

This chapter is preceded by a prologue
describing an ancient-era heart sacrifice that goes wrong.
The main story begins now, in our own time.

The Puuc hills in the Mexican state of Yucatán are totally devoid of rivers and lakes. Even cenotes, the natural openings to underground aquifers, are largely nonexistent. The people of a land so lacking in water would naturally take a religious interest in a rain deity, and a technological interest in the development of cisterns. I always wonder whether it was their technology or their religion that failed.

—*Milpa Spirits*

●
Damned Puuc Scribes

“*De prisa*, my dear. Don’t dawdle,” Julio Escalante urged his companion.

“What’s your hurry?” Lydia Rosenstrom asked sharply, still studying the newly-exposed stone monolith lying among the ruins of Pakabtún.

“Look at the sky.”

Lydia looked up from the lighted surface into the darkness straight above her.

“I can’t *see* the sky,” she said.

“Exactly my point,” Julio replied. “And that’s why I say *de prisa*, *de prisa*—unless you want us both to get soaked.”

“A little summer drizzle never hurt anybody.”

“I’m not talking about a little summer drizzle, and you know it.”

Lydia growled softly under her breath. Her old friend and co-worker was undoubtedly right. The air felt heavy and damp, and in another few moments they would be caught in a roaring downpour. But she wasn’t ready to leave. She might be closing in on sixty, but she wasn’t going to let the threat of rain drive her away from an incredible discovery like this.

Julio and his archeological team had started excavating the central courtyard area just this morning, while Lydia was on one of her rare shopping trips to the city of Mérida. They’d found the remarkable stela and worked feverishly to uncover it. Upon Lydia’s return, Julio had greeted her with the news, and she had rushed to the site to see it.

The nine-foot tall stone was majestic, even lying in the mud and rubble, lit only by their powerful flashlights. Lydia was glad that it was dark. Paradoxically, daytime didn’t provide the best illumination for studying Mayan inscriptions—particularly ones as eroded as these. In the searing June sunlight, such faint impressions would look fuzzy and indistinct. Artificial light could be carefully directed to reveal the ancient images.

Lydia crouched in the newly-dug earth beside the stela, holding her flashlight above the carvings, shining its beam across them at a long, almost horizontal angle to accentuate

the shadows. In the center of the rectangular composition was a weathered but splendid bas-relief of a human figure in a reclining position, with knees raised and arms stretched skyward.

“What a wonderful, elegant carving,” Lydia gasped.

The figure was a regally-dressed woman with the traditional sloping forehead. Her image was suspended in front of a towering, almost Christian-looking cross with a macaw perched on its summit and a double-headed serpent draped across its horizontal bar.

“Oh, Julio,” Lydia exclaimed. “This must be her! This must be Ix Kalem, the queen of Pakabtún!”

“Do you really think so?”

“It just *has* to be! And this scene symbolizes her death! See her position—as though she’s tumbling head over heels. And that’s the World Tree—the *Wacah Chan*—behind her. This is Ix Kalem falling down the World Tree into the maw of Xibalbá!”

The queen’s full lips were parted as if in an expression of mild surprise. She reached out with her hands in what appeared to be a gesture of childlike curiosity. She struck Lydia as remarkably self-possessed and dignified for somebody who was falling to her death.

“Take a look at the glyphs,” Julio suggested.

Lydia turned her flashlight on the symbols that flowed beside and beneath the falling woman. She could barely hold the torch in her shaking fingers. This was the find that she had hoped for, prayed for, even held a few shamanic rituals for.

In the year they’d been working in the ruins of Pakabtún, Julio’s archeological team had turned up very few legible glyphs. Lydia had translated some names that she knew had to be rulers, but she’d learned little about the actual history of the city.

“Let’s set up the lights and photograph it tomorrow night,” Lydia said. “I want good shots to take with me when I fly to the states Friday.”

“I’m sorry you have to leave so soon.”

In response, Lydia uttered a muffled curse.

Sorry was an inadequate word. She had agreed to go to Portland, Oregon the day after tomorrow to oversee the final touches on a virtual reality exhibit for the Howland Museum of Mesoamerican Studies. The exhibit was a computer walkthrough of Pakabtún, designed to appear much as the city would have looked a thousand years ago. If Lydia had known that this new discovery was going to turn up, she’d never have offered her services. Although she was only planning to stay in Portland for one full day, travel would take up two more days of her time.

Lydia continued scanning the stone with her flashlight. Even the sharp contrast produced by the beam didn’t make the new glyphs as distinct as Lydia would have liked. For one thing, they were arranged very haphazardly. True, they seemed to follow a familiar pattern, written in pairs arranged in vertical columns. But the execution was so sloppy and the rows so crooked that, in places, it was hard to tell one glyph from another, or even to be sure about their intended order.

Damned Puuc scribes.

This kind of thing was typical in Terminal Classic sites here in the Puuc Hills of the northern Yucatán. Farther south, in earlier Classic centers like Tikal and Palenque, the scribes had meticulously raised the lines and details above a flat background. Here, they

were just rough depressions in the stone, leaving them all the more vulnerable to erosion and mistranslation.

But all the same, Lydia felt a certain fondness for rough-hewn images like these. She reached out and touched them. The limestone almost felt alive as she ran her fingers through its cold, damp indentations. If the glyphs of the southern kingdoms were immaculately carved and flawlessly legible, they were also a bit tame, stolid, unspontaneous. The lines carved by Puuc scribes were expressive, even if it was sometimes difficult to make sense of them.

The first cluster of symbols was made up of dots and bars.

"I've got some numbers here," Lydia said. "It's a date. Oh, Julio, these are the accession glyphs! We'll finally know something about what happened and when. They'll be a *cinch* to translate! Why, I can probably do it right here and now!"

"The stela will still be here tomorrow."

"Shut up, already," Lydia hissed. "This first one's probably a birth date."

"Read it to me."

"Let's see. Ten *baktun*, one *katun*, nineteen *tun*, fifteen *uinal*, and thirteen *kin*." Lydia sighed miserably.

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"Well, that's the Long Count date," she said. "I guess we can figure out the 'gringo correlation' when we get back to the hut."

"No need to wait, my dear. It's AD July 1, 869."

Lydia looked up at him.

"What was that again?" she asked with surprise.

"The date. That's what you wanted to know, yes?"

Lit from below by the stray spillage of Lydia's flashlight, Julio's face looked truly bizarre. His thick beard appeared even more scraggly than usual, and his upturned nose looked like a snout. He was smiling a broad, toothy smile and his upper lip, catching the light, seemed disproportionately huge and bright.

"Are you saying you've learned to transpose Long Count dates *in your head*?" Lydia asked.

"That would impress you, yes?" Julio replied, his smile widening and his eyes crinkling.

"That *would* impress me, yes!"

Julio threw back his head and laughed. "I figured it out beforehand."

"You figured—?" Lydia sputtered. "Hey, why the hell am I even bothering to translate? I mean, if you've cracked the whole thing already—"

"Oh, not the whole thing, my dear. Just the dates. I'm pretty good with number glyphs. They're simple when you get the hang of them. The rest of it I can't make hide nor hair of. What *happened* on those dates? That's your specialty. There, you have always been and shall always be *la maestra*."

"Well, how nice to know I've not become obsolete," Lydia said, looking at the stone again. "'Was born,' it says. It's a birth date all right."

A familiar glyph followed—one she recognized from other glyphs they'd found on the site as the name of a king of Pakabtún.

"Bohol Caan! That's who was born on—what was the date again?"

"July 1, 869."

“Oh, my God! Now we know his birthday! And it’s coming right up in just a few weeks! We can throw him a party!”

“And the rest, they should tell us when he became king and when he died, eh?”

“They certainly should,” Lydia said, peering closely at the next set of numerical glyphs and ignoring the onset of a drizzle. “Care to tell me what ten *baktun*, three *katun*, fifteen *tun*, four *uinal*, and nineteen *kin* works out to?”

“AD May 25, 904.”

Lydia looked ahead to the next glyph—a verb.

“‘Seated,’ it says! Meaning ‘assumed the throne.’ So now we know when Caan was born and when he became king!”

“And the next—that should be his death.”

“Yes,” Lydia murmured excitedly, looking at the next set of glyphs. The drizzle had abruptly become a steady, warm shower, but neither Lydia nor Julio were inclined to pay any attention. “OK, I’ve got ten *baktun*, three *katun*, eighteen *tun*, four *uinal*, and two *kin*.”

“And that’s April 23, 907.”

“And that’s—”

But Lydia was taken aback by the next pair of glyphs, both verbs.

“Hold it. It says ‘died.’”

“Well? Isn’t that what we expect?”

“But it also says, ‘was born.’”

“‘Died’ and ‘was born,’ one right after the other?”

“Yes, but that can’t be right.”

Lydia moved down to the next horizontal row—the last in the group. At first, it didn’t appear to be two separate glyphs at all, but one horizontally elongated symbol instead.

“Wait a minute,” Lydia murmured. “I’ve found the subject for ‘died’ and ‘was born.’ It’s another name—or maybe two names. They’re all jumbled up—elements of each glyph mixed with the other, like the scribe was trying to merge two identities into one.”

“What names are they?”

“Ix Kalem’s one name.”

“So you may be right about that being her in the carving. What’s the other?”

Lydia drew her face closer to the stone in the increasing rainfall, mentally untangling the syllables hidden in the faded, swirling lines.

“Hol ...” she said, sounding out the first syllable. “The next one looks like ‘Tun.’ It must be ‘Hol Tun Mo.’ Remember, we found that combination in only one passage and we weren’t even sure it was a name. It would mean something like ‘Stone Gate of the Macaw.’”

“And you think it *is* somebody’s name?”

“I guess.”

“But whose?”

The rain was coming down in cataracts now. It had gone from drizzle to a downpour in just a matter of seconds. Water was rolling in rivulets through the hollowed-out lines. Julio was standing over Lydia, holding his spacious poncho over both their heads. She’d been so excited about the find, she’d forgotten to bring her own rain gear. Even so, she felt oddly cozy, with Julio’s makeshift little tent brightly lit by the glare of her flashlight. She ignored the muddy puddle of water forming around her sneakers as she puzzled over

this new mystery. Who *was* this Hol Tun Mo, and what was his relationship to Ix Kalem and Bohol Caan? And what was the meaning of those two verbs shoved up together ... ?

Died ... was born ...

Suddenly, Lydia knew what the glyphs meant. The realization took her breath away. It took several full seconds for her lungs to start working again.

“Julio, I’ve got it,” Lydia gasped. “I know who Hol Tun Mo was.”

“Who, then?”

“Ix Kalem ... Hol Tun Mo. One died ... one was born.”

“Their son,” Julio whispered.

Lydia nodded. “Their *newborn* son. And Queen Ix Kalem—”

“Died in childbirth!”

“It can’t mean anything else,” Lydia said. “So I was right! Ix Kalem *is* the figure shown falling into the Otherworld!”

Mud was pouring over the tops of Lydia’s sneakers now. She climbed onto the stela and crawled across it on her hands and knees, looking for the end of the glyphic message. No longer protected by Julio’s poncho, she was immediately soaked to the skin.

“Hey, get off my stela!” Julio exclaimed.

“It’s been here for more than a thousand years, already. It’s not like I’m going to *break* the damned thing!”

Julio stepped onto the stela, too, holding his poncho over Lydia again.

“Where is it?” she exclaimed breathlessly. “Where’s the rest of it?” She found no glyphs at all after the ones that gave the date of Hol Tun Mo’s birth and Ix Kalem’s death. The whole bottom right-hand area of the stela appeared to be blank.

“There *is* no rest of it.”

“But there *ought* to be! If Hol Tun Mo lived, even after Ix Kalem died, where is his accession date? And where’s Bohol Caan’s death date? Or their son’s?”

“Do you suppose they might be on the other side?”

“They should be right here. *Something* should be right here. There’s plenty of room, and they should naturally follow these others.”

“There’s nothing more here.”

Even though the hard stone surface was making Lydia’s knees ache, she leaned forward and ran her fingertips down the blank area.

“Wait a minute,” she said. “I can feel some more marks further down.”

“Where?”

“Here.” Lydia followed the shallow lines with her fingers. “I think they’re more glyphs.” She slanted the light across the area and peered at the scratches. “They’re not very deep. They were scrawled hastily—almost like graffiti.”

But the rain made them nearly invisible, even in the glare of her flashlight. She couldn’t even be positive they really *were* glyphs. Perhaps they were merely natural indentations in the stone.

As if seeking Ix Kalem’s advice, Lydia turned her flashlight back to the image of the falling queen again. At that moment, the air erupted with a flash of lightning so close that the thunder followed instantaneously, as deafening as a dynamite explosion.

Instead of washing out the image, the fleeting brightness rendered Ix Kalem abruptly and incredibly vivid to Lydia—more than vivid, truly alive. She could actually see the

bright, primary colors of the queen's gown and headdress and the coppery tan of her smooth skin. Lydia felt a deep, dizzying surge of sheer wonder.

Then darkness slammed down again. Lydia groped blindly toward the queen's face. Ix Kalem's carved features didn't feel like stone at all, but like warm, living flesh. And the stela itself seemed vibrant and alive beneath Lydia's hands and knees. Lydia felt an uncanny connection with the massive stone, an irrational sensation that defied reason, that defied words.

The sound of Julio's voice drew Lydia out of her spell, though she had no idea what he'd said.

Lydia looked up at her partner.

"I saw her, Julio," she managed to gasp. "I touched her. She was alive."

But Julio hadn't heard her through the pelting rain. Lydia ran her fingers over the image again. Now the surface felt like stone, not like living flesh at all. She felt a deep, rending sense of loss.

Julio reached down, seized Lydia by her arm, and pulled her to her feet.

"The *muchachos* will turn the stela over tomorrow," he said. "Then we'll see what's on the other side."

"There's nothing on the other side," murmured Lydia.

"How do you know?"

"I just know."

Still disoriented, Lydia turned slowly around. She faced the great pyramid of Pakabtún, its presence discernible even in the darkness. The main structure was miraculously intact, even though encroaching vegetation had pulled its staircases into rubble. The temple at the top still sheltered fragments of painted murals.

Bohol Caan stood up there and looked down on this courtyard, looked at this stela with the image of his dead wife.

"*Vámonos*, my dear!" Julio said, his voice barely audible over the increasing deluge. "As you can see, no lifeguard is on duty! We swim at our own risk!"

He was pulling a tarpaulin over the stela, weighting it down with rocks. Then he held his poncho up so they both could both get under it. Lydia sidled up to him, and they started jogging toward the village of Kin Ich, where they both lived. They were already drenched, and the village was a mile away.



When she got back to her hut, Lydia turned on the overhead light and put a tea kettle on the propane stove to boil. She peeled off her sopping wet clothes, dried herself off, and put on a cotton nightgown. Then she sat in her hammock and towed her wet hair while she listened to the rain hissing against the thick thatched roof above her head. With this humidity, she'd never get her hair really dry, not even with her electric blow-dryer.

Besides, why spoil this pleasant coolness with a blast of electric heat?

As she continued rubbing her hair, Lydia considered her experience at the ruins. She'd never before had a vision that powerful, and she was still a little shaky from it. Exhilarated, too—even though she had no idea what it could mean. She gazed vaguely

around her hut, as though to find someone to ask about it. As usual, she was quite alone there.

Like most of the other houses in the village, Lydia's hut consisted of one room with a clay floor and walls made from straight, slender tree-trunk poles with flexible branches woven through them like a giant basket. Even when it was sweltering outside, cooler air wafted through the spaces between the branches, offering considerable relief. And when it was raining, like it was right now, Lydia's hut was very comfortable, indeed.

Villagers had long ago helped her furnish it with the essentials—a wooden rocking chair with comfortable cushions, several hand-woven rugs, a rickety desk with a cluttered bookshelf and her laptop computer, and a little candlelit altar against the far wall. The wooden cross was draped with a sash of beautifully embroidered white cotton. Lydia generally didn't feel that she lacked anything.

Except ...

Except, perhaps, for a companion.

Just a few minutes ago, she'd been laughing with Julio in the rain, trotting back toward the village with her arm wrapped around his muscular waist and his arm around her shoulders. Julio's skin had felt absolutely bare through his soaked cotton shirt. Lydia's whole body tingled with pleasure at the recollection.

She closed her eyes and let her thoughts drift back to their brief, passionate interlude less than a year ago. She had put an end to it right away. Julio was more than a decade younger than she was, and they expected to work together for a long time. Lydia had learned from bitter experience not to mix romance with work in the field. Still, at times like tonight, she found that even translating glyphs with Julio was a rather sexy thing to do.

Her reverie was interrupted by a man's voice, speaking firmly though barely audibly over the torrents of rain.

"Hola, Profesora!"

Lydia's eyes snapped open. She heard nothing but the rain. Had she only imagined that someone had called her? Then she heard the voice again.

"Is anybody here?"

She got out of her hammock, shrugged on a loose robe, and padded across the rug-scattered floor in her bare feet. She pulled aside the brightly-colored curtain that hung in the cottage doorway. To her surprise, she saw Nacho Lorca standing in the rainy night.

Nacho was a Maya of indeterminate age. Lydia thought that he looked in his forties, but he might have been somewhat older. Quite thin, Nacho had high Mayan cheekbones, a hawk-like nose, narrow and penetrating eyes, and straight, thick hair. His handsome face was drawn and weather-worn from working in the *milpas*, the patches of burnt land the Yucatec Mayas used to plant maize. He had also spent a number of years working as a waiter in resort hotels in Uxmal and Chichén Itzá, where he'd learned to speak fluent English, French, and German in addition to Maya and Spanish. And he had traveled as far as Guatemala and Mexico City. Nacho wielded a lot of influence in the community, and Julio often relied on him, particularly when he needed to round up extra manpower at the site.

At the moment, Kin Ich's most prominent citizen was soaking wet.

"May I come in?" Nacho asked with a relaxed, nonchalant smile, as if it were the most commonplace thing in the world for him to show up at Lydia's hut late in the

evening in the middle of a downpour. The fact was, Lydia couldn't remember Nacho ever having visited her at home before, although he sometimes turned up at the archeological site. She most often saw him at the grocery and general store that he now owned in the village.

"Of course," Lydia said, feeling utterly disarmed.

She stepped out of the way, and Nacho trudged inside, water pouring out of his clothes, drenching the rugs and leaving puddles on the clay floor. He headed straight for Lydia's rocking chair, and she suppressed her urge to grab the cushions out of the chair before he sat down. With a charming, impish smile, Nacho deposited himself upon the cushions, as if blissfully unaware of his own extreme wetness.

Great. It will take me weeks to get those cushions dry.

"What brings you to my house this evening?" Lydia asked.

As if in reply, the tea kettle behind Lydia began to whistle noisily. Nacho's smile broadened.

"I thought we might share some tea," Nacho said.

Lydia walked over to the stove and poured each of them a mug of herbal tea that she had cut, chopped, dried, and put into bags herself. She handed Nacho his tea, then sat down on the edge of the hammock. Nacho began to rock in the chair. The rough-hewn wood creaked in a slow, steady rhythm.

"Quite a discovery at the ruins today, yes?" Nacho said.

"You mean the stela?" Lydia asked.

"Could I mean anything else?"

"You've seen it, then?"

"I was there when they dug it up. An extraordinary moment."

"Extraordinary is right," Lydia replied. "Unexpected, too. We thought there was nothing left to find in that courtyard."

"Oh, not so unexpected," Nacho said with an odd glint in his eye. "We've been anticipating it for quite some time, now."

"We'?" Lydia asked with a slight start. "Who do you mean by 'we'?"

"Myself," Nacho said with a shrug. "The ancient Father-Mothers. A whole line of *hmenob* stretching—oh, hundreds of years into the past, I expect."

Lydia was briefly dumbstruck. She knew that Nacho was a *hmen*—a Mayan shaman or medicine man. She, herself, had studied Mayan ritual magic back in Quintana Roo some years ago. But she and Nacho had rarely discussed this common bond between them. On the contrary, he'd always seemed a little stand-offish toward her. Perhaps, she guessed, he didn't like the idea of having competition around. Or perhaps his *machismo* balked at the idea of a woman learning about such things.

Nacho sipped his tea and continued to rock in the chair.

"Very tasty," he remarked. "*Flor de Tilo*, yes?"

"That's right. I find it very soothing after a long, hard day."

But even as she sipped the tea herself, Lydia realized that her heart was pounding. She didn't know whether it was from the day's discovery or from her mounting sense that Nacho had some portentous reason for stopping by to see her. She knew it would take more than the warm, mellow-tasting Linden flowers to settle her nerves.

Nacho leaned forward in his chair.

“She looks stunning, don’t you think?” he inquired. “Queen Ix Kalem, I mean—her portrait on the rock. Every bit worthy of her name—truly a ‘radiant lady.’ And so incredibly lifelike!”

He paused and stopped rocking abruptly. Lydia was too startled to reply. Did Nacho know what she had seen? His deep brown eyes seemed to bore right into her mind.

“In fact,” he added with a tone of great significance, “one could almost swear that she wasn’t stone at all, eh? Her face seems to glisten, her skin seems soft. You can almost see her breathe.”

Did he see it himself?

It took her several full seconds to muster the nerve to speak.

“What did you mean,” she asked, “when you said that you *expected* the stela to be found?”

“It’s an old story,” Nacho explained. “It has long been said that, someday, the portrait of Pakabtún’s last queen would be uncovered. And that would be a sign that our Magic Book would soon be returned.”

“Magic Book?”

“The Magic Book of Kin Ich. You’ve never heard of it?”

“I don’t believe so. What is it?”

“A storybook. A book of miracles from the Epoch of Miracles. It has no beginning and no end, and its pages turn themselves. It offers anyone who holds it amazing power. It was left to the people who live in this village by the last king of Pakabtún—by Bohol Caan himself.”

Lydia was even more baffled than before. Surely, Nacho had first heard the names of Bohol Caan and Ix Kalem from the archeologists at the dig. But only the recently discovered stela indicated that they might have been the last king and queen of Pakabtún. Lydia had just translated those glyphs a short time ago. She didn’t believe that Julio would have discussed the translation with anyone. Was Nacho one of the few other people able to read Mayan glyphs—or did he have some far more mysterious source of information?

Don’t be silly, Lydia. He’s just playing the hmen to the hilt.

She’d heard that Nacho was a celebrated storyteller. However he’d picked up the information, he was probably just weaving recent events and discoveries into ancient tales—which was quite common, after all. For all she knew, he was even making up this “Magic Book” business on the spot.

“What happened to this book?” she asked.

“It was burned by some *gringo* priest, back in—oh, 1562 I believe. But Queen Lady Kalem’s return means that we’ll soon get it back.”

“How soon?”

“Quite soon, I think. But it’s not what you’d call a done deal—not yet, anyway. Dangers must be faced. Risks must be taken.”

“What sorts of dangers? Faced by whom?”

Nacho only smiled and kept staring straight into Lydia’s eyes. For many long seconds, no sound was to be heard except the steady downpour outside.

Is he telling the truth?

Is something about to happen?

“May I see your *zastun*?” Nacho asked.

Lydia hesitated.

“Of course,” she said. She walked over to her desk, where a small, plain, roughly-cut, slightly cloudy quartz crystal lay. The *zajtun* was a shamanic talisman, a stone she used to connect with the ancestral Mayan Father-Mothers. She’d acquired it from her *hmen* mentor and knew that Nacho must have one of his own.

Why does he want to look at mine?

She picked up the crystal and took it to Nacho. The *hmen* rose from the chair, still dripping wet. Lydia held the *zajtun* toward him in the palm of her left hand. Nacho craned his head toward her hand, peering at the stone closely. He began to poke it with his forefinger, turning it over and over, smiling all the while. Lydia felt his breath on her hand.

What does he see there?

Does he see anything at all?

She knew that it wouldn’t do any good to ask. Like most *hmenob*, Nacho clearly relished the role of the inscrutable, riddling sage. In fact, it was a shaman’s responsibility to bring others into his world view so that the magic would work for them. Anything that produced the right state of mind was considered legitimate, including fakery. So being a bit of an impish, prankish trickster was part of the shamanic discipline—a part that Lydia had never fully mastered. Her own *maestro* had criticized her for this until the day he died, telling her over and over again ...

“You’ve got the genuine magic down well. It’s the touch of charlatanry that still escapes you.”

That touch of charlatanry seemed second nature to Nacho. It was entirely possible that he was trying to do nothing more than mystify Lydia. Then again, he might be performing some remarkable act of divination. She simply couldn’t know. In any case, she felt more than a little uncomfortable—even vulnerable—subjecting her *zajtun* to Nacho’s scrutiny.

After a minute or so, Nacho breathed a grunt of contentment, closed Lydia’s fingers around the crystal, and patted her gently on the fist.

“Great danger for somebody, I believe,” he said, gazing into her eyes again. “Before we can get back our Magic Book.”

Then, after a short pause, he said, “Thanks for the tea. It’s time for me to go.”

He turned and shuffled toward the doorway and pulled the curtain aside. The rain was still coming down in torrents. Nacho turned and looked at Lydia with an expression of apparent surprise.

“It’s raining!” he exclaimed.

Then he walked out the doorway and disappeared into the night.