

Dark Sky, Deep Pool

The wind that typically rustled the debris around the remnants of the old, now bare, ceiba trees that surrounded our camp had suddenly fallen still. Looking back on that still night in Tulum, that should have been my first indication that something really bad was about to happen. When the whispering chorus of the wind left us, the only other sound was the crackle of the fire. My father had built the fire out of a pile of old cookbooks that had long lost whatever secret recipes they once contained. It seemed a shame to me, as I dream constantly about the day I would get to taste one of the meals displayed on the covers. It's just not fair. I mean I just turned ten and I don't even get a cake for it! It's not my parents' fault though; I know they do what they can to give us everything. But Dad has told me about a thousand and five times how good of a chef my mother is. Not that I would really know, as she hasn't been able to cook anything other than a stew that always has the same taste to it. And just between you and me, I'm tired of that stew... But then again, that's life now, and although it's hard to, I tend to forget that sometimes.

Anyways, back to the night where everything went even worse for my family. The fire, that had the now all too familiar smell of burnt paper and ink, couldn't have been burning for more than an hour at this point, but then again, time is hard to judge these days. With the sun only gracing us with its warmth once a week, one tends to lose sense of time. But the reason I know that the fire couldn't have been going for much longer than an hour is because Dad never let it. I never understood why, but he is always adamant that once the fire burned for an hour, it was time for us to change camp sites. I think it's just his own way of occupying his mind and keeping the family moving forward. But because of this reason, I also have never had a home. At least no place to call a home. For my entire life I have known my home to be the family van. It used to be my father's work van from before I was born, and before the world became what it is today. But

now it serves as our headquarters. I suppose we are lucky to have the van, as almost all other cars are useless at this point for anything other than an extremely expensive graffiti canvas. All the oil, that I'm told used to run the world, has now gone bad, and only those with electric cars, and only those that have enough electricity to power those cars, can actually go anywhere. Let me stop you right there, before you go picturing one of the beat-up vans painters and plumbers use. This van is closer to a spaceship than it is any other car. The van is metallic silver, as if it were driven out of a molten puddle of never sold bracelets. It's large enough to sleep a family of four and has all of my dad's old technology he needs for his never-ending quests. And yes, quests is the correct word. Other than the fact that my Dad is Mexican American, he is almost identical to the Indiana Jones guy in the movies he showed my brother and me. We always joked that he should've been paid for those films using his likeness. But it turns out, he based himself off of Indy; so much so that he became an archeological explorer, specializing in ancient civilizations in South America. He has his findings displayed in almost every museum across the country. What once used to attract tourists from all over, now only attracts dust. Nobody has time to revel in the past these days, they are all more focused on surviving each week and being able to see the sun one more time. That doesn't stop my father though, he still spends his time researching ancient sites and artifacts and he takes our family along with him to each new location. This is how we ended up in Tulum. For the past week I've caught my dad talking to himself about how he has never been closer to the answer, but every time I ask him about it, he never gives me a straight answer, just some nonsense about trying to fix everything.

As if my dad knew exactly what I was thinking, he jolted me from my daydream, (if you can call it that anymore), with a slight grin on his face he took my hand and hoisted me onto my feet, "Come on Hector, it's time we get going." I looked around and was surprised not to see my

mother and brother laying by the fire. They must have been inside the van already I thought. My dad began folding the chairs and packing up the quilt mom is always either laying on or adding to. Since there was nothing left in our small camp, my job was clearly to put out the fire. As I approached the small pit we dug, the stench of burning ink grew so strong I had to hold my nose shut with one hand. My other picked up a handful of white sand and began sprinkling it over the red flames. I have used this method countless times before, but as I let the sand fall from between my fingers, my face was getting hotter and hotter. I don't know what it was, but the fire was not going out, and I couldn't stop staring into the hypnotic movement of the flames. I don't know how long I was having the staring contest with our fire pit, but it was long enough for my dad to come running over and put himself between me and the now angry flames. Can fire be angry? I don't know, but that night in Tulum I felt as if the fire was searching my soul; the same way an old man searches a beach with a metal detector looking for his lost wedding ring. I stepped back in a daze, as I was blinking spots out of my eyes, I could see my dad was now face to face with another man who was standing where the fire was moments earlier. I don't remember there being an explosion, but my ears do. I can still hear the ringing in them as I think back on that night. I was so disoriented I couldn't hear the conversation the new shrouded man and my father were having, but I could tell it wasn't a pleasant one. By the way my father was waving his arms around, I knew something had really made him angry as I haven't seen him do that since I broke the radio in our van a couple months ago. I stood there stunned, not knowing what was happening. Eventually my eyes stopped flashing and my ears stopped ringing, and I was left with both my father and this mysterious man staring at me. My father was the first to break the silence. "It's okay son. I should have told you sooner... turns out, your grandfather was right." The cloaked man nodded, "Ah Andrew, it's so nice to hear you not criticize me for once." I was

so confused I was struggling to find my words... “Di.. Did you just say my grandfather?” The mysterious man stepped forward and took off his cloak. I could have never been prepared for what I was witnessing. Before me stood a man near seven feet tall with skin the color of black ash, hair cut so short that I think his barber must have been a pencil sharpener, and eyes that would make a bull uneasy. He was draped from head to toe in jewelry made from gold and emeralds and wearing an assortment of denim and animal skins. All of this didn’t come close to covering his tattoos, which seemed to be constantly changing and glowing, like embers at the bottom of a fire, which made the space around him light up. While I was still staring into the kaleidoscope of tattoos on the man’s body, he clearly grew tired of no progress in the conversation. “Hector you are not the first I’ve left speechless. You are however the first grandson I’ve had this effect on. You see Andrew, this is why we should have met years ago.” He turned towards my father with a scornful look on his face. “Enough Dad”, my father replied quickly, “You know why I had to keep him away. My children are the most important people born in centuries.” The glowing man retorted, “Important yes. But now you have left them unprepared for what’s to come.” Dad snapped, “They will do what they must! In a way of their own! They are to be the ones that unite the old ways and the new. You heard the prophecy.” With that said, they both turned my way once more. “I’m sorry son. I should have been more honest with you. But I might as well start now.” He took a deep breath, “Hector, this is your Grandfather, Tohil.” Stunned I managed to say, “My grandfather’s name is Toe Hill?” My dad couldn’t help but laugh at my remark, however my grandfather was not so amused. “Young one, I have killed men for lesser insults. If you weren’t my own blood...” My dad interrupted, “Okay. Okay. He’s new to this remember.” “It’s actually pronounced Toe-ill. And yes, he is your grandfather. There is something incredibly special about our family son, something I’ve done my

best to try and keep you away from until now. You see... you are actually a descendant of the gods." I staggered backwards... I must be asleep right now. None of this could possibly be real. The stories my father have told me my entire life about the different deities of the ancient world, could they actually be true? "It comes as a shock to everyone Hector, don't let that discourage you" Tohil stated, "Despite your father's best efforts, I finally get to meet my grandson. And I must say, you remind me of a hero I knew centuries ago." I must have misheard him; did he just say centuries? "Yes Hector. I have been around for almost three millennia." My head was spinning. "How did you know what I was thinking?!" I blurted out. "Ah, just an old trick I picked up from a friend. You will meet her at another time. But enough of that now. Time is running out and its time we depart." I looked at my dad who now had an expression I've only seen him have when talking about the way the world used to be; "What does he mean dad? Where are we going now?" My dad looked as if he was fighting back tears, "Hector, you need to go with your grandfather to begin your training. I've dreaded this day, but you can't run from your destiny." He pulled me into him and gave me the type of hug that you wish would never end. "I love you son, and I'll see you soon. But go with your grandfather. I'll tell your mom and brother everything. I don't think she would let you go, so you better hurry, she's bound to come looking for us shortly." Disoriented, tired, and thoroughly confused, I didn't know what else to do but take Tohil's outstretched hand. The moment my hand reached his, a bright light surrounded the both of us. It grew so strong I had to shut my eyes. By the time I could open them again, my surroundings had changed. We were no longer standing in the center of a makeshift camp, but instead at the base of a wooden walkway that was surrounded by heavy vegetation. Giant palm trees towered above me, the ceibas had leaves that would dance in the air as they fell towards the ground, the leaves on the banana trees sung a song in the breeze. I had never seen so

much green in my entire life. As I was looking around, I must have had a face filled with astonishment, because my grandfather... no godfather... oh I don't know, let's just call him Tohil, couldn't help but to laugh. Between his outburst of laughter, he managed to say, "You see, this is how the world is meant to be. It once was this way, and it can be again. Follow me." He led me down the wooden boardwalk and I could see that beneath us was a cenote larger than any I had seen before. "Where are we?" I asked. "This is known as the Gran Cenote Hector. Your ancestors used to sacrifice wealth and blood in hopes of godly favors. They were correct to assume it had a significance to us gods, but they were wrong about the sacrifice of blood. Cenotes are doorways to the godly realm, where I come from, and where you must go. Luckily, no one has been sacrificed here in a long time, so there won't be the issue of cleaning you up afterwards. Now then, I have a lot to teach you in a very short amount of time, so no more questions. Hold your breath and I'll see you on the other side." Tohil stepped forward, spoke a word that sounded like gibberish and Pig Latin combined, and in a matter of seconds the blue cenote below began to swirl. He took me by my hand once again and we both jumped.