent lots of time at the shooting range practicing his shot. In the night dives, he would set up cans along abandoned sections of the bank and do target practice from the water. He had inspected the yacht from every angle to make sure he knew, as far as he could, what to expect on this night.

He had made arrangements for his getaway, too. He had dropped a twenty-five-stone weight along with a waterproof box large enough to lie in filled with provisions into the river. He had deposited extra-large tanks of oxygen for him to stay underwater for three days after the hit. He would shoot out of the Thames into the estuary using a sea scooter and anchor himself to the bottom to wait out the frenzy nearby Canvey Island. He had enough supplies for a few more days.

He had done the route daily for the last three weeks, first down then up the Thames. Now he sat on the grass in a spot he had scoped out two months earlier. At that time, he had hidden all the equipment he would need today. He dug up the two lightweight bottles of oxygen, the dry suit and his gun, from where he had left them under the bushes. He had purchased everything used and anonymously, so no store would have any record of these purchases, in case anything was ever recovered from the bottom of the Thames. He had left another bike and a change of dry clothes locked up on Canvey Island.

He was looking at the sliver of the moon as he lay back on the grass and considered intensively. The moon. The stars. The celestial bodies. So small, so meaningless, humanity but an insignificant ant. And yet, without man, life would not know itself. Why did other humans from the universe not show themselves on Earth? Of course they exist, if man is Universal Truth; and the mere fact that man exists means that he *is* Universal Truth. But that was too abstract. He felt a bug walk over his foot. There was not much to do here

anymore: everything was ready. It was just a matter of putting everything on, slipping into the water, floating a couple of miles downstream, anchoring himself in place with the ropes he had attached to the five nearest buoys, and waiting for the target to show. He knew that the opportunity would not be guaranteed and wondered if he would be quick and sure enough on the draw when it did present itself. *If* it presented itself. Shooting at cans and at a person were not the same thing. He felt the chemical of insecurity shooting through him for a moment.

Success would not be easy and he wondered, not for the first time, if any part of him wanted him to fail. The chances of failure were high, and he pondered if that actually eased his mind. But assuming he was successful, what then? There would be no way to track him down or pin the crime on him. Unless he was actually caught. It was too audacious, too grand in scale, too momentous to suspect some lone guy without any connection to any organization or interest group. They will look for organizations, and they will not find me, thought the man. His chemicals were momentarily again at ease.

He felt the cool April breeze as he walked into the river. He took everything with him. He even refilled the holes he had dug up. What he did not need for his mission, he dropped, one by one, to the bottom of the river as he floated down: the five-pound-sterling bike he bought from a garage, the wig he wore on the ride up, the flea-market baseball cap, the supply-store shovel. He began to float down the large, slow-moving river. It was now familiar and didn't make him nervous. He had his long-range rifle in a dry bag, strapped snugly to his back. The rifle was also untraceable; he had purchased it for cash on the street, had never shown it to anybody, and all the serial numbers had been filed off. He had for it a scope and a silencer. He had a heavy hammer and railroad spikes in the dry bag to keep it from floating and to anchor himself down after the deed was done. Even though he could see the lights and sights of the city as he floated down, he didn't have the mind now to notice any of it. He knew they were impressively beautiful and represented the modern history of Earth.

He kept his head slightly above the water, his dive mask on his forehead; he would not need it till after the deed was done. After floating for what seemed like an eternity even though he knew it had not been more than forty-five minutes, he saw the yacht and heard the party on board, from a distance. He again mused on the luck of the pitch-black night. He hooked onto a buoy about six hundred yards upstream from the yacht to make his first observances. The swirling spotlight atop the ship surveilled the surrounding area, including the surface of the water. He sat in the water submerged up to his nose and observed the scene for close to twenty minutes, which again felt to him like an hour. All his thoughts were surreal in anticipation of what he was about to do. He closed his eyes, collected his thoughts, steadied his breathing, unhooked himself from the buoy and floated slowly again downstream. There was another buoy about three hundred yards from the yacht, and that was where he would hook up next.

At the new buoy, he drew the plastic-wrapped rifle, for which he had waterproofed the ammunition with a special sealant, from his pack and peered through the scope, which he had not wrapped. The river was calm, without too much current, and he was able to maintain his balance in the water as he gazed at the partygoers on the yacht. Would he be able to see his target? And, if everything went his way, would he have a shot? More importantly, would the shot hit its mark? But that thought did not preoccupy him. He knew that the shot would be guided by a higher power, hit or miss. Whether it was meant to hit the target was almost of no concern to him. He was not being paid; he did not owe anybody any explanations. He would do everything humanly possible to make the shot true, but that was all. The rest was in the hands of providence.

There was always the possibility that his target would not show up at the yacht party, or would not make themselves visible through a window or, ideally, on deck. He might not be able to get a shot off at all. What then? There would likely not be another opportunity as favorable as this to liquidate the target. They were extremely important and very well guarded, not to mention getting on in years and difficult to spot in public. Life had to be lived as it presented itself. The man asked himself if he would stalk the target further if this attempt failed. He asked himself how committed he was to the death of the target. His intention was to create chaos within the ranks of the world elite, the rulers of our reality, the puppeteers. The target would be dead of natural causes some day anyway, but if they faded and the system was allowed to replace them in a natural fashion, the passing of the torch would be seamless. The torch had been passed for thousands of years and to allow that to continue simply would not do. The System had to be disrupted, and disrupted monumentally. It had to be made to wobble first, if it were to crumble.

But if he failed today, would he continue to hunt down the target, dedicate his whole life to this pursuit, if it were to come to that? Would he sacrifice his own chance at life and happiness? Were life and happiness even available to him after this deed? He shook his head. If this mission failed, there would not be another. And not if it succeeded, either. This was a one-off thing.

He continued to stake out the huge yacht. There was still another buoy about seventy yards from the yacht that was well within the reach of the searchlights, so he did not venture any closer. He would still be able to get a good shot off at three hundred yards. The voices were carrying in the night; he almost felt that he was amongst the guests. Perhaps it was a heightened state of awareness; his mind, his thoughts were now on auto-pilot. He knew the head of the person he sought. Because of the balmy weather (fate, he thought to himself), most of the partygoers were out on deck and finding his target was like finding the proverbial needle in a haystack. He watched and watched. The grey, eminent head he sought did not appear. He waited for an hour, till his extremities began to cramp up and freeze. He had known this would might happen, that he might be too cramped and frozen to act when required. He didn't know how nerves would affect this aspect of his mission; it was the only thing he could not test or plan.

And then he saw the head through the scope. How interesting is life? How interesting is human discomfort, which truly is only felt in the face of boredom, or a lack of a meaningful mission. Humans need missions. Humans know no pain, no discomfort, no cold, no heat, no hunger, no thirst, no fatigue when they have a worthy mission before them. The man instantly regained all faculties. All discomfort was simply wiped away at the sight of the grey head. And the sight was not fleeting. It lingered, out on deck, uncovered except by a fashionable hat, exposed, lovely, human, warm, like a grandparent.

The man raised the rifle and poked his finger through the plastic he had applied to keep the trigger dry. He now had the increased difficulty of keeping the nozzle of the weapon low to the water while he looked for his shot. He dropped a couple of railroad spikes to float better. After getting organized, he once again looked up, half expecting his target to be gone, half hoping it would be, only to find its fine, silvery head more visible and exposed than before. He put the target in his scope, observed the large, smiling face, thought of the humanity. He had lost touch with time, with temperature, with feeling, with thought; he had no idea what music was playing, what the surveillance lights were doing, whether things were moving fast or slow, what was happening. He lowered the nozzle a tiny bit, felt comfortable in his position, and pulled the trigger.

The target immediately disappeared. A man with a clear mind, on dry land, without so many challenges to his senses would have seen if and where he had struck. This man just put his mask on and pulled himself down the buoy line till he reached a depth of five yards, then let go, in a sensation of absolute nothingness. Pitch-black, unmoving, silent yet clamoring, nothingness. He unslung the sea scooter from his pack and turned it on. At cruising speed, he wanted to travel the ten kilometers in roughly two hours, which was walking speed. He set his timer. He had the weapon still slung around him. He would drop it in one hour, about five kilometers from the site of the deed, halfway to his destination.

The drones. Man. Are you worth it? Are you worth a good man's peace of mind? Are you worth fighting for? Are you worth saving? What does it matter? All is in the hands of providence, of the universe. The man thought again about the motivation for his actions. It was not about the drones; it was about the Queen Bee. The Queen Bee. The Queen Bee, and the revolution to come.

Part One – Innocence and Grace

FORTUNE FAVORS THE BOLD

Chapter 1

The boy walked down the dusty road. He walked this stretch every day and knew it well. He was finished with school for the day and on his way to his work for a few hours before he went home. He was eight years old, and even though he wasn't really employed there, he took his after-school stopover at the apiary with Don José seriously, and he called it his work. Don José was the beekeeper. They were best friends: an old indigenous man and a young boy belonging to the elite class.

"Hola, Don José"

"Buenas tardes, Clemente, ¿cómo estas, hijo?" Bees buzzed busily about as they talked. There was a peaceful vibrational hum, as if the whole compound were a Tibetan lamasery and the bees the monks. The apiary was well-kept in a rustic state. Often, the smell of cooking intermingled with the eternal fragrance of the flowers. A main house, a smaller house, a barn and three tool sheds were buried in the garden of trees and flowers, almost a forest, that made up the premises.

"I've come to see how the bees are doing, especially how the new queen you told me about last week is doing," said the boy.

"She's getting herself installed, son. Soon she'll be completely established and nobody will be able to question her authority. But tell me, how was your day at school today, Clemente?"

"Fine." Clement, like any child, was not particularly excited by the question.

"Tell me some things you learned. You know, I never went to school after I turned eight or nine or something like that; when I was a small child, about your age. Of course, you are not small, but when you are as old as I am, children just seem small," Don José laughed his good-natured laugh.

"You didn't miss much. Just numbers and letters and things that no one needs."

"Oh, but you do need them, son. You would do well to learn your lessons, Clemente, as I know you do. It's not every boy who has the opportunities you have, son. Otherwise, you'll end up a beekeeper who knows nothing else, like me."

"I prefer to be here with you and the bees. Because the bees can teach you great lessons too, lessons of courage and calm, and I want to learn that too, like you do it, Don José."

"Yes, that's true, son. There is also much to be learned outside the classroom, in real life, from the animals and the trees and the clouds and wind. You're a very bright young man and you will do great things. I can teach you all there is to know about beekeeping in a short time, but you have a greater destiny. The apiary is only a very small stepping stone in your life. You will achieve things that a simple man like me can only be astonished about."

“Don José, I like being here with you because you are fair. That is how I know you are a good man and why I love you.”

“Well, your parents be proud and happy to have such a fine and fair son like you. I know that they are, too: I see it in your mother’s eyes. And you should be proud of them, too.”

“I am. Are you proud of your family, Don José?”

“Well, of course, son, but you see, I was not able to teach my children the fine things you learn in school.” Don José looked to the ground and became still. This was a tough subject for him, but he quickly looked back up and carried forth for the sake of the child. “My children make me very proud; they are humble, like their mother and father, and we are honest, good people, so I am proud. And of my parents too, and my grandparents, and all my people. When you are a poor peasant like us, all you have is your family, your people. For us, life is very simple, without the jagged peaks and valleys that more educated folk, from whom much is expected, experience in life. Our victories and defeats are smaller, but they are victories and defeats nonetheless. We are happy with little, as long as we have each other.”

“The children at school told me that your son Rodrigo is in jail because he killed a man. Is that true? Are you still proud of him?” The boy had a distant, dark memory of trauma related to Don José’s son, but what had caused it had been kept from him.

Don José swallowed hard. He had not expected this question from the child. “Clemente, that is precisely why you must learn your lessons. Ignorance is a terrible and violent thing. All crime is done out of ignorance. If my son is an ignorant man, it is because his father was ignorant and could not teach him better. I failed him. I was not able to teach him the correct path, and his own character was not strong enough to discern it for himself, so he made some terrible decisions, for which he pays. But as difficult as it is for me, he is my son, and I am of course still proud of him. I wish he had been wiser, but then I wish I had been wiser too. As men, we all have our own crosses to bear and our own destinies; we all make our beds and sleep in them. And you have a great destiny, my son. Of this, I am sure. You will do fine things and make everyone who knows you very proud.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that, Don José. I’m just a regular kid, you know.”

“Well, son, these are not things to worry about right now. Right now, we have to attend to these bees. These bees, they are wise, you know. They stay away from trouble and work all day, fulfilling their destinies. They just build, and work, and make delicious honey. And the queen bee, she’s the most special of all – she gets to feed on the royal jelly and makes more and more babies to populate the hive and build more, work more, make more honey. I love the queen bee. If only we could keep our noses clean like the bees, we’d be alright.”

“But the bees have stingers and they can be violent too. Wouldn’t that mean that they are ignorant, if ignorance causes violence?”

“Well, self-defense may be violent, but it is not necessarily violence born of ignorance. Bees have stingers to defend their queens and their existence, not to go around bullying other creatures. Spiders have poison and they kill, and you could call that violence. They kill, and not even for self-defense, but proactively, to survive. The animal kingdom is full of violence, and animals that succumb to that instinct are just that: animals. But humans are different.

“Men love bees – they give a million times more than they take. They make honey and pollinate all the plants in the spring and summer so that they can procreate and feed us and keep the chain of life alive. They have no education, but they have an incredibly disciplined code of conduct. They keep their hives clean, get rid of their dead and wait on their queen hand and foot. They work for the benefit of the colony and make communal decisions about their future existence. They are industrious above all else. They are adept architects, builders and peaceful warriors. You know, I think it would be terribly interesting to live the life of a bee. I will ask Ix Chel for this tonight, Clemente, for my next incarnation, even though the life of a bee is very short. Except the queen.” Don José laughed again. “But enough talk. Help me with these honey panels, son. They are sealed and ready for harvesting.”

“Don José, I’m sorry about your son. I know you are a very wise man.”

“Well, wiser than my son, that’s for sure. Or maybe just luckier. He’d be happy with the bees here too, like he used to be. He just got unlucky - very unlucky. Here, help me get this honey off these frames. That’s it, boy. This spring honey is lovely. We’ve got a lot of panels to do today. But you better be running along home soon.”

“Mama asked me to bring two jars home, and some royal jelly too. Don José, I know what you mean about people and bees. Sometimes I have problems with the kids at school. I mean, I like them, and they like me, but sometimes I feel like they don’t understand me and I don’t understand them.”

“Don’t let it get to you, Clemente. It’s normal. You’re from a different place than we are. You’ve already seen the world; most of us have never left Oaxaca, much less Mexico.”

“Don José, sometimes I wish I were Maya like you and like so many of the other kids. I wish my people were pyramid builders, like yours. They must have been a fabulous people. I wish we lived in those times when the pyramids were still being built. I wish I were one of the architects.”

“Yes, Clemente, you would have made a fine pyramid architect, I’m sure. Maybe you will build pyramids one day yet. Pyramids were technical wonders, and man still creates technical wonders even today, and every day these wonders become more wonderful. And for that, you must learn your lessons. The language of building is numbers, so learn your math, son. Even bees build with geometry.”

“Do you know what those Maya were like, the pyramid builders?”

“Not really. I know what my Maya are like, but those Maya are long gone. Their history has been destroyed. We still tell some stories, the ones that we know, about Kukulcan and the others, and some others you may not know, but the thing that made the Maya great builders has disappeared. The world we live in

now is another man's world. We did great things, achieved great heights, but as with all things that have a beginning, the golden era had an end."

"Can you tell me some of the old stories?"

"Of course, son. I will tell you all I know, but not today; soon, when the time is right. Today we've finished here at the apiary, and your mother will get angry with me if you do not get home soon. Ask Choncha in the house to give you the honey and royal jelly before you go. Don't forget those. Go on."

Chapter 2

Clement Justus walked the remaining two miles of dusty road to his home kicking up the dust and pebbles along the way. He watched the birds flying around in the sky, he looked at the houses as he walked past, listened to the sounds of the neighborhood in which he lived, thought about Don José, the bees and the children at school. He liked most of the children; he liked the school. He was at ease whether he was on his own, with Don José and the bees, or with his boisterous group of friends. Clement had an uncanny ability to blend in well with his surroundings and find peace in many different settings. He needed little to be satisfied and was somewhat mature for his eight years.

He loved the dusty landscape, the arid dryness of the air. He drew it in deep into his lungs and felt the raw earthiness of the life-giving breath. He put his hand before his mouth as he breathed out and contemplated the fact that the air was moister than when he had breathed it in. He noticed that the outside air temperature must be the same as that of his skin because he could not feel any temperature whatsoever. He heard a crow cawing as it flew past and he looked up into the bright blue, cloudless sky. He thought about the delicious pastries his mother was going to bake with the honey he was bringing home.

Kicking up the dust and any other object that crossed his path, Clement thought about what he had told Don José. School was okay, but the lessons were boring. It was with the bees and the old man that Clement felt he learned the lessons he wanted to learn. The social behavior of the bees was astounding. The hive was like a city, with all sorts of specialized workers. Don José joked that there were probably even merchants and lawyers in there. How nice it would be if everyone were busy working on the same goals: to make honey and provide for the well-being of the community of the hive. Instead, it just seemed that all people were busy pursuing their own goals. His father was building and running his factory, his mother was making her confections, the teachers were disciplining the children, children were busy disobeying the adults. The world was busy, like the bees, but what was our honey?

When Clement arrived home, he found his mother and Olga, her assistant, loudly chirping about recipes, flavors, proportions and people. Olga was a middle-aged woman who helped his mother create delectable cookies, pralines and cakes, and also knew everything about everyone in the town in which they lived. The kitchen was always, every day, at all times, the liveliest room in the ample house. It always smelled divine, and there were often visitors and guests talking about everything under the sun and tasting the concoctions. All delivery personnel were used as guinea pigs and taste-testers.

In the Mexico of those days, indeed in all of Latin America, well-to-do families and their homes were both a nucleus of daily life and an engine of the economy. They were like coral reefs, where many people were employed, directly or indirectly, and around which people of many different types orbited, swimming in and out, to and fro. His mother was used to this life and handled all her house employees and vendors with charm and aplomb. She had been raised in this life and carried herself in it with ease.

Clement walked over to his mother, who was so busy that she hadn't noticed him, and pulled out the jars from his schoolbag. "CJ, darling, you're home. Did you bring me the royal jelly? I've been waiting all afternoon to try a new recipe." Clement gave her the jars of honey; he also gave her a small jar which was only partially filled with a whitish-yellow substance. It was not fit for consumption in its pure state; it was carefully mixed with honey in differing proportions to create different flavors and effects. Don José had told him that *jalea real*, or royal jelly, was a magical substance. The bees took the pollen from the flowers and fed it back to the queen, which gave her incredible superpowers. She would only eat royal jelly her whole life, for as long as she was queen. Clement wondered if the queen bee saw the sour and astringent taste of the royal jelly as a necessary sacrifice to pay for her greatness. The royal jelly gave the honey a spice, a sour tang.

Abigail Olabarrieta Dunn, the boy's mother, was a confectioner, and used her home kitchen as her creative studio. All her finest creations contained royal jelly. She had bought the apiary for the satisfaction of producing her own raw materials. She was of Irish and Basque descent, a Dunn from Venezuela; an exotic bird.

The extended Dunn clan lived in Caracas, Bogota, Santiago de Chile, Buenos Aires and Oaxaca. Abigail had grown up moving between all these countries, but she had been born on Isla Margarita in Venezuela, and she belonged properly to the Venezuelan Dunns. She considered herself to be a *Margariteña*, although no Dunns lived there year-round anymore. The Dunn family compound, Villa Elizabeth, was a sprawling complex on the Sierra of the island overlooking the Caribbean and the Atlantic to the east. On a clear day you felt like you could see Africa. It was where Abigail called home, and she was the best hostess the villa had. When she was there, everybody else who happened to be there felt that their trip to Villa Elizabeth was complete.

Abigail Olabarrieta Dunn's ancestor Thomas Dunn had come to Venezuela shortly before the beginning of the nineteenth century. He had been friends with Francisco de Miranda in Europe and had been initiated into the Venezuelan Freemasonic Lodge with Miranda and Simon Bolivar before the revolutionary wars began. They had fought together to liberate Gran Colombia from Spanish rule and hatched plans together to found an American nation based on enlightened principles, not on feudalism and colonialist plunder. These masons had chosen the colors of the Great Colombian flag – yellow, blue, red – based on the scientific knowledge of the primary colors of the light spectrum. The colors were chosen to represent the different races of the nascent nation – white, brown and black – which together made one people, as the primary colors made one light.

In the last two centuries, the Dunns had acquired a reputation for being idealistic, savvy and generous business people. Through marriage, they had blended French, Spanish, Italian, Lebanese, Native, and African into their genetic stock. They had become quintessential South Americans, meaning that their mixed blood was a source of pride - a mark of distinction of being American and not European. It allowed them to commit fully to America and their existence there, instead of pining for some old forsaken motherland. By the time of Abigail Olabarrieta Dunn, the family had ceased to be Irish and was Venezuelan, Chilean, Colombian, Argentinian, South American.

At the age of eighteen and following the Dunn family tradition of studying in the United States, Abigail had gone to Boston to pursue her passion, confectionery, and had attended the Boston Culinary Academy. The Dunns were a very pragmatic family, and although they had established themselves well in life, they had retained their Protestant work ethic and valued, as Americans do, the practice of maintaining a side-job while at school to build character and experience. Although they were comparatively wealthy, they were not ostentatious in the least (with the exception of Juan Carlos Dunn, the Argentinian globetrotting playboy polo patriarch). They liked fine, but not fancy things. They did not call undue attention to their wealth and privilege, especially in light of the social inequality in their home countries.

Abigail was a strict vegetarian, a staunch feminist, and a socio-political utopian ideologue who fought for the rights of all humans. This latter was also a Dunn family trait from the times of Thomas the Liberator, and Abigail had certainly inherited it from her ancestor. In that sense, the Dunns were a very down-to-earth clan, preferring the company of campesinos and simple folk to any extravagance that their social status bestowed upon or requested of them. Abigail was a woman of the people, and she made sure to teach that to her son.

While in college, she developed an interest in the German language and learned to speak it passably. One day, while still an apprentice at the confectioner's, Abigail was called upon to deliver some of the store's finest and most expensive pralines in a beautifully elaborate gift box to a client who had ordered by phone and asked for delivery to a nearby hotel. There, a young man opened the door to room 1810. When he saw

Abigail, he froze. He was so stricken by her beauty, all he could muster up to say, in German, was, “Vielen Dank.” Abigail had noticed the utter astonishment of the man, had guessed its cause, and replied, in German, “Bitteschön. Das sind zweihundertsiebzig Dollar. Hier ist die Rechnung.”

The man collected himself. “Two hundred seventy dollars for a box of chocolates? Must be of the very highest quality. And they really find the most fitting delivery personnel.”

Abigail did not respond; she was aware that by saying nothing she retained the upper hand. They both felt and enjoyed the state of heightened self-awareness brought about by the encounter between two strangers who could be sexual mates. The man had not been expecting a beautiful woman to deliver his order and leave him tongue-tied, nor had he expected her to speak his tongue. And Abigail was aware that anything she said now would even the playing field by giving the sexual tension an escape valve through which to dissipate. She smiled.

The man gave her three hundred dollars cash after fumbling through his pockets and wallet, saying, “Please keep the change. I had budgeted three hundred for the box of chocolates anyway.”

“I’m not allowed to take tips, nor do I have need for the money. I will go down to the reception to get your change.”

“I have a better idea. You return it to me tonight at dinner.”

Abigail accepted the invitation to a fine but simple restaurant in Boston specializing in crab and lobster. The atmosphere was loud and casual and matched Tobias’s mood. He told Abigail his story. He was German, from Berlin. He was on business in Boston. He came to the city regularly and spent about four months of the year there. His last name was Zurvanian, an old name with Armenian roots, although he knew little about his Armenian heritage. His ancestors had emigrated to Germany during the genocide in 1915. His parents had both died young in a traffic accident when he was two years old and the boy had grown up in the care of a German family who had been close friends of his father’s, a renowned violinist. His life seemed destined for tragedy, but his foster family loved him and raised him as one of their own. He grew up surrounded by music, but as he matured, he decided that he wanted a practical kind of life for himself and went into business. At first, he was a simple employee in the shop of a company specializing in machinery for processing paper. When his talents were discovered, he was groomed for management by the owner. Since then, he had been travelling to America regularly for the better part of seven years, since his early twenties. Now he was thirty. Abigail pondered that piece of information; she was twenty-three.

Like Abigail, he was also gifted in languages and could speak German, French, Italian and English fluently. His foster parents were enlightened people and had raised him well, sponsoring him through a thorough education in the arts and sciences. In the end, Tobias’s penchant for tinkering and working with his hands, perhaps an heirloom of a musician’s handiwork, had led him into mechanical engineering. Now he was in Boston setting up paper processing machinery in three separate plants, plus two more in Germany.

Abigail Olabarrieta Dunn and Tobias Hayk Zurvanian fell in love that evening. They were both exactly what they had been looking for in a partner: beautiful, educated, worldly, intelligent, full of potential, and displaced. Abigail was very politically inclined, a utopic idealist. Tobias was a down-to-earth and extremely capable man who considered himself a realist.

Abigail graduated from culinary and business schools, obtaining both degrees with distinction. No one in her family had ever stayed in the United States after graduating, and she would not be the first. By now, she and Zurvanian had been together for three years and Zurvanian was spending eight to nine months in Boston. Their love affair was intense. Zurvanian, ever the realist, had known all along that the woman he loved would want to go back to her territory upon graduation, so he had maneuvered at his company to get a post in a Latin American country. He even learned Spanish from Abigail. He told her that he would need a couple of years to get himself the right situation in Mexico, Oaxaca, where his company and the Mexican government were deep in discussion to set up a paper factory. Zurvanian did everything in his power to make himself central to this deal and succeeded, with his newly acquired language skills, in becoming the main contract partner. He willed the deal and his role in it into existence.

That year, Abigail and Tobias were married in Villa Elizabeth on Margarita Island, after which they moved to Oaxaca to start a new life together. Love had prospered, goals had been met, human resourcefulness had been proven, the future was bright.

Chapter 3

Clement Justus was fourteen years old and in the eighth grade at the local middle school. He had an easy time with schoolwork and focused a lot on the social aspect of being a teenager. Abigail and Tobias were permissive, but they also demanded that Clement hold himself to high standards. He was a good kid, with a good attitude about life, happy, well-adjusted, intelligent, polite, friendly, charming at times, and empathetic towards others. He was well-liked in his school and had many friends.

Because of his background and upbringing, he was always somewhat aloof, but he was nevertheless socially competent and knew not to provoke people needlessly, for there were lots of city toughs. He had a couple of special gifts of which he was yet not fully aware: he was an excellent judge of character, and he was able to make friends with people of all social levels and walks of life. The first gift allowed him to read people and situations quickly and accurately. The second gift was due to his authentic and genuine like of

people. Not just the elevated, not just the poor, not just the good, but all people. He was a philanthropist at heart.

Clement had two best friends: Jaime and Enrique. One day, the three boys concocted a plan to hang out at the beach in Puerto Escondido for a long weekend. They gathered a group of six friends and pitched the idea to their parents. Because the group was so large and two of the boys were sixteen years old, they all got permission and made the necessary preparations to take their first long unchaperoned trip to the shore, seven hours away by bus. Clement's father pulled him aside and gave him the usual pep talk.

"You know what I expect of you, son. You know your mother and I trust you. I am certain you will not abuse that trust."

"Of course not, father. You can rely on me."

"Good. Your mother may not want me to say this, but I don't care if you guys pull pranks, or drink, or mess around with girls, or even if you smoke weed, but with the trust I place in you, your responsibility to not do anything stupid or get into trouble must follow. I don't care if the police call me to pick you up, as long as you have not done anything irreparably stupid to yourself or to others. You understand?"

"I do, dad."

"What do you understand?"

"I understand you are placing a lot of trust and responsibility in me to have fun without doing anything stupid to hurt myself or others. I won't let you down."

"Good. Now give us a hug."

With his mother it was similar, except she had tears in her eyes. And she was more concerned about the girls. "You're not going down there to hang out with floozies, are you?"

"No, Mom, of course not. I'm not going to do that, and I don't plan on doing anything stupid." His mother's eyes were watering, but she wasn't crying. It was more pride in her growing son than anything else. He was a budding man and his voice had changed.

"Son, protect your honor. Your honor is the most valuable thing you have. Do whatever you want, but don't do anything you'll regret."

Of course, despite all the speeches by parents and children alike, the main objective was to break from authority and to be, in a word, stupid. The boys were planning on drinking lots of beer and tequila, meeting as many girls as they could, and scoring some weed if they were lucky. Clement was not the leader of the group; that was Jaime, the biggest and most masculine of the boys. He was also a year older than Clement. Jaime was loud, strong, rambunctious, impulsive, brave and bullish. Enrique was the charmer, especially with the girls. They were going with three other boys from the school: two older boys, Vicente and Julio, who were already sixteen, and Ángel, a fifteen-year-old on the soccer team who was well liked by all.

The boys spent the cramped seven hours from Oaxaca to Puerto Escondido reading, listening to music, talking at times, watching the picturesque scenery go by. The bus was full and the road was long. They left Friday morning at ten a.m. and arrived at five p.m. at the bus terminal. From there, they took a local bus to the beach and found their lodgings: a small hostel by the name of La Granja.

After they were settled in, they went to the beach to take a look around and have a swim. By eight p.m., they had found their way to an outdoor kiosk that sold tacos and enchiladas. The establishment was typical: four plastic tables, sixteen plastic chairs, a cooking hut with a small front porch, a pleasant patron. Simple food, ice-cold drinks. The night was pleasant and warm and dusk was falling. The boys were happy, refreshed from their swim and energetic from their youth. The first night was just getting started, and it promised adventure and fun. The youths started on a polite note.

“Buenas noches patrón. ¿Nos pone seis Carta Blanca por favor?”

“Muy bien, hijo. ¿Y qué van a comer?”

“Una hamburguesa con todo.”

“Dos.”

“Tres.”

“Cuatro.”

“Cinco.”

“Bueno pues, pónganos seis, y bien picantes.”

“Órale muchachos. Pues ya vienen. Tomen las cervezas de la cava. Están heladitas.”

The boys had already drunk all the proprietor’s beer, and although he didn’t have any left in his cooler, he ran down to the next vendor’s stand to get some more. Street vendors in poor countries are extremely resourceful; this man could have procured absolutely anything within half of an hour of anybody having asked. Anything. Imported or domestic. Expensive items they would have had to pay for up front. But the lads didn’t know this yet and were content to just drink beer on this first night out alone in the world. They were all savoring the freedom in the warm, balmy, subtropical air. Twilight had come and gone, night enveloped everything, the streets were alive with a different energy.

After the long haul of almost the whole day, the boys were happy to sit at a plastic table which was just like millions of other such tables across South America, all advertising Coke or Pepsi, and drink their beer. They drank up a storm. The sixteen-year-olds had a bit more experience, but not much. Clement felt his head getting woozy, his voice getting louder, his tongue getting looser and more difficult to maneuver; he felt his laughter getting more uncontrollable. The conversations were lively. They talked about everyone they knew: about their teachers, about kids in the schools, about the sports teams and their opponents. The night got later, the beers were going down ever smoother and quicker. They probably drank out the beer from all the vendors in the vicinity, but they never even knew, because the patron kept on bringing them.

He was a good sort, a humble man used to raucous tourists. He enjoyed the kids, gladly joining their conversation when asked and happily sharing his relaxed beach wisdom when the opportunity arose.

“Ah, no. Don’t worry about a thing when you are in Puerto Escondido. Life is too short. Enjoy yourselves. It’s a glorious evening.”

The youths laughed at his exaggerated bliss, but it impressed itself upon them. They were at an impressionable age, and even more so with the blood alcohol level rising.

And so went the first night. They drank themselves into a stupor steadily and peaceably until about midnight, when they stumbled back to their hotel in boisterous style. They probably woke some other guests but they were not impolite or ugly, and they were spared any reprimand for their short-lived unruliness as they settled in. That night they all slept the sleep of the innocent: exhausted, drunk, and happy as they were.

The next morning, they all awoke with a feeling they now had for the first time, and would get to know very well over the course of the next ten years. They each had a ferocious hangover. Clement had never known anything quite like this, but the sheer excitement coupled with ebullient youth meant that none of them dwelt on it. They were up early and raring to go. The beach was calling. The day, life, glory, victory, all were beckoning. They rolled out, askance and confused, in pretty bad pain, happier than ever.

They spent the day on the beach. It was a typical, beautiful day. Life and nature were caressing them, loving them, enveloping them in her tentacles. They were in the build-up phase, before the breakdown phase. Life was inhaling, expanding, growing, opening, stacking, reassuring, teaching. Building them up, before their destinies took over. Or was it fate? Who knows? When good things happen, we call it destiny, and if bad things happen, fate. All the boys were full of potential.

Evening came. This time, the boys were better prepared and had bigger plans to hit the town in larger fashion. This one was going to bite. They could all feel a type of exhilarating foreboding in the pits of their stomachs, but they didn’t know why. Perhaps it was because deep down, they were planning on behaving like men tonight and not children. Maybe they were thinking they would get laid, five of them for the first time. They went down to another nearby street vendor and wolfed down some food. They were anxious to get to a bar. After eating, they walked down the main road and turned off into a random side street named Calle Jimenez. As if pulled by a winch, they gravitated to a seedy dive called El Coyote, which seemed to satisfy them all. It was open, there was a small stage, the place was empty. They felt like adults walking in.

“¡Órale muchachos! ¡Muy buenas noches!” said a youngish woman from behind a small wooden counter along one side of the establishment. “¿En que les puedo servir?”

“¡Una botella de tequila, por favor!”

“¿Con gusano o sin gusano?”

“¡Mezcal! ¡Con gusano, con mucho gusto!”

It was Jaime who had spoken up authoritatively. They did not know that they had walked into probably the only locals' bar in all of Puerto Escondido, which was primarily a tourist town. The boys sat down and received their bottle. They all manned up as they took their first shot with salt and lime and tried not to grimace in pain. Ángel had a coughing fit. Conversation was slow and not fluid; they were a bit tense. After the second shot, no more wrenching or coughing fits, they started to relax. By the third, they started conversation, and other patrons started to roll in. A band began to set up on the stage. There was no sound system.

Clement noticed that the alcohol was somehow not affecting him the same as in the previous night. He was the only one in the group who had not yet doffed his inhibitions after the first few rounds. He still felt sober, although the first bottle was almost empty. Jaime loudly ordered a second. The bar was now filled with other young men and women, none as young as themselves, however. The band – a beautiful woman in her twenties with a guitar and a man with a trumpet – were playing a ranchera as inconspicuously as possible, also warming up. They were not yet stomping on the stage for drum effects as they would be in an hour. The song was soulful, agonizing. The musicians were good.

Things were starting to pick up. There was hootin and hollerin. Clement's head was now spinning. Things were happening too fast for him to keep up, but he knew he was having fun. At some point, the place was really booming and the music was hitting a climactic crescendo, when suddenly things started to abate, until now only their table was left, along with three young men sitting at the three stools at the bar. The men at the bar had been eying and talking about the youths, unbeknownst to the latter. The bravest of the three locals stood up and sauntered over to the travelling party of six. Only Clement noticed that he stumbled more than he walked.

“Buenas noches, muchachos. ¿De dónde son ustedes?”

“De Oaxaca,” answered Jaime loudly, smiling.

“Ah, de Oaxaca, que bonito. ¡Maite! ¡Tráete otra botella de tequila para nuestros visitantes de la gran ciudad de Oaxaca! Vamos a mostrarles lo que es la hospitalidad costeña, ¿ah muchachos?”

“¡Pos claro!” retorted Jaime. By this time, three of the boys had had enough and stumbled home to sleep it off. Only Clement, Jaime and Vicente remained at El Coyote. Jaime was being somewhat more macho than his usual self, and Clement could see a mischievous glimmer in the eyes of his tipsy coastal hosts, who joined them to make a new party of six. They had all had enough to drink and Clement felt that this new constellation could not lead to anything good. If he had had the presence of mind to remember his father's wise words, so oft repeated – *Don't do anything stupid!* – he would have got up and gone home on the spot. But he was too drunk, and impetuous, and adventurous, and young.

Maite brought the bottle over somewhat reluctantly because she knew the man who had ordered it. For the youths, the night was going deeper into uncharted territory, which presented a stronger lure for them

than any possible misgivings at this point. The night with its festivities was once again beginning. The bored, callous, cynical, local toughs were setting up to feast on well-bred innocence and inexperience.

“So, lads, here to enjoy our fine beaches, are you? And a taste of our fine young ladies as well, I’m sure. ¡Órale, muchachos, a sus saludes!” the man went on. He was the only one doing any talking. “You know, boys, here we have the finest women in all of México, and the finest tequila too! Isn’t that right, Chóco?” He turned to his colleague, who heartily and promptly replied, “¡Claro que sí, mi jefecito! ¡La mejor tequila de todo México! ¡Órale muchachos!” The three men and the three boys whooped it up to the local tequila and the rancheras on the stereo. Jaime, as usual, was the first to react.

“Sí, but where are the women? I see only tequila,” said Jaime, blurry-eyed.

“What? Don’t be insulting to our beautiful Maite, one of the finest women and bartenders on the whole coast. On the whole planet. He didn’t mean it, sweetheart.”

“Oh, no, of course not. Maite is very beautiful, but there is only one of her. Where are the rest?” Jaime’s bravado was speaking.

“Oh, this one is frisky, eh, boys? And horny too. Is he always like that? Of course I know where the women are. We are only here to get warmed up, muchachos. I hope you have your party sombreros on. We can take you to the women, for you to see and feel and fuck for your own selves, eh, boys? Claro que sí, cabrón. ¡Maite! ¡La cuenta por favor! The boys want to pay!”

Clement could see that Jaime and Vicente were swooning from the alcohol. Now, for the first time, observing developments, the gravity of his father’s words dawned on him – *Don’t do anything stupid, boy. Don’t hurt yourself, and don’t hurt anybody else.* He carried on now out of a sense of duty, and his drunkenness subsided in one fell swoop. He knew he must be drunk – he had had a lot of tequila – but somehow he didn’t feel it. He just felt numb, insulated, isolated, surreal. Existence began to reverberate. There was a ringing in his head. Everything felt so unreal, but it wasn’t fake, either. He suddenly felt like he was invisible; like the only thing that was him was two floating eyeballs, miraculously suspended in the ether where his eyes would have been, and nothing more. He didn’t know what was happening because he had never been this drunk in his life.

He shook his head and the reverb began to wane. His building anxiety attack waned with it and he was back in the boisterous Coyote bar with his friends, new and old. Things were a blur. Nothing was clear. Conversation was too loud, too fast. Someone said something and they all got up. Somehow, the bill was paid. All six young men exited the bar and stumbled into the night. Clement knew that he was talking, but he didn’t know what he was saying, or why. All of them teetering, the young men took the boys to another establishment, where they had to buy an expensive bottle of Scotch whisky to get in. Somehow, they scraped up enough money. They were taken to a table by a man in a tuxedo and immediately greeted by almost-

naked young women dancing on the stage. The place was dark and smoky. The youths had paid for the bottle, but the other three commandeered it when it was brought.

They all drank more. Women came to their table. The men knew the women. A girl took Clement to a room, but he was much too drunk to do anything about anything except puke in a paper bin in the corner. She was understanding. He found himself back in the bar, alone. Then he was with Jaime and Vicente. Then the six were leaving the bar. Once outside the door, Jaime fell to the ground and did not get up. The three men rifled through his pockets and took his wallet. Vicente squatted against a wall, his head hanging on his chest, vomit pouring down his front. The three men were using aggressive language.

“¡Pinche oligarcas! ¡Pinche putos niños ricos! ¡Pinche cabrones niñatos!”

Clement was again the hanging eyes suspended in the ether. The men came for him. They were menacing and howling, showing their fangs. If he had been sober, he might have wanted to cry. One of them barked at him through gritted teeth as he showed him his knife, right in front of his suspended eyes. Clement did not feel his body at all. But he felt the courage well up in him, his fear fade away. He thought he heard himself raise his own voice in defiance, and he swung his fists violently. Or was it an object he had in his hands? He heard a dull, sickening thud, saw blood fly. The knife clanged on the ground. Suddenly, Jaime was back on his feet. One of the toughs lay unmoving on the ground, blood gushing from his head, a knife sticking out from under his ribs. It was El Jefecito.

“Holy shit, what just happened? Is he dead?” Jaime was the first to react. “Let’s get out of here. We gotta get out of here. ¡Vicente! ¡Vicente! Let’s get the fuck out of here!”

When Clement awoke the next morning, he remembered much less than all of that. He had a terrible sinking feeling; his head was pounding; he wanted to die. He was completely dissociated and lost. He didn’t realize yet that he was covered in blood and vomit. Four hours later, the boys were all on a bus back to Oaxaca. Vicente, Jaime and Clement did not say one word on the way back home. They just slept.

Chapter 4

Clement travelled a lot in his childhood. One of Abigail’s childhood friends, Clarissa, lived in Indonesia. Clement stayed in that country with his mother for two months once. There, he made friends with Juanes, Clarissa’s boy. When they were twelve, Juanes and Clement would ride their bikes to the beach and play with the local boys. Juanes and Clement taught them English and the locals taught them Bahasa

Indonesia. One day, as the boys splashed about on the shore, one of the local boys was attacked and killed by a shark. Clement witnessed as the whole beach screeched in alarm while the boy screamed and flailed wildly. He witnessed the victim being dragged ashore, one leg missing below the knee, and him dying on the beach. He felt nothing for the boy. Neither pain, nor pity, nor sorrow. Just nothing. That almost worried him, because Juanes was extremely shaken up, but then he realized that he had felt nothing because he didn't think that anything *bad* had happened to the boy. Sure, he had died violently, and he was glad that he himself had not been killed in the boy's stead. He had died, but he was *supposed* to die, would always have died like he did.

During that visit to Indonesia, before he had witnessed the boy die on the beach, Clement and his family took extensive archeological trips to some of the Pacific isles. The most impressive place for him had been Borobudur, right in the heart of Java. It made Clement very happy because it reminded him of home and of the megalithic structures with their associated religious mythology that he had grown up with in Mexico. While at Borobudur, he had had a conversation with his father.

"This temple was erected in honor of Buddha. Buddha is an emblem for the enlightened man. At home, in Mexico, a similar archetype may have been Quetzalcóatl, Kukulcan, or Gukumatz. In Peru it was Votan, or Viracocha. It might also be called Christ Consciousness to us Christians."

"What is an archetype?"

"An archetype is an ideal. It is the skeleton, or the bones, of an ideological structure upon which we build myths and stories. Take Jesus for example. What we want to say is that there is a type of man who is good, who can be a role model for all humanity. That is the core of the story. The rest we invent to agree with our tastes, or to some political end. Buddha is Jesus, but in another place and another time. They are both depictions of the archetype of the Enlightened Man."

"Will we ever be enlightened, father?"

"Well, son, we still live in the Wheel of Samsara, to use Buddhist terminology. We are not enlightened, but it is our goal. Maybe some day you will be enlightened, but don't think it is a walk in the park."

"Were Buddha or Jesus real men?"

"I don't know. Like I was saying, they represent archetypes of what is attainable if you work real hard."

"I guess that means that they were real men, because it is attainable."

"Yes, I guess you're right."

"What did Buddha do all day long?"

"They say he sat under a tree and spoke with those who came to him."

"Was he killed, like Jesus?"

“I don’t remember how he died. That’s a good question. But it doesn’t matter, because he believed in reincarnation.”

“That means that people never really die. They just get reborn again and again until...until...”

“Until they become Buddha, achieve enlightenment, and transcend this plane to inhabit another, albeit unknown, existence. Or they can choose the life of a Bodhisattva and return to Earth to teach us ignorant Earthlings.”

“Father, is everything on Earth ignorance?”

“Well, this is a plane of polar opposites, so yes and no. Much suffering and pain are basically due to an emotional ignorance. Any time that you feel suffering, pain, rage or other destructive feelings, you are either applying your own ignorance or struggling against it.”

That summer, they also spent two weeks exploring the half-sunken complex of Nan Madol, on the island of Ponape. It was a small place with few residents. Clement was struck by their resemblance to what he knew from home.

“Father, this reminds me of our ruins in Mexico. Who built these?”

“No one knows, son.”

“But the people here even look like the some of our Maya back home. Don’t you think they did it?”

“Well, I don’t know. Nobody knows. But certainly, it is possible that they were the same builders, perhaps in different epochs. They say that this was once part of a vast sunken continent named Lemuria, or Mu. Maybe Mu also led to the Mayan Empire. Some people say it did.”

“But why is it that people don’t know their history? I mean, can’t we study it and conclude that these or those people built this city?”

“History is shrouded in mystery. For one, it is old and forgotten and maybe there was a break in the continuity of it. On the other hand, there are certainly some political motives that wove that shroud. Remember also that conquering peoples destroy the past of the conquered to cement their overlordship, such as when the European conquerors destroyed the history of the conquered Africans they brought across, as well as that of the natives they found in America. They did their best to ban the histories of their subjugated races and crafted their own mythology to justify their ends. This is an important law of rule.”

“But why?”

“Knowledge is power. To remove knowledge is to remove power. And to that end, the media war of political propaganda is as old and as important as the war of military might. The pen is mightier than the sword. It is *ideals* that rule the world because the support of the masses is what makes kings, and kings have the means to shape the message that gets broadcast to the masses for the express purpose of shaping their ideals, in order to control their energy and productivity and thus to build and retain power. This political propaganda always subverts the truth, which leads good men to fight to right the balance of perception, to

regain their sanity and peace. But most likely the main reason we don't remember our history is there was a cataclysmic event that cut us off from our past for an extended period of time, maybe several thousand years. So you see, maybe it's not that simple, son."

They also visited Truk Lagoon, where Clement was certified to dive for the first time, being now twelve years old. He displayed an immediate adeptness at diving, as it was entirely complementary to his personality and disposition. He enjoyed the slowness of it. The deliberate thoughtfulness in the element of water was a revelation of new possibilities unfolding before him. It was during one of his dives in the lagoon, before he had even really considered the ruins of the wars of human ignorance, that he "came to" for the first time in his life. It was a momentary feeling of bliss, of perfection, of deep resonance with Truth and the cosmos, that allowed him to feel how alive he was. He had never before felt that. It was as if he had suddenly remembered everything about everything, about the whole universe, for a flash of a second.

In a night dive that he did with his father, he actually saw the cosmos. At depth, the divers switched off their torches and were left to float in an inky blackness. But they were surrounded by infinite microscopic flecks of bioluminescent microorganisms that to his imagination were the very same flecks of light in the starry night sky. He floated, a giant without limits, surrounded by all the stars in the universe. He felt nothingness, to complement the everythingness. He *just was*, and he felt the just being. There was nothing missing, nothing superfluous, nothing there, just himself. No water, no temperature, no hunger, no people, no knowledge, no ignorance, just stars and inky blackness. His father switched his torch back on. They did not speak a word till the next day.

Chapter 5

Clement was in shock when he returned home from Puerto Escondido. He was overwhelmed with feelings of stupidity and disappointment. Vicente had had the luck to not have seen, or not remember, anything. Jaime was able to hide it if he did recall anything at all. Clement had a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach for days. He hid it from his mother by hiding behind his homework. He was despondent. Something within him had broken and he could not hide that from his father.

"What's the matter, son?"

"I'm not feeling so well."

"You haven't been feeling well since Puerto Escondido. What happened down there?"

"I already told you, Dad. It has nothing to do with Puerto Escondido. We had a good time. I don't know, I'm just in a phase, I guess. I'll snap out of it soon."

His father left him in peace. He was not naïve and knew that the kids had probably gotten drunk and smoked some weed, maybe gotten into a little trouble, but he didn't want to pry; at least not right now. If the bad mood and despondency persisted, he would have a chat with him. He knew all the boys and all the parents, and he knew that they were good lads.

For his part, Clement was expecting the police to knock on his door at any moment for having killed a man, or badly hurt him. He hid in his room, pretended to have lots of work to do and sat at his desk for hours on end in the first two weeks after the trip. He replayed the broken images in his mind over and over, but they never got any clearer. On the contrary, they seemed to get vaguer with each passing day. He saw the build-up, he saw the face of El Jefecito, the dancing girls, the squalid room in which he pathetically puked. The screaming and the cussing, blood, mayhem, terror...and blackness. *What happened? What happened? What had happened?*

None of the other boys ever talked about that night. They all knew that there had been a fight, but nobody seemed to know the extent of it, and as Jaime never mentioned the gravity of the situation, Clement never mentioned it either. They could not, as the memories were too haphazard to piece together. Finally, about three weeks after the trip, Clement, when they were alone on one of the lunch-table benches in the school courtyard, confronted Jaime about the evening.

"Jaime, what happened that night?"

"I don't remember. It's a good thing we got out of there in one piece."

"Did those men attack us?"

"Yes, I think so. Yeah, they came at us. I think one of them, El Jefecito, even had a knife in his hand, but you stopped them and we all got away."

"I stopped them?"

"Yeah, you started swinging something and they just split. That's what I remember, but I was dead drunk. I don't remember much. You're like my hero, man."

"Did anybody get hurt?"

"Well, none of us, thank goodness."

"Did I kill El Jefecito?"

"I don't remember anything like that; I don't think so. I don't know. Why? Do you think you did?"

"Did you see him on the ground, bleeding, with a knife in his side?"

"Maybe he fell on it. He came at us with a knife. Just forget about it, it's over. We're all fine and that's what matters."

Clement didn't know what he was supposed to forget. He felt the sickening thud again and again in his mind. He felt bone crush within his own bones. His body was remembering, even if his mind couldn't. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Jaime was upbeat, impervious to the idea of anything being amiss. Clement noticed that Jaime's innocence had not been yet breached, and he was glad. He was glad that there were no active witnesses in his group to be sucked down into his personal hell.

The police did not knock at his door. It remained a dream, a nightmare, a secret. He did not blame himself. He thought about destiny, and fate. In his mind, he saw a club swinging in the void of space, and he witnessed, completely unattached to himself, that the destiny of a face had ordained that it should move into the path of the swinging club. The face had moved into the path of the club. It was so mathematical. He saw the mechanical movements of the clockwork of life. Like when the boy had been killed by the shark. Men are born; men die. Men are innocent, men make mistakes, men suffer, men survive. Men live. Do not do anything stupid, his father had said. Do not hurt yourself or anyone else. Clement shook his head.

He was reminded of a parable he had once heard from Don José: *Four men entered the orchard. One man died. One went insane. One went apostate. One left in peace.* It was that man's destiny to die that night, as it was Clement's destiny to swing the instrument of his demise.

Clement sensed, on the grander scale of simply being, that he could not be pleased or displeased with the victories or defeats of men. At that moment, he also checked his ego. He knew instinctively that he was not cold enough to not feel emotions like happiness and disappointment, bliss and desolation, and everything in between. He knew that he would mourn his losses, and how. But he felt his personal religion to be completely detached from all happenings, like the two eyeballs suspended in space. Those two floating eyeballs, floating in the ether, attached to nothing, observing the world in an abstract, non-believing, solipsistic, fatalistic, fantastic way. Things will happen because they are meant to happen. They happen because they must. And we are the ones who carry out the ordinances of the cosmos. We are nothing but tools in the Hand of God. *Amor Fati*, Don José had once said.

It was about a month after Puerto Escondido, six months before Clement's fifteenth birthday, that his mother broke some interesting and somehow cosmically fitting news. Don José's son, Rodrigo, who had just been released from prison, would be coming to work at the apiary with Don José. This was serious news, and it warranted a sit-down family meeting to discuss many questions. Abigail and Tobias knew Rodrigo, and had assented to have him now come into contact with their fourteen-year-old son. They knew Clement to be a bright, introspective, talented young man and wanted to prepare him for any psychological impact which contact with a convicted murderer might have on the impressionable mind. Clement had known Rodrigo too, when he had been a child.

The next week, at the apiary, Don José was particularly inquisitive and communicative. It was Saturday, and the fine spring morning air with the evaporating dew carried the fragrance of the flowers particularly well. It had rained recently and the foliage was thick and richly green, for an arid climate. The usual hum of the busy bees did not distract man or youth.

“Hola Clemente, hijo.”

“Hola Don José. How are you today?”

“Fine, son, fine. Did your parents already inform you about Rodrigo?”

“Yes, Don José, they told me about it a few days ago. I’m glad he’s coming.”

“Good, son. I want to talk to you about that.”

“Oh, don’t worry, Don José, I talked to my parents about it. I’m not afraid of Rodrigo. He’s known me my whole life, and I’ve known him. I think we’ll be fine, don’t you, Don José?”

“Yes, my child. I’m glad you say that. The most important thing is that you don’t fear him, Clemente. But make no mistake, son, Rodrigo still has to prove himself. He was a good boy, and we all know how he has suffered, but prison does things to a man. Do not fear him, and do not lose your awareness of yourself by allowing yourself to be impressed or intimidated. We all have to get used to each other again – but Rodrigo was always a good boy.”

“Yes, Don José, I’m conscious of that. Can I ask you a question? Why did he kill that man?” Clement was very curious about Rodrigo, especially as he was still going through the mental strain of the Puerto Escondido incident.

“I don’t want to tell you his story, son. He spent seven years in jail for it, but now he is free and wants to reintegrate into normal life. He grew up here in the apiary, just like you. I taught him here, about the bees and the flowers. This was his home. But one day he made a decision which led to a man’s death, and he had to pay. He will pay his whole life long, son. Surely, it was a long series of decisions, and not just the final one that caused his calamity. Somehow, somewhere, it was fated to be. He should be the one to tell you his story.”

Clement tried to think of all the decisions that had put him in the position to strike a man at Puerto Escondido. Was it his own trajectory that had made him kill the man, or was it the man’s trajectory that had put him in the position to get killed, with another man as the medium? He wished terribly he could talk to somebody about this, but he was afraid to even mention the subject. It was all too fresh in his mind and he still feared repercussions. He needed more, deeper guidance.

“Don José, will you teach me your religion? Does it have a name?”

“Well, it has no name, but we are called the Men of the Serpent.”

“Of the Serpent? Why?”

“It is a very ancient religion, from a different time. There are very few of us left who adhere to it, and we like to meet in caves to discuss our beliefs and our traditions.”

“Why in caves?”

“Well, because caves were the ultimate protection for our forefathers, the original Men of the Serpent. Humanity has spent much time in caves.”

“But why Of the Serpent?”

“Because the serpent is the closest animal to the earth, physically. Therefore, it is a symbol of the Earth, of the terrestrial, and thus of the feminine nature of life. We are Devotees of the Mother.”

“But the snake represents the terrestrial, and the eagle comes out of the sky to destroy the snake.”

“No, he does not want to destroy the snake; he wants to be joined with it. The terrestrial with the celestial. The material with the spiritual. The opposites, the male and the female, night and day, good and evil. That is what Kukulcan is all about, the Feathered Serpent: a combination of the eagle and the serpent. It is a representation of the binary reality of the universe.”

“Is that why there has to be evil in the world?”

“Precisely. There must be evil because there must be balance. And your awareness of this is your best defense against anything evil in this life, whether based in science or magic. You see all in existence with only the two eyes in your face, and it is your duty to understand that this is not all. To see the Light, you must first be aware of the inherent balance of nature and life.”

“How do you get to that level of awareness?”

“This is not easy. In the olden days, the elders were taught *The Way* methodically and systematically by their gods. I had the privilege to learn what remnants there are of a once mighty mental state from my own elders, who had it as a priestly hand-down from time immemorial. Base men are not supposed to know *The Way* at all. Nevertheless, there are teachers of these truths, such as Shiva, Vishnu, Mithra, Buddha, Jesus, Gukumat, Viracocha, Hermes, Prometheus and many others.”

“Will you teach me this awareness, Don José? I think I will need it to achieve my goals.”

“And what goals might those be?” asked Don José.

“I want to make this world a fairer, better place, Don José. I’d like to find a way to wipe the slate clean and have a brand-new start for humanity, another golden era.”

“Those are big ambitions, son. You’re not even fifteen yet.”

“I’m old enough to know what I want. And I will be fifteen at the end of the summer. Will I be ready for you to teach me then?”

“I’ll have to think about it.” But the old man had to think about nothing. The boy had asked for the teachings himself, and right on time, for his fifteenth birthday, which was the traditional age of initiation. Don José knew the power of the human will; that man has the power to will his world into existence.

“I will talk with the other Kans, to see if we can teach you up. I’ll let you know in a couple weeks,” he said at last.

Chapter 25

Enos was at first his usual reserved self. They had rolled a joint and were passing it around. The meeting was over and they had adjourned to the study. Everybody had left, but Clement remained. He was pensive. Gaviota's question had not really been answered. Who were the gods? He also had no answers. Such is life on our three-dimensional plane of illusion of Maya and of Samsara, he thought. But it would be great to find out. "Who, indeed, were the gods?" he wondered out loud.

"Who are today the architects, the agrarians, the chroniclers, the miners, metallurgists, space travelers, and everything else? Who drives civilization forwards? Mesopotamia is the cradle of Civilization," said Enos with uncharacteristic passion. He was coming alive now. "We've been building the civilization in which we live right now for six thousand years," he continued. "The written documentation began in Sumer and continues uninterrupted till this day. That's not to say that building itself began in Sumer, just the documentation of it, of which I happen to have a few samples. Ancient clay tablets."

"Where did you get them? What do they say?"

"I have different tablets from different sources. These particular tablets here I purchased from a dealer in antiquities in London whom I have known all my life. They were taken out of Iraq during the occupation after the latest war. I do intend to return them to the Iraqi government at a time when they are sovereign, but right now it would be like handing them back over to the American government, who plundered them in the first place." Enos got up, walked over to a shelf, which Clement now saw had a faux façade that slid to the side, and carefully drew out a wooden box. He placed the box on the table between them, reached in, grabbed a tablet wrapped in a blue cloth, and carefully handed it to Clement, who inspected it with reverence. It was about the size and shape of a smallish paperback book, fitting nicely in Clement's hand, covered on all sides with cuneiform script.

"These are roughly five and a half thousand years old, from the Sumerian city of Eridu, although they were found in the destroyed library of King Suppiluliuma I, in the ruins of the Hittite capital city of Hattušas, where they were kept as heirlooms from their long-gone forefathers, the Sumerians. They are written in the archaic Sumerian script. I have nine such tablets in this box."

"What do they say?"

“These are diplomatic communications, like the tablets found in Amarna, Egypt, but much older, and although they are difficult to understand because they have references to unknown places, we believe that they are communications between Sumer and one of their colonies in America. It refers to a snake people and ziggurats high up in the mountains in the *Lands of the West*. Maybe in the Andes. We definitely thought that would interest you.”

“Wow.”

“Furthermore, one of them, the one in your hands, discusses the operation of an energy reactor in the ‘Western Lands.’” There was a pause. “Clement, we want to let you know that Briggs has finally discovered a way to reactivate the reactor in the cave in Colorado, and we are going to do that.” Clement struggled but finally remembered that Briggs was the genius savant who’d saved Enos’ life in the mountains. “That will very likely trigger heavy reactions on Earth which will have wide-reaching implications. I don’t want to speculate on the fallout, but it could be pretty dire. Human activity and even life itself will be shaken to the core and never the same again. We have to tell you because we think that you are a key link in this endeavor. We believe in destiny, and we believe that we have been brought together for a reason.” Enos let his words resound in the room.

Clement sat motionless and silent for a moment, which seemed to him long and uncomfortable. He didn’t yet know if he had correctly understood what Enos had just said. It seemed all a bit drastic. Enos had turned very serious and Clement sensed a somber mood in him. “But why?” he finally asked, looking Enos in the eye.

“Because of everything that has been said this evening and every evening. Because we know that the World Order which rules the Earth is led by the same forces that have led matters on Earth for the last six thousand years, perhaps longer,” said Enos. “Precisely because the people, or forces, that started our civilization six thousand years ago continue to be the same people, and forces, that rule our Earth now. We have traced a continuous rulership from Sumerian times until today. The same families, the same people, the same driving forces that founded the Sumerian civilization, which was in actuality simply a re-establishment of civilization after the biblical flood, continue to rule today. Our true history has been obfuscated from us, attested to by religious, mythological, archeological, architectural and historical evidence which the astute and educated observer can discern.” Enos was becoming more and more passionate as he spoke.

“Are you saying that the very same people who built those caves still rule the Earth today?”

“Well, not necessarily the same individuals, but in essence, yes, the same people. Look, you have to follow the trail. Nothing else makes sense. Everything found in antiquity is found in

its most advanced form in today's modern, developed, industrialized nations. And there is an elite within these nations. Civilization cannot exist without an elite, as a body cannot exist without a head. Kingship was originally established all those many thousands of years ago, and the same kingship, which came down from heaven, persists today. Heavenly Kingship is the only formula of rulership to create civilization known to man.

"Look. Aren't you a beekeeper? The queen bee; she is the mother of all the other bees – the workers, the drones, the nurses, and they all exist for her. A hive without a queen bee is no longer a hive. It will be in a state of frenzy until a virgin queen kills her way to the queenship. And so it is with humans. We must have our Queen Bee, and we have been taught to kill to maintain our regent, whomever that may be. But who am I telling all of this? You're the Ajaw Cab. The King Bee."

"Yes, I've had these thoughts before. So you want to force a change of the Queen Bee?"

"Yes. Do you think that the families who have established themselves in kingship would ever give it up? I can assure you, Clement, that they would not. They have not in six thousand years, and will not in six thousand more. It is completely against the laws of power to give up power willingly. Power must be taken, and kept, by force, and so it is in our civilization. We are here, Clement, to keep mankind under our power, under our proverbial thumb, doing our bidding. This kingship goes back to the foundation of kingship, which was established by An, Enlil and Enki at the beginning of recorded time."

"You are saying that the last six thousand years have been a steady march by a small group of people, whose descendants are still in power, to the place where we are today? And that the development of man has not been a series of trials and errors, but a concerted effort to maintain for this kingship perpetual power?"

"Yes. That is what I'm saying, we knew you'd get it. Our civilization was founded after the biblical deluge. There were civilizations prior to our own, civilizations which gave us our caves. I am saying that the re-establishment of civilization in Sumer was a function of the elite forcing the local natives to work for them in their cities, which they built to display their own greatness. It was not, as conventional wisdom has it, that the people just came together and started building cities because they thought it was a good idea. The marauders *are* the civilized. The elite, the kings, need to build in order to simply be who they are. It is who *we* are, Clement."

"What is your proof of this?" asked Clement. Enos looked at Cyrus, who looked back at him, but only shrugged his shoulders and stuck out his bottom lip, as if to say *don't look at me*.

“My proof is me. I can trace my own family tree back more than four thousand years, to the beginnings, to Sumerian and Babylonian times. I know it sounds a bit far-fetched, but we have books in my family libraries going as far back as clay cuneiform tablets, like the one you have in your hands. There aren’t too many families who can claim this, but in the West, the ones that do are all aristocrats. The British Royals, like my family, can trace their lineage at least back to Babylon.

“I was taught to read cuneiform as a child. My family, or at least my branch of our family, is now down to me. I’m the last one in a line who can trace its lineage through priest-kings and aristocrats of all sorts all the way to one of our original patriarchs, King Gudea of the Gutti Tribe in Babylon, around the year twenty-three hundred before Christ. The oldest tablet in my family’s possession was written by a scribe for Gudea in the city of Lagash forty-three hundred years ago.

“My family tree continues down through the ages and shows how we moved east from Ur, to Persia, to Bharat, modern-day India, back to Persia, then further west to Byzantium in Asia Minor, then north to the British Isles, and finally to America. Everywhere we have been, we have ruled, and we have left places when our rulership became untenable, either through geological or social catastrophe. Our people have always been the minority and we have always ruled the vast masses of indigenous inhabitants, whom we subjugated through our superior military technology, but also because we have always possessed an incisive and decisive intellectual Drang, or imperative, to rule. We have used any and all necessary means to achieve this goal.

“At first, our people ruled openly as gods or demi-gods. Then we ruled as aristocratic kings descended from and appointed by the gods. Finally, through the changes brought about by the rediscovery and re-colonization of America, our rulership through divine right went underground to survive the onslaught of revolution caused by the freeing of human ingenuity through the destruction of the yoke of our established aristocratic feudalism in Europe. Through democracy, it looked like the masses had finally usurped our stranglehold on power, but that is really only an illusion. In reality, we still firmly grip the reins of civilized existence and steer its development, as we always have. Through indoctrination, propaganda and social engineering, all masterminded without interruption by families like my own, we still rule society, but now, even more surreptitiously and thoroughly than we ever have before. No matter what happens, our talons dig deeper into the flesh of man as we progress.”

“How, exactly, do you do that?”

“The advent of the electronic age has allowed us more complete power than ever before. Technological innovation in all its forms allows ever more control of the masses. You have to understand: *all* technology is in the end developed *by the state*, which has more means than any other entity. We, my people, have always been masters of the state, and therefore of technology, and with it we have ruled life on Earth as kings. Today, in our current system, people believe they are free. And in a sense, they are, but in another sense, they never have been, not since they were living in the wild. My people have ruled in all times, over all peoples of all colors and creeds. But now no one knows of us except ourselves.”

“Who are you? Who are your people?”

“We are just a few families who today look amorphous. We have been using our reason to gain power and wealth longer than any other people on this planet. While others were still babes, so to speak, we were already mining for ores and building cities and conquering peoples through intellectual prowess, which manifested itself through a need to rule. Our people escaped destruction after the last flood and reemerged in Asia Minor, what is today Eastern Turkey. Our spiritual home is Mount Ararat, in Armenia, where your people come from, Clement.

“The Earth is our Promised Land, our Land of Milk and Honey. But it wasn’t promised us; no, we took it, because no one stood in our way. Wait. Many have stood in our way, but none with means such as ours. And now, thanks to technology, which we have championed and driven for thousands of years, always knowing we would get to this place because we came from it, we have finally regained total dominion over humanity, on all continents, in all countries. Now, we can wrap our fingers around mankind’s throat. Oh, rest assured, we will tighten the grip. I say this not because this is what I want, or as a threat to scare you, but because it is what we have always done. Since time immemorial we have tightened the grip. It is what we do. It is what man does. It is crass, base, and low, but it is. It simply *is*.”

“But how does it work? How do you do it? How do you enslave man?”

“It’s easy, really. The formula has been the same since the beginning, and we have records of it in our libraries. At first, when we awoke from the catastrophe of the flood, most of humanity had devolved into lowest-echelon survival mode. The flood wiped out a previous civilization, where my people had been part of the ruling class. The awakening was really a coming together of some civilized clans that had managed to survive the flood, which had been triggered when Earth was struck by small- to medium-sized heavenly bodies. This caused tremendous earthquakes and land movements on a mass scale, which brought devastating ice melts and tsunamis. As man has

always lived near coastlines, most cities were destroyed: either sunken, shaken to bits, buried under earth and mud, or burned to the ground.

“Almost everyone died, as there was no place to hide, but as always – since it was not the first such geological upheaval on Earth – some survived. Little pockets here and there. But all history, all scientific knowledge, all higher learning was temporarily lost. For a few thousand years, man lived like this, re-finding himself, just surviving, fighting elements, with no higher civilization. No cities, no construction on a mass scale or technology to speak of. Until our clans came together; clans of people who, although they had lost their heritage, had not lost their memory of a former time. They came together and founded Sumer in Mesopotamia. Once they had found each other after thousands of years of dereliction, they began to rebuild civilization.

“By civilization is meant various things. We began to rebuild and document ourselves once again through writing, and with that step we walked back out of prehistory into historical times. The capacity to organize and build, with everything that entails, separated the elite from the rest of humanity. Building civilization requires resources and labor, and we were few, so we captured and enslaved man to provide us with these resources and labor, because we had the technology and power to do so. But this slave manpower had to be housed and fed and entertained, so we built cities and developed agriculture and high culture. We built our monuments to our gods, who were out in space, heavenly bodies, and our religion we parsed out to the masses in coded form. The slaves were loved by us, and they loved us back, but they were our slaves, and to ensure enough labor in all areas, we conquered ever more peoples and developed social stratification. By manipulating all the skills needed for human progress, we were able to impress man and keep him in check, under our control, to harness his life energy and rebuild our lost civilization.

“Because we could, we made ourselves gods again. But *god* is just a word, really. We just used all of the tools at our disposal to keep man in awe of us. We brought them together to build our walled cities and massive monuments to ourselves; we unified them, and it was clear that we, the *gods*, were the ruling elite. It was not questioned. The civilizing process had begun, and everything that comes with it. In a way, it is freedom, but at its core, it is enslavement. It has to be, in order to continue to build and build and build, until the present day. People think history is blind and turns randomly, zigzagging through time like some headless force. The fact of the matter is that there has been a single, unified, driving force behind history, in the way and for the reasons I’ve just described. It has been divide-and-conquer from day one. The victors have always been the

same ones. History has always been written by these people, us. But we have never written the truth, at least not for the laypeople. We have confounded you, and led you astray, to our ends.

“We have suppressed the truth at every turn, always using the means of the times. These means have changed throughout the epochs, but not the ends. At first, we set ourselves up as gods, but when this strategy had served its purpose and exhausted its lifecycle, we morphed ourselves into kings by divine right. When this tactic ran its course, we rebirthed ourselves within democratic societies, but we also submerged our identities behind figureheads in order to be the unseen puppeteer in a play of marionettes. And that is where we are today. All governments are the puppets of a greater, unseen force, and the eye of man is misled by sleight of hand. In every place and in every time, we have demanded and received obedience, on the promise of nirvana and the penalty of death. Today is no different, and yet, in a different way, much more subtle; but no different in essence. Today, we make you believe in myriad ways that you are free, when in fact you are the same slaves you have been since the beginning of history. We are the ones that manage all earthly resources.

“We have built an enslaved society that by and large self-regulates thoroughly. The religions and mythology and laws and the economy we have planted are enough to make sure that everyone toes the line. Man is weak and human history is a long litany of human folly. It was not difficult to convince mankind to enslave itself. To be sure, it has taken a long time to *completely* achieve this end: it is technology that facilitates this final step. Free thought is now no longer possible as all are bound to one another through a commonly shared fake reality. And we control that reality. Completely. Man’s ignorance, coupled with his arrogance, have sealed his fate. And there is no return. No return to simpler, less vicious times. As I said, our grip will only tighten around the throats of man.”

“Wow. That sounds horrible. I don’t know what to say.”

“There is nothing to say.”

“There must be something to say. How can it be so final?”

“It has always been final. My people have been working toward this for millennia. There is no coincidence that we are now where we are. It was not chance that brought us here. This is the culmination of our achievement. We have manipulated and clouded man’s compass, in every way; mentally, physically, and spiritually. We have divided and conquered you. You live in Babel, where every man speaks his own language and none can communicate with his neighbor. We have

poisoned your minds, bodies and souls to such a degree that you now self-regulate on someone else's behalf: ours."

Clement, still listening attentively, looked deeply into Enos's eyes. It was a sort of piercing incision meant to search for something. But he found nothing. Enos's black eyes looked right back, devoid of emotion despite the impassioned admission which had just taken place. What kind of admission had it been? The men continued to stare into each other's eyes.

"Would it make a difference if I killed you?" asked Clement finally.

Enos did not flinch or bat an eyelid. "No, it wouldn't. There is no man alive that can affect the system that has been put in place. We own and conduct all governments, all industries, all resources, in all places. There is only one thing we can do, Clement, to survive the next tsunami that is coming, that we are building."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because you are the third person I have ever met that has the mental preparation to deal with this extremely anguish-inducing information. At least, that is my hope."

"Well, if it's all said and done like you say it is, what can I do? Why are you wasting your time telling me?"

"I do know that you are a piece of the puzzle. Coupled with your mental fortitude and preparation, which will be what saves you and your loved ones, you possess a skill which may come in handy to our endeavor one day, when the chaos comes."

"What endeavor? Dude, I am not endeavoring with you. What skill? What chaos?"

"You are a builder. We, you, will need to build more bunkers to survive the coming tsunami that we are planning. Like a new ark, but on land."

"What tsunami is that?"

"I did say there is one thing we can do. Briggs. You know about his work, about his poring over ancient manuscripts to try to power up the ancient crystal which is hidden within the cave. Once the crystal is powered up, the electromagnetic fields of the Earth will be automatically shifted. The first repercussion is that all electric frequencies currently in service to man will immediately become useless. It will affect us like a sustained electromagnetic pulse that will blow all circuits on every level, everywhere. No more electronic communication will be possible. All computers, all broadcasts, all communications will be rendered non-functional. Everything will go dark and silent.

“Airplanes will fall out of the skies, cars will shut off, radios and stereos will go dead...but more importantly, electronic ledgers will be wiped out. Nothing, and I mean nothing, in our technologically advanced world will work. People themselves will fall into a temporary state of shock and illness as their own electromagnetic fields fall into temporary imbalance when the surrounding frequencies are shifted. The next thing that will happen – and I know this because I have ancient documentation of it – is that the shifted electromagnetic fields of the Earth will cause the *weight* of the landmasses to shift upon the face of the Earth. Meteorological and geological phenomena will begin to occur which will likely culminate in monumental tectonic shifts. These shifts have all happened on Earth before. They are known to us as *floods*.”

Clement let this sink in a moment. What was there to say now? Was Enos completely insane? Maybe he was. Clement looked at Cyrus, who was looking back at him with a dead serious expression; it was evident that he supported everything Enos had said. He did not qualify it or soften it, or look surprised in the least. Nothing. It was all moving too fast. He did not know what to think. It was all very disconcerting. He looked away for a second, looked down at the ground. Why were they telling him this? Was this what he had been searching for? Was this where his search was always going to lead? He realized that deep down, the more he thought about it, the more perversely alluring the thought became. He briefly asked himself if he wanted to die; if he was ready to die. Rebekka crossed his mind for a fleeting moment.

Suddenly, Clement's whole being was transported back into his own cave, the one he had seen with his own eyes, the one that had originally told him that man had been lying to himself for eons. He had thought back then that man was somewhat more innocent, somewhat less capable of such a blasphemous history. He tried to reel in that thought of innocence. No. Man cannot be so evil as that. No. It must be some sort of whacked-out cult. He eyes shifted back to Cyrus, then to Enos, then back to Cyrus. He almost felt he might get angry for a moment and storm out of the place, which suddenly felt small and tight. Emotion welled up in him as he thought of his own happiness, of his unwed wife, his unborn children, his parents, his family, his unlive life.

But the anger welled back down when he thought of Don José, Rodrigo and all his lessons. What Enos had said was far-fetched, but plausible, and in that moment, he saw it. He saw the human folly, but more importantly he saw the human genius and the human manipulation. It broke his heart; it made sense. It suddenly made more sense than anything he had ever known before.

“Does it have to be this way?” he asked after a long pause. His voice was firm and strong. Maybe it did need to be this way, but he needed to hear it now that other options had been weighed and discarded. Less drastic options.

“We are currently headed for an endgame; a type of techno-enslavement which has no pity, no mercy, no remorse, no escape and no exceptions. The only other option is to continue to march blindly into this techno-enslavement and embark on a science-fiction existence which will end in the total and irretrievable destruction of the sovereignty of man on Earth. When that is achieved, then they, the very few of them, not more than one thousand in number – think of that; not more than a thousand – will leave the planet to conquer space. Man comes from space, Clement. You know that. I’m not saying we are aliens; I’m saying man is a Cosmic Truth and wherever the conditions for human life arise, there humans will spring from a germ found in space, in the cosmos. This germ is nothing more than a frequency. The cosmos, the universe, is hyper-fecund with this germ, which created all life here on Earth and everywhere else where it finds a seed.

“I cannot say what will be the end of this experiment once the techno-enslavement kills off the will of Earth-based man completely, but man will no longer be man. Man will be dog. It’s all the same to the elite.”

“And so you will stop this process by killing off humanity proactively through geological calamity? Is that your solution? And why don’t you just rejoin your people and enslave us like the rest of them? Why are you a traitor to your own line? And you want me to build you a bunker and save your hide?”

“It’s better to die like a man than to live like a dog,” chimed in Cyrus. It was the first time he had spoken in a while.

“But you want to save your hides while you kill off billions, through your direct actions,” Clement said, now with force, in a confrontational manner. The two other men took it calmly.

“I do not expect to survive,” said Enos. “By sparking up the crystals, I will put myself to my people. They know where I am and they know I am an uncontrollable loose cannon for them, but they will have time to put two and two together and make me pay for my treason.”

“But you may also escape and live. You have a bunker already; don’t see why you even need mine.”

“Whether I live or die is irrelevant. If I don’t do this, I will live for sure. I will live no matter what I do, until I take my own life, like my father took his. You will not save me. But by doing

this, I endanger myself far more than if I let fate run its inevitable course with mankind. If I did see a way out for man, then, indeed, I would be more likely to rejoin my people.”

“It sounds to me like you are looking for a way to manipulate human destiny; to shift it according to your own will. I mean, if indeed you can spark up the crystal and you are not just full of shit, why should I somehow help you kill billions of people? What even makes you think that you can trust me in this mad plot at all?”

“You’re right. You shouldn’t help me kill billions of people. You should help me save hundreds of millions. It’s quality over quantity now, Clement. There is nothing I can say to justify wanton death. Yet our intent is not to kill, but to save. That many will die is the unfortunate collateral damage of saving man from man. Think of how many people man has already killed through the ages in his senseless wars of conquest. Now, where is the difference? In six thousand years, man will flourish again and my people will be in the same position we are in now, so really, we will only have bought six thousand years’ time. This is not the first civilization we have lived in, and although Enlil promised that he would never wipe out man again for being too noisy, I am not Enlil, and we do not intend to wipe out humanity. We intend to wipe out the construct that man has built because this construct is now poised to take the final steps toward the complete and irreversible subjugation of man into techno-enslavement.

“Clement, you can see for yourself where we are headed. We fall every day deeper into the grip of an invisible elite who control all technology, all media, all governments, all corporations, all the money, all resources to be found on Earth. *They are all-powerful*. Clement, don’t play dumb now. There is a reason we are telling you this. There is a reason why we are all here, talking right now in the middle of the night. You have instructed yourself. Fate has chosen you, as it has chosen me. Even though you don’t know your own history like I do mine, your name, Zurvanian, tells me that your people are very old and come from original stock. Zurvan was an ancient Zoroastrian god, originally Sumerian. Zurvan was the binary, polar, black and white god encompassing all duality. You don’t just come by a name like that, Clement.”

Clement’s father had told him of Zurvan. It had been one of his first lessons about the unity of life. He knew deep down that there was no other solution but revolution. What else is there to bring society out of a rut when it finds itself stuck in one? There is no other solution. But does revolution have to bring with it death and destruction? Of course it does! Revolution *is* death and destruction; an establishment of something new upon the ashes of the old. It is beyond good and evil. How can it be any other way?

Clement felt the initial shock of thinking about mass death subside into a feeling of inevitability and even correctness. Were Enos and his people the Rex Mundi he had been warned about by Don José? He thought for a moment he could walk away and say that Enos and Cyrus were crazy psychopaths. But were not the current world rulers crazy psychopaths? Were not the captains of industry who push forward progress at any and all cost – at the very cost of human health and freedom – were they not psychopaths? And the masses. Seen individually, they were family and friends, and we loved them through thick and thin, but seen as a mass they were nothing more than popcorn; filler content born to produce nothing more than piles of shit and empty wrappers their whole lives.

Sure, this was a cynical thought, the thought of psychopaths, but then humans were all psychopaths living psychopathic lives, nothing more. What would Rebekka think of all this? Nothing more than crazy talk, he was sure. It was crazy talk – what else? Well, I can't help them, thought Clement. I won't stand in their way, but I can't help them. This is their quest, their mission, their destiny. I may have an ancient name, but I didn't grow up knowing I belonged to a Sumerian family dating back four thousand years, like Enos. I don't even know if I can help them, or if they even need my help. The bunker. That's what Enos had mentioned.

“So, what you need is for me to build a bunker?”

“No, of course not. We don't need you to do anything. At the end of the day, Clement, all I've done is warn you that one of two things will happen: either we will fail and humanity will continue its calamitous march toward total enslavement, or we will succeed and we will start up a new magnetic grid on Earth, which will have its price in human terms, but which will also allow for a new beginning. Either way, your destiny will ensure that the right thing happens with you. We are your fans because you are one of us in your own way, and you are a skilled man of destiny who will be of tremendous value for the *Time After*. You will be Utnapishtim: he who was forewarned to survive the flood. You have been forewarned, but there is no ark to be built.”

“But do you even know who will live or die?”

“Well, San Francisco is generally a bad place to be when geological phenomena begin to occur, as are all coastal areas. Land high and firm is always the best, and has always been the best through the past floods.”

Clement thought about the finality of Enos's worldview. “But you, Enos, you are different. How did that happen?”

“There has always been one like me in all epochs. There have been times with no black sheep, but the next one always comes. We have disseminated all information on Earth, but it is always re-condensed in a few interested hands that suppress it for their own benefit. Our family can’t stop black sheep like me from cropping up, but we remain black sheep.”

“What, you mean like Buddha and Jesus and Kukulcan and Viracocha and stuff?”

“Yes, I do.”

He’s not very humble after all, thought Clement. “But you also said that even if you do wipe out civilization and with it a large portion of humanity, your people will still take over once again in six thousand years. So what’s the point? Can’t we get rid of you forever?”

“Yes, we will once again take over, as we always have. Even if only a handful of us survive, we will find our way back to the top, because we possess the keys to kingship, to rulership on Earth, and we will always exercise those. We are the keepers of technology, and when man technologizes again, it will be because we have implemented the keys again. We are the warlords. We will take over again. Of that, there is no doubt. You could say we were born for that purpose, and we will fulfill it.”

“So what is then the point?”

“The point is that as living men we have to act now. What happens in the future is for men of future generations to decide. One day, hopefully, we will find a way to progressively grow savvy together, with the right self-restraint, which will allow the brotherhood of man to develop technologically, but in balance with nature and the universe. We have done that before too, on other planets. That is the only way to beat us: to join us and become builders with us.”

“Are you an alien?”

“All humans are aliens. We are beings of the cosmos, of the universe. Only Earth is a coincidence, we are not.”

“How far away is Peter Briggs from starting up the crystals?”

“A few months, between ten and twelve I suppose. He is currently busy translating some ancient tablets, with my help, which will allow us to understand the mechanics and spark up the crystals.”

“Like the tablets you showed me?”

“Yes, but the ones I showed you were in clay. The tablets Briggs is working on are in the cave and are made of lapis lazuli, as are all the finest tablets from the oldest generations. Some are in jade, too. So literally etched in stone. It is upon lapis and jade tablets that the codes and formulas

were written, and he has access to those in the cave. Here, let me show you one.” Enos went back to the fake façade and retrieved a small box. He unlocked it and handed Clement a small blue square stone, about two inches on each side and a quarter inch thick, with tiny meticulous writing all over it.

“This is an original lapis. These tablets are magical incantations to summon inner spirits. They are the foundations and source of all worship and prayer on Earth. They are in essence prayers to the universe, which is God by another name. This tablet has been in my family’s possession since it was etched almost four thousand years ago. We found other, similar lapis tablets in the cave. I have four of them here with me, although in our family libraries in England we have hundreds of stone and clay tablets, and we have hundreds more on our estate in Hungary. No tablets of this type in mint condition are available to the public anywhere in the world. They are all in private libraries in the possession of our people, except for a very few lost ones like the ones Briggs is working with.”

“So Briggs is not one of you?”

“No, but he does have our blood. He has to have it, to be who, and how, he is. But his personal history is lost, even more so than your own, so he is a normal man, like you.”

“What makes your people your people? Where do you make that distinction?”

“I can trace my line back to kings that were treated as gods, as you know. Our blood is extremely well disseminated throughout the world, but only very few individuals and families can trace theirs back in family trees immortalized on tablets. We have hundreds of genealogical documents on our estates. It is not so much a purity of blood, it is more a documented history of the mixing and matching throughout that ages that makes us who we are. That type of meticulous documentation means that we are also privy to other documents, such as these ancient tablets with codes and formulas which we have been applying to society and in government for a thousand generations.”

Clement looked closely at the tablet he had been handed. He thought about all the writing on the ancient monuments he had seen in Mexico. They looked similar, but at the same time different. The orderly linearity of the writing on this tablet struck him as a bit of a departure from the chaotic, pictorial expressiveness of the Olmec inscriptions he had seen a hundred times before. The artifact he was holding looked old and felt old; it exuded old, even though it was very well preserved. He wondered which of the markings were older, the Mexican or those he was holding in his hand. He passed it back to Enos, who put it away in the safe and closed the fake façade again.

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