

Lying in a body cast in an ICU unit, Ron Grogan is given the choice either to convince a Mayan Indian Princess he has never met to become a Sun Priestess and or he will die in Amarillo, Texas.

## **The Man From Xibalba**

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The Man From Xibalba

by

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Forward

I can not underestimate the role my wife Joanna played in the writing of this story, I can not

tell you the number of times she had the right answers to my problems. I would have been in trouble without the fine work of my editor Dawn Stark in finding all of those little things that are so important to a finished story.

## Chapter 1

### The Guatemala Highlands 1860

In the year 1523 Hernan Cortez sent Pedro de Alvarez and an army of his Spanish

conquistadors to what we now call Guatemala and thus began a five hundred year rape of a land and its people.

In the highlands of Guatemala, the land of eternal spring, there was a bite in the air on this fall morning of 1860. Now, with the warm sun high in the sky and a light breeze ruffling her long black hair, Twelve year old Ali Balam marveled, "Could there be any place on the face of the whole world more beautiful than this?" The clear sky matched the blue of her huipil, the traditional blouse that she wove herself on a backstrap loom. The intricate pattern in the blouse as well as the blue skirt, identified her as a member of the Jaguar Quiche village. In the distance where a ring of clouds trailed the string of volcanoes, the verdant forests called out to her. When she turned away from the beauty of the mountains and caught a glimpse of the line of men coming up the trail from Quetzaltenango, her heart went cold. The leader was a mestizo. She was surprised to see who he was. There was no question about it, he was Farero Carrera, the first President of The Republic of Guatemala. It was he who gave her father the title "El Balam," the Jaguar. That was when Carrera was the leader of the Guatemalan Guerrillas and the Jaguar was his constant companion.

He was with Carrera when the mestizo strongman marched into Guatemala City and had himself elected the first President of the Republic of Guatemala. That, however, was before Carrera turned his back on the Indians who had supported him throughout his years of guerrilla activity.

The Jaguar retired from Carrera's army and returned to his native Quetzaltenango. But he did not find the Indian Pueblo he had left as a young man. He found the Quiche elite fighting with the rich Ladinos to see who could steal the most from the poor Indians in a city dominated by the white Catholic Church. Disgusted, he gathered together twenty five families and built this village in the Chuchumatane Mountains where they could worship their own Gods and not the white

man's God. Where they could live as Quiches had lived for thousands of years. It was not easy. The fields where they were forced to grow their corn and vegetables were nearly vertical and harvesting the crop required the effort of every member of the village, including the children. Carrera was on another one of his rampages and he was here looking for men.

She watched her father, the Jaguar, and Carrera, the President, face off. She couldn't hear what they were saying, but the gist of the conversation was obvious. The men of the village would have no choice. Carrera was about to raid a city on the Pacific coast that was refusing to become part of the republic. They would go with the President or his men would destroy the village and burn the crops.

Rafael Carrera and his army, along with all of the adult men of the village were barely out of sight when Ixoqil Balam, Lady Jaguar, wife of El Jaguar, who was also sun priestess of the village, stood on the top steps of the temple and called what was left of the village together. Before her were 25 women, 40 children under the age of 14 and one old man, father of the Jaguar and high priest of the village.

"If we wish Tinimit Balam to be still standing when our men return then every one of us, including the children, must harvest the crop and take it to market."

"Do you really believe that the men will be back?" one of the younger women called from the edge of the group. "They are off to war, not to a party."

That began a series of grumbling and shouts of "we can't harvest that crop by ourselves." Lady Jaguar raised her hand and called for silence. "We have a few hours until dark. I am going to the fields. All of you who wish may follow me, I cannot force you."

Lady Rabbit, wife of the Rabbit, who was considered the mayor of the little village stepped up beside Lady Jaguar. "Think of the future," she said "Do you want a place for your children?"

With that she marched to the house she shared with the Rabbit and their fourteen year old son. They, along with Ali, the Jaguar's daughter, began piling up tools. Soon others returned to their homes, gathered their tools and followed behind. The older women collected the infants and small children and brought them to the largest house in the village.

For the next week the villagers left their homes just as the eastern sky began to lighten and trudged to the fields. There they worked until it was not possible to see what they were doing. The older women would prepare food and bring the babies to the field to feed the women working.

In ten days they had harvested the crops and prepared them for delivery to the market at Quetzaltenango. It was only then that they rested. Ali went to her favorite place on the top of the ridge where she could watch the trail. There she remained all day searching for signs of her father and the others returning from battle. On the third day she spotted a wagon. From what she could see, the wagon appeared empty. What struck her, though was the strange looking driver. She ran back to the village and called to her mother.

“Mother, someone is coming up the trail.”

“Is it our men,” her mother asked, “Are they coming back?”

“No, Mother. There is only one person in the wagon. The wagon seems to be empty.”

By this time other women from the village had gathered around them.

“And Mother,” Ali went on, “He is a strange looking man. He looks like an Indian but he is black, blacker than a mestizo.”

At that moment the wagon came into sight around the bend in the trail. The women were shocked. The wagon driver was a Garafunan, a black Indian. In the sixteenth century a ship loaded with slaves foundered near an island in the Caribbean. The slaves escaped to the island

where they mated with the Indians who lived there. They became known as Garifunans, black Indians. Strange as it might seem that was not only what shocked them. He was not alone. In the back of the wagon lay one body. The body of the Jaguar.

As the wagon driven by the Garifunan came into the village square The High Priest and the Sun Priestess met it at the center of the square, motioning for it to stop. "As befits a great warrior," The Garifunan announced in heavily accented Spanish. "I have brought the Jaguar to his home. The others are buried on the battlefield."

The Sun Priestess motioned to one of the women, "Give the traveler food and a place to rest. We will care for the Jaguar."

Quiche tradition required that the Warrior be interred before nightfall. The village temple stood above the village square at one end. It consisted of a mound with seven steps leading to a platform at the top. At the rear of the platform the temple itself consisted of an enclosed building with two rooms. The area in front of the temple itself was excavated and the warrior was laid to rest.

As the sun went down in the west the High Priest and the Sun Priestess went into the temple while the villagers waited at the foot of the steps. In the rooms the High Priest and the Sun Priestess drank from a prepared chalice. In the inner room the high priest slit open his penis and using a carefully prepared bark directed the blood onto a sacred wooden bowl. In the other room the Sun Priestess slit her tongue and direct her blood onto her sacred wooden bowl. Both bowls were then set on fire. Thus they both entered Xibalba, the underworld, the abode of the Gods and the Sacred Quiche Lords.

To a Quiche life is continuous. Once a person's period on the earth was finished he would be transported to Xibalba to be reborn again at a later period. Here in the great underworld of



Xibalba the Jaguar, his wife the Sun Priestess, and his father, the High Priest could confer with the Quiche Lords to determine the fate of the village and its people.

A full moon cast its light on the village of the Jaguar as its people prostrated themselves before the temple. Not until the sun God arose in the east did they see movement in the temple. The Sun Priestess came out. Her clothing was streaked with blood. She appeared to be exhausted and ready to fall off the platform. Ali started to climb the steps to her mother but the Sun Priestess held her hand out and motioned her back. A few moments later she seemed to regain her strength. She stood tall and in a voice that showed no trace of the obvious fatigue she announced to the group.

“We must leave.” she said. “We must travel to the north.”

Before her stood twenty five widows with their forty children. They were all that were left of the Village of the Jaguar. There was no doubt in her mind that what she was asking of them was impossible. She was also fully aware that there was no other alternative.

“The Quiche Lords will protect us as we travel. They and only they will tell us when we have reached our destination.”

The women murmured among themselves but no one considered refusing the High Priestess. There was no disagreement. If they returned to Quetzaltenango without their men they would have no position in the community. Their lives would be at the discretion of the city fathers. Life was tough enough for Indians with viable families. There simply was no provision in the culture of the city for twenty five families with no men.

“Our High Priest is now in Xibalba.” She motioned for two of the women to come forward. “You will ascend the steps and help to lay the High Priest next to his son. The rest of you will prepare the wagons. There will be no market. We will take the produce with us We will have

need for all of it.”

Once the High Priest had been laid to rest the Sun priestess came back down from the temple where she was met by the the Garifunan. He bowed before her as though tongue tied and unable to speak until she laid a hand on his shoulder. “Speak,” she said.

In rough accented Quiche he said, “I would like to come with you.”

“I know,” she answered “and you may come.”

“However,” he said more than a little nervous. “I must return to Quetzaltenango.. There is something I cannot leave behind.”

“I know,” the High Priestess said quietly. “We will leave at dusk. Come and bring her with you.” With that the Garifunan jumped on his wagon and in a moment disappeared down the trail.

With no men, the women and families of the village of the Jaguar would have no place in the culture of Quetzaltenango. They would be at the mercy of the city fathers. They came out here to the mountains to escape from the ladino bosses and the white man's Priests and returning was not acceptable. However, they were well aware that once they left their village in the Chuchumatane mountains they would be entering hostile territory. They would have to stay away from regularly traveled routes and travel only at night. It would be necessary for them to find places to camp in the forests of Guatemala and Mexico.

The village was a flurry of activity as the wagons were rearranged to provide for carrying the children. Little Eagle felt out of place, useless. He was 14, the oldest of the children. He thought he should have gone with his father. If he was killed at least he would have shown he was brave. His parents tied him hand and foot and hid him in their house so he would not be forced to go to war. He was large for his age, larger than some of the men. He was called “Little Eagle” because with a bow at a hundred yards or an ax at fifty feet he could split an eagle feather evenly down

the middle. His father was the mayor of the village and the right hand man of the Jaguar and his mother had proved herself in battle during the guerrilla wars where they Quiche women fought along side there husbands. He spotted Ali working on a wagon across the square and wondered if she thought he was a coward for staying back with the women.

When she looked up from the wagon she was working on she saw him looking at her. His traje was blue, like hers, with the intricate pattern of the Jaguar village. On his head he wore a low round hat with a blue band and a wide brim. She knew he was there. She always knew he was there. Their mothers were first cousins which made both of them members of the Clan of the Jaguar, but technically able to marry. That is probably what caused her to blush and purposely avoid him during village events. Still, she had to admit, he was strong, and handsome. Particularly when he was fighting and his back and muscles glistened with sweat. Some of the girls her age she had met on market days in Qhetzaltenangoi were already having sex with boys, but she was the Jaguars daughter and thought herself above all that.

From across the square Little Eagle watched Ali complete her task on the wagon and then start up the footpath that led to the ridge that overlooked the village and the mountains beyond. He had watched her go there many times. More than once he wanted to join her, but she was the Jaguars daughter. That made her a kind of princess. Really, he told himself, that is only an excuse. The problem was that she scared him. He could face any wild animal in the jungle, he had no fear of standing beside his father in battle, but if he caught her looking at him he turned to jelly. He hated the thought, but knew he had no control over it so he simply avoided her as much as he could.

From her vantage point on the ridge she watched Little Eagle, his mother, and her mother riding at the head of the wagon train. They would be the advance riders. It would be they who would pick the trails as they avoided the main routes. And it would be they who would be the

first to meet with bandits, with other Indians who would try to drive them off their land. Since they would be traveling through Mexico it would be they who would first encounter the soldiers of the French army because France ruled Mexico.

As much as she loved her mountain village with its breathtaking panoramas, she still missed the friendship she might have had with other children at the school in Quetzaltenango. She saw them only on market days when they took their produce to the village square. She asked her father why it was that they lived here in the mountains instead of in the city. That is when he told her the ancient Quiche story of the Jaguar and the deer. They were standing on this very ridge watching the sun set over the mountains to the west into the Pacific ocean. "To the Quiche," he told her, "The land, the animals, the plants and trees, even Xibalba, the underworld, home of the Gods and the Lords, were all one. We live our lives in a great concert of life." Just as her mother taught her how to weave, to prepare the produce of the fields for market, and to cook, her father told the animal stories handed down for generations that taught her the customs of the Quiche.

"A deer," he began, "went to look for a place to build himself a house. There was also a jaguar who was out looking for a place to set up a house. He came to the same place the deer had chosen, and thought he would build there also."

This was a story she had overheard when the men of the village would gather the boys around a campfire and tell the animal stories that taught them how the Quiche lived their lives. Now she was hearing it directed at her.

"The next day," he went on, "the deer came and thoroughly cleared the ground with his antlers. The jaguar came later and said: "It seems somebody is helping me?" Then he stuck some big poles in the ground and set up the framework."

"The man called "The Jaguar" who had earned his reputation as a man to be feared, a killer

and a leader of men, during the long Guatemalan Guerrilla war, looked directly into his daughter's eyes and went on, "The next day the deer came back and when he saw this, he said: "It seems somebody is helping me."

"Then he covered the house with branches and made two rooms, one for him and the other one for whomever was helping him."

The Jaguar turned from the setting sun and looked down at his daughter who he knew would grow up to follow her mother's footsteps and become the Village "Sun Priestess" He took hold of her shoulders as he went on, "The next day the jaguar saw that the house was finished. He went in one room and fell asleep. The deer came later and went to sleep in the other room."

There was a rustling in the bushes. The Jaguar, a man who was feared by men throughout the highlands bent down to kneel next to his daughter and pointed into the bushes where a deer looked back at them. But Ali had already seen the deer. She was attuned to the sounds and smells of the forest.

The Jaguar went on, "One day the two came home at the same time. When they saw each other, the jaguar asked the deer: "Was it you who was helping me?"

The deer answered: "Yes, it was me."

Then the jaguar said: "Let's live together."

"Yes, let's live together in the same house," said the deer. They went to sleep and the following morning the jaguar said: "I'm going hunting, so sweep the floor, prepare wood and water, because I'll be hungry when I come back."

The man known throughout Central America as the Jaguar placed his hand on the shoulders of his daughter. "Ali," he said, "As you know all men, all animals, the trees, the flowers, we are all brothers but what I am telling you is a lesson we must all learn."

He went on, his arms sweeping across the great forest, "The jaguar went to the woods to hunt and got a very large deer. He brought it home and said to his companion: "Let's eat what I have caught."

"But the deer didn't want to eat; he was very much afraid. He couldn't sleep all night long on account of fear. Early the next morning he went to the woods and met a very large jaguar. Later he met a large bull and said to him:

"I met a jaguar who was bad-mouthing you."

The bull went looking for the jaguar and found him resting. The bull came up to him slowly, leaped on top of him and gored him. Then the deer went off dragging the dead jaguar. When he got home, he said to his companion:"

"Let's eat what I have caught."

The jaguar approached him, but he didn't want to eat; he was very frightened. That night he couldn't sleep thinking about the deer killing jaguars; and the deer couldn't sleep thinking about the jaguar killing deer. Both were very frightened. "

At midnight as the deer moved his head, his antlers struck the wooden walls of the house. The jaguar and the deer were frightened by the noise, and both of them ran out of the house without stopping. And so the deer and the jaguar each went his separate way".

"So you see, my Ali," he finished, "They are Creole, their are Ladino, There are Mestizo, We are Quiche."

Looking back toward Quetzaltenango she spotted the Garifuna's wagon. He was not alone. If his complexion was mahogany, hers was ebony. She wore her hair piled high on top of her head and her silver necklace caught the fading sun and sparkled. Ali turned down the path to meet them in the village square.

The entire village was clustered around the Garifuna wagon. The beautiful ebony woman seated next to him had the attention of all of the women and children. Her smile kept them captivated as the Garifunan introduced them both.

“It would be best,” he started, “That our names never be mentioned. I have taken from the richest Creole in Quetzaltenango, his greatest jewel.” He nodded to the woman seated with him. “And while I was at it I also took the rest of his treasure.” He then pointed to the large chest in the back of the wagon.

“What should we call you?” Ali's mother asked.

“We have chosen good Creole names to hide behind. You may call me Victor Morales, and she shall be known as Rhena. Since she was born a princess in the heart of Africa you could never pronounce her real name anyway.”

“Fine,” the High Priestess said, “You shall be known as Victor and Rhena Moreno. But what of the chest of jewels? This rich Creole, won't he be coming after it as well as your companion?”

“He is in Guatemala City with the President, celebrating. He will not be back for at least two days. My hope is that we will be in Mexico by that time. When he gets word from Quetzaltenango, we have given them every indication that we are heading to Honduras where the rest of my people live”

“When he gets wind of our leaving,” The High Priestess said, “he will come after us with Carrera's army following right behind him.”

“You forget,” Victor said, “Mexico these days is owned by the French. If we can get across the border into Chiapas, Carrera will never antagonize the French army.”

“Perhaps so,” the mother of Little Eagle, who was standing back up till this time, “but nevertheless he will come after us with one of his crack platoons.”

“You are the Jaguar women. I have seen you fight during the guerrilla wars. I will take my chances with you any time over his ladino troops.” With that the women gave a cheer and the village began to form into a traveling party.

Lady Rabbit was the highest educated of the Quiche women. She had attended the University in Guatemala City and could speak most of the Indian dialects of Guatemala and Southern Mexico. Looking back at the caravan as they moved out of the village square she began to get worried. She called the leaders together, including her son, Little Eagle, and called Ali from the wagon where she rode with the younger children.

“Lets not kid ourselves,” she said. With the treasure we are carrying Carrera will follow us to the end of the earth. He will not be afraid of Santa Anna's army. They are too busy up north with the Americans.”

“Yes,” her son spoke up, “We do have a head start. Can't we be out of the area before he finds out?”

“Carrera is no fool, son, It will take us the better part of the week to get to the Chiapas border. In two days we will be within a few miles of Copan. He has a crack platoon stationed there. We will not get by without a fight.”

“Are you suggesting that we turn back, Lady Rabbit?” Lady Jaguar said “Do you really think we have other options?”

“No, but we don't want to run into a trap. I suggest we stay well west of Copan. Give them a hard time finding us.”

One of the other women pulled her horse up close to Lady Rabbit. “I know that country. It is very difficult terrain for three wagons loaded with children. Also, the people who live there hate the Quiche's more than they hate Carrera.”



“She is right,” another voice spoke up. “My mother was an Ixil. I have relatives in the tribes up there. They guard their territory jealously. They will not allow us to pass through.”

“She is right,” Lady Rabbit spoke up., “But for one thing. We are women and children. We have no Quiche braves with us. Achel and I will go ahead and arrange for passage. I speak their language and she is one of them. “

Then Achel came forward and took the map that Lady Jaguar was carrying. She pointed to a spot on the map. “You will find it necessary to cross over this ridge. It will not be easy, but you can do it. Here,” she pointed to another spot. “you will find a meadow. After your second night of travel try to make it to this spot. If we are successful, we will meet you there with Ixil warriors to help fight off the army. Carrera's men do not know the terrain there, and in the jungle those ladinos are cowards. Camp in the open so they will think you are defenseless. Leave only the children and older women there. The rest of you hide in the jungle and wait for the army.”

The weather was clear and they followed the road to Copan using the bright starlight to guide their way. As the sky began to lighten they left the road and moved into the jungle. With no roads to follow, it was extremely slow, not only the problem of finding places where the wagons could move, but also it was necessary to hide the trail behind them, so they would not be followed. They found a clearing at the base of a cliff, parked the wagons there and all but the sentries, and the women keeping the children quiet, slept.

As soon as the sun began to set they left the campsite, only they did not return to the road to Copan. Instead they stayed in the jungle hacking the best they could until morning found them at the foot of the ridge that Achel had mentioned. As they fought to haul the wagons up the nearly vertical walls of the ridge they were met by a group of Ixil warriors who bent their backs to the task and by mid day they had the entire caravan over the ridge and into the meadow below. They set up camp in the center of the meadow where they could easily be seen by watchers on the

surrounding heights. The children and the older women remained in the camp. The rest followed the Ixil warriors into the heavily wooded slopes. Before the afternoon wore off they got a message from their scouts that a full platoon of Army regulars was coming across the mountain toward them.

From where Little Eagle stood protected by a thicket of vines, he could see about fifty men coming up the side of the mountain. "Ladinos." He said it like a curse. The way they moved in the open picking them off would be like shooting ducks in a pond. Then he remembered that as far as they knew they were chasing a bunch of old women and children. When he turned and looked back at the encampment he could see Ali playing with the children. He wanted to shout to her, to get her to stay behind the wagons, but he knew that she was doing this on purpose to lure the ladinos into thinking they had it easy. He had many dreams about being in battle but this would be the first time he pointed his bow toward a living human being.

The first of the army reached the top of the ridge. One of them was pointing at Ali playing with a group of children. He nudged his companion who picked up his rifle and aimed it down at the children and at Ali. Little Eagle didn't even hesitate. Before the soldier could raise his gun to his shoulder Little Eagle's arrow caught him mid chest and he fell over backwards. The action unleashed a fury of arrows and suddenly the sky was filled with the missiles raining down on the army. They allowed the women to clean up the rest of the forces so that those who were able to escape and return to Copal would have a tale to tell of these ferocious Indian women who defeated a platoon of regular army soldiers.

Achel, Lady Rabbit, and the leaders of the Ixil Indians met at the clearing, said their goodbyes, and the caravan started again on its journey toward the Mexican border. As before there were no roads, no trails, they had to hack their way through the trees, barely finding space to draw the wagons. They had no compass, they used the sun and the stars as Mayans have for

thousands of years. At the rate they were going it would take them a day or more, perhaps two, to reach the Chiapas border. Their only hope was to stay hidden well enough that, if Carrera was able to gather another platoon of Ladinos they would not find them before they reached Mexico. If they were found again, the army would no longer be lulled into expecting an easy fight. Their reputation was already spreading across the ancient Mayan lands.

They were camped by a stream under the protection of a sharp ledge, rising hundreds of feet above them. The adults were sleeping, waiting for dusk to begin the next night's journey. Several small children were splashing in the creek and Ali, with her skirt tied up around her waist was playing with them. Little Eagle, coming off his shift as lookout watched them, captivated by the way Ali was blossoming into womanhood. She caught him looking at her as she picked up a child who had fallen into the water. When she looked again he was gone. She turned and saw him walking toward his mother. Lady Rabbit was beckoning to Ali. After making certain that none of the children was about to drown in the water she left them with a ten year old girl and followed Little Eagle.

Several of the women were talking about the path ahead as they approached the Mexican border.

"There is a Tzutujil village a few miles north of the border," Lady Rabbit was saying, "I had a tzutujil roommate for a while at the university. They are really a distant cousin to the Quiche. The Mexican troops there are primarily Aztec and are housed in a town several miles Northeast of the village. The Tzutujil have no love for the Aztecs, but they will not be very pleased if we bring Carrara's Ladinos into their back door. I will ride on ahead and if I can find my friend I will try to talk them into putting us up for a few days. We need the rest."

As the caravan hacked their way north Little Eagle climbed a tall peak just to the east of the track they were following. From that peak he spotted the Ladino army. They were following a

track well to the east of the caravan, but he was not happy that they were as close as they were. He climbed down the peak and moved further north until he found a meadow beside a stream. There he built a campfire, using as many green woods as he could to send a smoke signal hoping to lure the army even further east. This trick would never work on a Quiche army, but these ladino's were city fighters used to fighting in urban areas.

When he returned to his perch he saw the army turn toward the east. By the time they discovered the ruse, the caravan would be crossing into Mexico. He returned just in time to help move the wagons over a rocky trail where they threatened to slide sideways off a ledge. As they neared the Mexican border they ran into terrain that, while it was not flat by any means, at least had room for the wagons to travel.

The Tzutujil village they were looking for was directly north of them and well east of the river. If they stayed within the river valleys they would have a much easier time with the wagons,. However, with Carrera's Ladino army behind them, they weren't ready to take on the Mexican army stationed in the villages along the rivers.

The roads to the village were not only bad, they were hidden. These Indians were not interested in visitors, particularly visitors in Mexican army uniforms. What surprised them most was, as they entered the villagers were lined up cheering and clapping. The story of the rout of the Guatemalan army by women and children had reached the village well before their arrival.

Once the celebrating was over they were shown to a small canyon a few hundred yards from the village where they were encouraged to stay through the winter. In the spring they would help with the planting and prepare for traveling in the summer. While they were there Lady Rabbit and Little Eagle would go further north looking for a village where they could trade their work helping the harvest in exchange for both a place to stay and protection from the Mexican army during the next winter. This turned out to be a solid plan of action. For the next few years they

moved from planting to harvesting taking back trails and staying in small villages

They had just completed the harvest at a village in the mountains west of Chihuahua. Little Eagle caught up with Ali on the crest of a ridge where they could look down across the valley, to the Gulf of California and even a glimpse of the Baja Peninsula. Little Eagle, having been for the past three years the male leader of the children of the Jaguar, was finally developing enough courage to approach Ali. At seventeen Ali was obviously a full grown and very beautiful woman. Ali swept her hand across the valley below and the water in the distance. "Isn't it beautiful?" she said.

"Yes you are." replied Little Eagle stuttering a little.

He took her hand, but she pushed it away. "No," she said.

"Yes, Ali," he said this time taking both her hands. "I can't hold it back any longer. I have been in love with you for as long as I can remember."

She let go of his hands and slipped her arms around him. "I was wondering," she said. "When you were going to get around to telling me."

"What about you, Ali, do you love me?"

"Of course I do," she said. "I always have."

The kiss was long and warm and when they came down from the ridge the moon was high in the sky.

Little Eagle and Ali Balam were married on the banks of the Rio Grande. Lady Rabbit met and married a Comanche brave and became known as Lady Buffalo eyes. As they pushed north through the United States they were confronted by another more serious problem. The American civil war was just over and the American army was engaged in rounding up Indians and moving

them to reservations in Oklahoma. The caravan found it necessary to live off the land as they progressed north on the high plains.

Little Eagle, with his mind on his wife and new son back in the caravan almost missed the battle on the plains ahead. He was ahead of the caravan scouting for other Indians and the American army. He signaled to his step father Buffalo Eyes who was a hundred yards behind him. They watched the battle from a bluff.

“They are Apaches,” Buffalo Eyes said, “probably escaped from the army. It appears that they are raiding cowboys driving a heard of cattle to New Mexico.”

“If we let them do that they will bring the army down on us,” Little Eagle said.

“You are right,” Buffalo Eyes said, “go back and get the ladies. If we don't stop them we are liable to end up in Oklahoma.”

The band of Apaches was not that great, or for that matter not that brave, particularly faced with a band of whooping hollering Amazons. They made short work of the Apaches, not leaving any of them alive to attract the army.

That evening, sitting by a campfire with the cowboys, they celebrated the victory over the Apaches. The leader of the group introduced himself as Charles Goodnight. He was a Texas rancher who had made a name for himself driving cattle from Texas up to Colorado where he got top prices from the miners there. But most fascinated by their story, was his close friend, John Adair, an Irishman with a thick brogue who introduced himself as a money man. He was particularly intrigued by the story that the women told about how the Spaniards had conquered their land and were forcing the Indians who had lived on that land for thousands of years to live in poverty and in near slavery to the land owners.

“Ah,” he said. Sounds like my country where the damned English drove our people from their

own land and starved us out.” He stopped to light another cigar. “Charles, we must do something for these people. We can't have them ending up in a reservation in Oklahoma.”

“I would like to, “ Goodnight said sadly, “We lost at least a hundred head in that little raid. I am afraid we are going to be a bit short of money as it is.”

Adair turned to Lady Jaguar and explained. “Charles and I made an offer to buy 24000 acres of land near Amarillo. This last trip to Colorado was going to put us over the top. We expected to have enough money to pay for the land when we returned. With this loss we probably will lose out on the deal.”

Victor had remained in the background. The racial prejudices in the United States was an open sore to any black man trying to do business. To many white men his status would be something lower than an Indian. He spoke up, though quietly. “We may have an answer to your problem.”

Goodnight looked back at the Garifunan as though he didn't realize he was here. “Come up front.” he said, motioning for Victor to join the main group. “And bring that beautiful wife with you. You are among friends.”

Victor and Rhena moved from the back of the group to the front. “If you gentlemen will come with me,” Victor said in Spanish, “I will show you the answer to your problems”.

“Gladly, my friend,” Goodnight answered also in Spanish. “We would be happy for you to show us the answers to all of our problems.”

When Victor opened the chest Adair fell to his knees, his hands rifling through the gold coins, the gem stones inside. It took him a full five minutes to get his senses back so that he could speak.”What did you intend doing with this?” He said.

“These people,” Victor said sweeping his arm out to show the group of Quiche Indians,“ have

traveled for ten years over terrain you would not think possible. They have endured hardships that would be beyond the endurance of a lesser people. They want to build a village of their own hidden from the rest of the world. They wish to live there own Quiche way, as their people lived for thousands of years. Such a village would need to be supported. My wish is to invest this money for them and see to it that they have no need to look to the white man for their lives.”

Adair stood shaking his head, tears forming in his eyes. “We can di it, Charles.”

“We can, and we shall.” Goodnight answered.

“Charles,” Adair explained, “with a little help from, actually a mere trifle of what you have there, is going to buy the land surrounding Pala Duro Canyon, the second largest canyon in the United States. On this land there are many small canyons. In exchange for what you have done and for what you deserve, you can pick out any canyon you desire. You can build your village where no one else will even be aware you are there.”

After some discussion the group split into three. Goodnight and his cowboys rounded up the balance of the cattle and headed west toward Colorado. Adair, Victor, and Rhena headed to Dallas to complete the transaction for the land and to convert the treasure chest into investments that would support the village. The Convoy of Quiche headed for Amarillo and the Palo Duro Canyon.

With the wagons parked just below the crest of the ridge, Lady Jaguar and Little Eagle climbed to the crest, looked down at a hidden canyon. The opening to the canyon, hidden in heavy undergrowth, was narrow and rocky. But the head of the canyon showed steep sides with a clearing at the bottom. Lady Jaguar looked around from where she stood and counted. Just from this vantage point alone she counted 7 canyons. She turned to Little Eagle. “We are home. The Popol Vuh said that man originated in the land of seven canyons. Here we will build the new



Tulan Zuyua, the land of the seven canyons.”

## Chapter 2

South Boston 2010

Ronnie Grogan's forefathers were driven from their land by the hated English. In the early twenty first century, in a few blocks of South Boston, they still sing and dance to the old tunes. They are proud to be Americans but they were equally proud of their heritage, though few of them had ever laid their feet on the ground of the emerald isle. Ronnie was born and bred in this atmosphere. He could tell you the stories he grew up with about the Banshees and the little folk of the old sod. But, for Ronnie, that was about to end.

When Ronnie Grogan woke up this morning, just for a moment, as he wiped the mist from his eyes, he did not know where he was. The room he awoke into was bare except for the mat on which he slept, and a duffel bag in the corner. Something was way out of place. He was not drunk last night. Only overtired from getting rid of his life. Twenty five years packed into trash bags and left out front for the garbage pick-up. He didn't feel any loss, it just took a moment

looking around the empty room to reorganize his mind to the future. He slipped on some clothes, stepped out onto the porch and slammed the door. He slammed it on Mary Catherine. He slammed it on Uncle Abe's stores. He slammed the door on the gang at the empty lot where they played sports. That life is over. Another is beginning and he had absolutely no intention of looking back.

It was a cold January morning in South Boston, with the pale yellow glow of a frigid sun low in the sky. January might be a good time to be in the Berkshires with a new fallen snow, a warm fire in the fireplace, and a few more days of vacation. But in South Boston with a cold clammy humidity rolling off the bay, leaving, fleeing the scene, seemed to be more appropriate. Ronnie Grogan closed the door, his duffel at his side. Looking up the alley from the third story porch he could see the house where he grew up, and behind it, across the alley, a woman, Emma, Mary Catherine's mother, entering her back door. In the vacant lot at the end of the alley a group of young people were choosing sides for a pick-up game of touch football. Other than a couple of weeks on the cape, and one in the Berkshires, this is where he had spent the entire twenty five years of his life. Now he was about to leave and he couldn't shake the disquieting feeling that he never really belonged here.

Unlike his father, a big brawny Irish cop, he was, and there is no better way to put it, little. He was not a midget or a dwarf, but how else would you classify someone who, as a senior in high school tipped the scales at 68 pounds and lacked three inches of making five feet. To make matters worse the girls called him "cute." That is, all of the girls except Mary Catherine.

Choosing sides in the sand lot, he was always the last to be picked. His cousin Danny had a brainstorm one day during a baseball game. It was the last of the ninth; the score was tied with two outs. He put Ron at bat and instructed him carefully. "Stand there," he said, "with the bat on your shoulder. No matter what happens do not under any circumstances swing the bat. Your

strike zone is so small no one can hit it.”

Sure enough he was walked, but that was not the end of it. Small as he was, little Ron could run. Before the opposing team realized what was happening he stole all the way home with the winning run. You might have thought that settled Ron’s future on the ball field. However, it was not to be. That evening, police Officer Joe Grogan, the hero of the block, took one in the head during a shoot-out. At only fourteen, Ron’s life suddenly took a turn for the worse.

The traffic on the avenue was moving leisurely. Too late for the off to workers and too early for the morning shoppers. On the corner his uncle Abe Fortas was watching two men in a bucket truck take down a sign. “Quickie Mart,” it said. When Ron walked up next to him and put the duffel down, Abe turned and said, “End of an era, Ron”

“In more ways than one, Uncle Abe.”

“I heard that Mary Catherine was getting married.” He said looking down at Ron.

“Yes,” Ron replied, “To a guy from Waltham. She met him at a party in the city.”

“Must have been quite a shock to you.”

“At first, I guess I just never thought about not having Mary Catherine around. We have been friends since babies. But really, she’s gotten to be more like a sister to me than a girl friend.”

“Josie and I are leaving on a noon flight to Sarasota.” Abe said looking at the sky. “I hope we get off the ground before the weather sets in.”

“I will be driving to California.” Ron said as he picked up his duffel.

“You don’t start school till fall. Why leave so early?”

“Got a deal working with Danny; I plan on spending the summer lying on the beach in San Diego.”

Abe looked back up at the cold gray sky. "I don't blame you. So, have a good trip I know you will do well out there."

"Yeah, I'll send you picture post cards. Give my love to Aunt Josie."

"Sure will," Abe said opening the door of his 93 town car.

When Joe Grogan was killed in action Ron's mother, Betty Jean, received a fairly decent settlement from the city, but not enough to allow them to continue living in the house. She had a weak heart and was unable to work. Abe Fortas had married her sister Josie. The Grogans were a close knit Irish family but they all knew Abe and he pretty much fit into the family. After Joe's death Abe gave Betty Jean and Ron a third floor walk-up and Ron a job in his stores. Through middle school and high school Ron worked in Abe's six convenience stores first as a stock boy and later at the register. When Ron began college he moved him to manager and finally for the last year Ron had been managing the entire six store chain. There was some talk of selling the stores to Ron, but a large chain operation began buying up all of the convenience stores in the South Boston Quincy area and Abe decided it was best to just get out while he could still get something back.

By this time, Ron had gotten his MBA with high marks but from a small unknown school. Abe called in a few favors and did a bit of arm twisting and got Ron accepted in the PHD program at USC with an assistantship which would allow him to live pretty well for a student, even in high priced Los Angeles. As Abe drove away to meet Josie for the final arrangements for the move to Florida, he felt that he had left his nephew in a safe and sure position with the outlook of a long and prosperous future. He had a smile on his face. He loved Ron as much as if he had been his son. Particularly since Josie and he had only one daughter. What could go wrong, he thought. Ronnie was a solid boy. He never got into trouble. He worked all his life without ever slacking or complaining. He could see him in the future as a professor in some

prestigious college. Never, even in his wildest imagination could he picture Ron Grogan doing something as utterly dumb and lame brained as the boy was about to do.

With his duffel slung over his shoulders Ron turned back down Pembroke street to a house in the middle of the block that looked like every other house on the block, except that it had a sign hanging from the roof of the porch saying "PUB." Parked in front was a 79 Buick Century two door. It might have been green but now it was mostly rust. The rear window was discolored, the back windows cracked. Ron threw his duffel in the back, walked up the three steps of the porch and went into the pub. Mort Kelly and his wife, seated at a table with coffee and breakfast, greeted him. Burt Riley at the bar waved his beer in greeting. Danny Grogan, George Dolan, and Gary Murphy were at the back booth. On his way back Ron stopped the waitress, Rita, and ordered a cheese omelet and coffee then sat next to Danny.

"You don't really think that crap can will make it all the way to California, do you?" he said, looking Danny directly in the eye.

"What does he care," Gary said laughing, "he's not going to be driving it."

"Don't knock it," George said. "That is a Mort Dolan back lot special. Don't let my grandfather hear you downing it."

"That's the whole point," Danny said turning to Ron. Not an easy chore since Danny took up over half the booth. Fortunately for once Ron was little. "Driving that shit box, no one is going to be suspecting that you are carrying a trunk full of grass."

"And if it takes a shit on the road I will be cooling my heels in some back country hoosegow." Ron said as Rita put the coffee and eggs down in front of him.

"Don't be so tough on it, Ron," George said. "I told you its one of my grandfather's back row specials. The engine is cherry, tires practically new, and it runs like a top."

At this point I think we need to get something straight. These four South Boston Harps are definitely not the Quincy drug cartel. They never, well almost never, used marijuana for recreational purposes. Danny's mother Mary went through an extended period of chemo for her breast cancer. When he found out that a little grass made the medicine go down better, he started his own marijuana farm. Not a big deal. He just put a skylight in the garage roof and a big table under it. You may have your doubts, but take my word for it. He did not market it. Remember, even after the untimely death of Joe Grogan that still left three cops in the Grogan family. Of course word got out and Mary was not the only person in South Boston with cancer. To make matters worse not everyone who claimed cancer was being perfectly honest. The point is that word somehow got back to the Boston police and when Mary passed, Danny decided to get out of the farming business. His problem was how to dispose of the crop. Particularly since the cops were scheduled to raid his house in about one more hour.

Don't let his wise cracks fool you. Gary was not a Grogan. He wangled an invite to the Grogan cousin parties because he had the hots for Danny's sister Julie. He and Julie have two kids now and you'd think he was born right there on Pembroke street instead of four blocks away. It was Gary, always wanting to prove that he was "one of the Grogan boys," who finally came up with the solution. He had friends in LA who would be happy to pay good money for the crop, for medicinal purposes to be sure. All they had to do, was get it there. Ron was scheduled to move to California, though not until fall, but with a little inducement perhaps he would leave sooner. And George's grandfather had that old Buick they used for chasing parts. That made it a simple family project. They bagged the grass up, put it in the trunk of the Buick, and the rest was up to Ronnie. All he had to do was deliver the car to an address in LA where they would give him ten large. He was to put half in Danny's pay pal account and use the rest to enjoy the summer on the beach. By the time Boston's finest broke into Danny's garage Ron and the crop

were on the interstate crossing the line into Connecticut.

With everyone anticipating a major storm coming in from the northeast, the traffic on the interstate was light and moving fast. It was a little tight going through Hartford, but otherwise the trip through Connecticut was uneventful, boring. The storm hit Boston about noon and by that time Ron was on the Cross Bronx expressway. As long as it stayed east along the coast he would have no problems with it. The boredom of the road made Ron realize that for the first time, that he was alone. Although he had always been a loner, he could always depend on someone he knew being nearby. Mark Bryan's and Joe Grogan's houses were back to back, with only a wooden fence and an unlocked gate between them. Betty Jean Grogan and Emma Bryan had been friends since elementary school. Their baby's were born within hours of each other. Whether it was the sandbox at the park, the swings, or just riding in strollers next to each other Ron and Mary Catherine were always together. It didn't bother her, as they grew up, that he was so much shorter than her. And he never gave any thought that she was more than a bit chubby. At cousin parties they were mostly left alone. Most people thought of them as brother and sister, and I guess a lot of the time they thought of each other the same way. That was brought to a crisis when they were thirteen.

The two families had rented a cabin on the cape for a week. Ron was sitting on a sand bar reading and he spotted Mary Catherine about ten feet away. She had a strange look on her face when he looked up. He didn't know how long she had been looking at him. She didn't say anything but slowly loosened the strings on the top of her bathing suit and let the top fall. He was excited at seeing the budding breasts but also a little ashamed, that maybe he shouldn't be looking. He didn't move but could not look away. In a matter of a few seconds she pulled the top back up and ran away. She did not speak to him again for two weeks.

Surprising as it may seem, Mary Catherine and Ron were almost never together alone. If there

was a group activity anywhere on the three blocks that constituted the Grogan family expanse, you could depend on both of them being there and often seen together doing things. The relationship between them was always understood by every one else but not the two. It makes sense when you think about Ron working through middle school, high school and all the way through business school. His mother, Betty Jean, chided him constantly about not having any fun. His answer was that he liked the stores and he was having plenty of fun.

If his relationship with Mary Catherine was subdued, his attempts with other girls were more like ultimate disasters. Girls his size were children. Girls his age literally looked down on him even when they didn't assume he belonged to Mary Catherine. He could be more friendly with girls that came into the stores because most of them were not from the neighborhood, but he was usually too busy to make any connections.

His earliest memories of Mary Catherine involved Emma and Betty Jean taking the two of them in their strollers down to the park and leaving them to play together in the sand box. He could remember Mary Catherine teaching him how to dance at the cousin parties. They went to school dances together, but in the evening sitting on the porch swing, or walking home from a party, it still felt to him a little like hitting on his sister. It wasn't that he didn't like other girls, but for example, the one time he dated Frieda from the other side of the avenue, they met Mary Catherine walking home from the movies. Frieda took one look at Mary Catherine and would never talk to Ronnie again.

With Mary Catherine it was a different case. Growing up the boys left her alone. She was overweight, or course, but more importantly, she looked younger than she was. She didn't lose her baby fat until she was out of high school. By the time the boys in the neighborhood realized that her chubby figure had turned voluptuous, it was too late. The boys from the city had discovered her. As for Ronnie, he just could not lose the feeling that she was his sister. Now it is



too late. She is marrying the engineer from Waltham.

Traffic built up a bit after Hartford, but not enough to slow him down. Getting by New York City took a bit of his attention. Once in Pennsylvania traffic eased up and he began looking for a place to catch a few zees. George was right. The old Buick looked pretty sick but it ran as smooth as clockwork. Maybe they were right about something else. Maybe no one would suspect that an old clunker like this would be carrying a trunk full of drugs, so far, so good.

Between school and working at the stores Ron didn't get to see very much of Mary Catherine but one night after a cousin party, he walked her home to find that her parents had gone away for the weekend. She invited him inside and things began to warm up. He thought she was about to invite him into her bedroom until she stopped.

"No," she said, "not yet, Ron."

He kissed her lightly and returned across the alley and back to his own home where he sat thinking about her for a long time. Since they were infants together he had never known another girl. At the same time perhaps he didn't really know her. There was a girl in one of the Quincy stores that seemed to be interested in him. She was different from Mary Catherine, a lot thinner, and no trace of Irish. He began to think that perhaps Mary Catherine was not the only girl in South Boston. Rena was a slim, Mexican girl with long black hair and the biggest and darkest eyes he had ever seen. That made her about as different from chubby red haired Irish Mary Catherine as you could get.

The next day, when he was checking the store in Quincy he decided to use the bold approach,

"Are you off tomorrow night?" he asked her. "How about you, me, dinner, I will pick you up at six?"

For the next few weeks Mary Catherine never entered his mind. Soon Rena was spending

nights with him in the apartment. She asked if she could move in with him. He would have said yes but that afternoon Mary Catherine came into the store where he was working. He was in the office doing paper work. When he looked up she was watching him. Then she smiled and left the store. Why was he going to California? Oh yeah, Mary Catherine was marrying that guy from Waltham.

It was chilly when he left the motel in the morning, but he couldn't get over how much warmer the Pennsylvania sun was than the one he had left in Boston. His idea was to catch I 40 and take it to LA. The northern route would have been faster but the weather didn't look good. He could swing south and pick up I20. That would be safer, but a lot longer. He kept his ear on the weather reports. There was a storm coming across the high plains but it was slated to stay north coming across Kansas. His game plan was to make it into Oklahoma tonight, get through Texas and into New Mexico tomorrow then one day into California and finally a couple of months on the beach, surf, bikinis. That will take his mind off Mary Catherine.

All the way from Boston the Buick never even whimpered. He was riding the speed limit all the way; to make sure that the police would take no interest in him. Uncle Abe had always been good to him and paid him well. He did not have a shortage of money. It might have been easier, and a little more comfortable driving a new Escalade, but he was thinking that the boys were right. He was safer driving the shit can that no one would look twice at. When it came to girls, he thought, well, isn't that what California is all about?

Someone or something must have been laying, waiting for him. He no more got over the Texas line when the front moving across Kansas suddenly decided to take a side trip to Amarillo. There was some snow coming across Oklahoma, wisps across the road, small snow banks. He didn't even need the wipers. They have a condition in Texas they call a blue norther. That is when the temperature drops more than thirty degrees in thirty minutes and is often followed by

heavy wind blown snow. The visibility went from miles to inches and before he knew it he was having trouble keeping the Buick on the road. It is about sixty miles from the Oklahoma border to Amarillo but during those sixty miles the elevation increases by over 1300 feet to the top of the caprock. Fortunately, the traffic wasn't heavy because every few miles he would encounter complete white-outs for hundreds of feet.

On the one hand being a New Englander he had experience driving in snow. On the other hand he was a city boy and had never come across anything quite like this. He thought about pulling off and taking a motel in Shamrock, or Broom, but that would throw his timing off. He was not committed to any particular time table; it is just that he had in mind getting to the warm sunny beach in southern California just as soon as he could. In fact thinking about the pictures he had seen of the bikinis on San Diego beaches made the miles go by faster.

Not too fast, though, suddenly the snow let up for just a moment, long enough to see a pick-up truck sitting cross ways in the road ahead of him. Getting around the truck, he had to hit the snow bank and that set him spinning. It was the kind of thing he and Danny used to do in Massachusetts snow storms. They would find a road out of the city that wasn't traveled and put the car in a controlled skid. Getting out of this one was almost fun except that it brought him up almost striking a parked Cadillac. That caused him to stop smiling and start paying attention to what was happening outside.

He came up behind a snow plow and thought about staying behind it where the road was a little better. That brought his speed down too far. He was intent on making it at least to Tucumcari before he settled in for the night. He got past the truck but then saw that the traffic was backing up. That's when he realized that he had reached the point just east of Amarillo where I 287 from Dallas merged with I 40 from Oklahoma City.

He pulled into the left lane and watched for openings to get around the slow pokes. If he could just get past Amarillo, it would be clear sailing to the New Mexico border. The radio said that I 40 was closed west of St. Jon but that only meant he could sleep in until they cleared it. If this was 128 or 495 around Boston it would be one massive parking lot. At least here the traffic was moving,

He could pull off here, find a motel in Amarillo. That wouldn't cost him more than half a day. It was still early, a little after seven by his Boston clock. It was just getting dark. He put the lights on but that didn't help much, they just reflected back from the snow. Ahead of him the highway looked like a junk yard with cars and trucks pointing every which way and no way to get by. He pulled up next to the guard rail and settled back to relax and wait until it cleared up.

When he looked in the rear view mirror, he spotted an eighteen wheeler jack knifed and sliding down the right lane. There were three cars between him and the hurtling truck. He just watched. Then he realized how fast the truck was coming. The first car just seemed to stream up into the air and land in the next lane. The second crumpled like an accordion and the truck didn't seem to have slowed a bit. He slid across the seat, opened the passenger side door, and saw that on the other side of the guard rail was an opening looking over twenty five feet down onto another highway filled with moving cars. He had no time to decide on a better action because He barely opened the door when the Escalade behind him hit the Buick and with the door open Ron went flying over the rail and down toward the road below.

Lying in a body cast in an ICU unit, Ron Grogan is given the choice either to convince a Mayan Indian Princess he has never met to become a Sun Priestess and or he will die in Amarillo, Texas.

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