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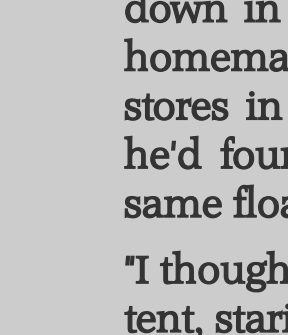
MAYAN CALENDAR GIRLS

The Great Meso-American Novel

Light, vital reading to kill
what time we have left.



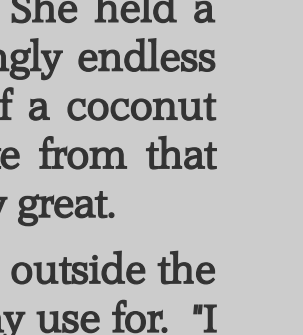
The very last word in
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A Touch Of Romance

MAYAN CALENDAR GIRLS isn't without it's sweet side, much of it provided by the relationship Mei Mei and Tuan develop over the course of fleeing from Mexico by kayak. These two chapters show some of that.. and the sideline notes on Time that makes this take on 2012 a bit unique.



FROM HAIR TO ETERNITY

"So what are your theories on The Big Bang?" MeiMei spoke softly from down in her throat. Pensive, ultra-relaxed, but still playful. She held a homemade "CocoLoco": rum from a metal flask in the seemingly endless stores in the kayak's hull, mixed with the milk in the shell of a coconut he'd found on the beach and chopped open with a machete from that same floating warehouse. She felt absolutely and stupendously great.

"I thought it was fantastic," he replied lazily, lying with his head outside the tent, staring up at more stars than anybody else would have any use for. "I think it's the most singular thing that ever happened. And I'm hoping it'll happen again soon."

"Men," MeiMei murmured in his ear. She had rolled up on one elbow to sip from the coco, but now reached across his bare torso and slid her equally bare breast along his rib cage. He bent the wrist that passed under her waist, cupping her butt in just the nicest way ever. She didn't really feel like laying here making cool repartee. She felt like jumping up and down and whooping and hollering. Had actually done quite a bit of that a few minutes before. Not to mention some tremulous shivering of timbers, clenched toes pointing at the sky, and quaking like a flushed fawn under aspens. And not to mention some various groveling and gesticulating and walloping of the kind a decent writer wouldn't think of mentioning by any means. And now that single touch of his hand on her ass had caused her to consider the possibility of another such episode in the fairly foreseeable future.

"If you'd read the brilliant monograph I co-authored with Steven Hawking, you'd know that I'm more a proponent of the Steady State theory."

"That's fabulous, OB. Do you or Steven want to go steady?"

"I'd go with him, if I were you. They say he's hell on wheels."

"Oh, that was tacky. Even from a hard scientist."

"Well, less so, now. Hard, that is. Still plenty tacky."

MeiMei set the coconut down and nuzzled him a little, sniffing him out. She still had a hard time believing that she was not only getting laid, but even edging over towards those Harlequin Romance sort of trappings she'd had so little time or opportunity for in her life. Smart, famous, funny... what else? Oh, yeah, rich and owns a sailboat. All that and pretty good muscle definition and a pronounced stamina. Those pussy pirates probably killed me after all, she thought. And I must have been a damned good little girl.

It hadn't exactly been sudden. To say the least. He probably could have had her however long ago it was that she knocked on his door naked. Brought her a towel in the shower, stepped in, and stepped up. She kind of doubted she'd have made much objection. Swimming along under the inverted kayak with the searchlights, motor launches, and blue beanies out there had softened her outlook, as well. She remembered thinking it had to be the sort of situation where the imperiled heroine ends up under four-poster damask with an improbable bustier and a side order of pectorals.

Then there was that moment this morning, when their masks had touched and he'd just put his hands on her. Like you'd walk in and put your gloves on the side table. Just touched her in a way that obviously had no practical intentions, but seemed so natural she'd barely registered it: just looked into his eyes behind the wet glass and knew they were almost there yet.

But for some reason, it was late afternoon when she'd known for sure that she was going to bed with him that very night. If you want to call sprawled on a beach "bed". Not, she thought as she stared up through the scented darkness into the deepening cup of stars and listened to the wind rustling the palm fronds in syncopation with the rhythm of the low windward-side surf just yards away from them, that any silk sheet Tempurpedic setup could compare to this.

They'd beached the kayak and pitched the tent, eaten a light snack of coconut slices and canned salmon, of all things, and gone for a sunset walk along the confectioners' dust beach, wading in and out of the transparent water. She'd spotted an odd stick that looked like a stringbean floating vertically in the shallows, then realized it was some sort of pod. It bobbed along in the wavelets of the lee shore, bumping its bottom end along the finely fluted sand bottom. She'd picked it up to examine, turned questioning eyes to Tuan.

"Glad you asked," he said. "Because that's a very interesting part of a pretty relevant process."

"Shocker."

"It's a mangrove seed," he proceeded serenely. "Falls into the water and goes with the flow. When it gets into shallow water, it does what you just saw. Sooner or later, with a little luck, it gets stuck, stands there in the water. And starts putting down roots."

"Ah, I get it." MeiMei just loved it, put the seed back in the water and squatted to watch it keep on bumpin'. "Then it grows up and puts out those limbs that turn into roots and roots that creep up and become trunks."

"Exactly. Even if the reef wasn't built up to the surface yet, that seed could snag in five inches of water and start growing vegetation."

"And then it would catch silt..."

"And birdshit and floating junk and whatnot. Start creating its own currents, where silt gets dropped on it's lee side."

"And you've got a swamp or something out here in the middle of the ocean." She thought about it. "And it would look like land, wouldn't it?. Like a little island. We saw some of those yesterday."

"And pretty soon it would be a real island, real land. Start having little beaches. Waiting for the next opportunistic traveler."

"A guy from Fodor's guide?"

Tuan led her up the beach to the edge of greenery and picked up a coconut. "Toss this on the beach," he said.

She made a show of shot-putting the coconut almost to the waterline, where it rolled to a stop.

"If you keep tossing it, it'll always end up like that," he told her. "Notice the way it's shaped, not really round, but not really conical. It's a shape that lets it roll into position automatically any time it's washed ashore."

"And once it gets settled in, your island has trees."

"Which means things stay put a lot better."

MeiMei thought of the huge stone trunks she'd seen lying on the bare reef, but could see what he meant. "It's all about design."

"That, what you just said right there, is at the heart of my whole general theoretical meandering," he said lightly, but she felt the serious import of it. "You look at coral, they're little jelly creatures the size of barley. Screening the sea for calcium to build a skeleton to protect them. But it doesn't protect them from death, and the next one that drifts along builds his little shack on their remains. And you end up with one of the largest things in the world. Then you get things just happening by on the next wave and the way they're made, the way they're shaped, ends up building land out of the sea."

"So you just take the right décor group, add water, stir and you've got a continent."

"I woke up once in grad school. Whichever grad school. Berkeley, I think. Slumped over some cubicle desk in the library stacks and there was this note written on my knee in felt tip pen. It said, 'Who designed the city of coral?' Want the punchline? I couldn't find a felt tip pen anywhere around the desk."

"Intelligible design?"

"I'm still working on that. I'm not the only physicist who realizes he's just one equation or variable away from getting into theology."

She walked down to the water and stared at the mangrove pod, still pogoing along. And kept staring. It was a message sans bottle, she felt. She looked up and he was looking right into her eyes. "You just get the right elements, with the pre-existing design, and set them afloat," he'd said. "Then all it takes is time."

And from that point, it had taken exactly one hour and seven minutes until she'd tossed her head back onto the sand, moaned, and felt the docking procedure complete itself.

And now here they lay. Building an island?

"Something you said yesterday," she said, speaking almost directly into his ear. "About the universe not expanding out forever, but like reaching limits and starting to contract? Is that what you mean by steady state?"

"Not exactly. And I have to admit it appeals to me in a non-scientific way at the moment. Kind of, oh, I don't know...a romantic folly of sorts."

"Is that anything like a sweet nothing?"

"Yes, but more mechanistic than rococo, like a BMW. I look at the idea of the universe inflating into Everyness, then deflating to what Nothingness would be if there were even a nothing to think nothing about and what hits me is..." He leaned forward and touched his hand to her shoulder. "That in millions of years, this net of time that is unfurling around and through us will recoil, and we will once again be here, together, right on this beach."

Mei kissed him, then said, "But in reverse motion. Shouldn't hurt the sex part any."

"But then we'd paddle away backwards, I'd end up in my living room wandering why a genius millionaire with Abs Of Semi-Steel should be sitting there alone, and you'd be dashing away into the night on a backwards SkiDoo. And we'd wander off to separate lives. Go through our childhoods, once again without appreciating them, and end up as gleams in our fathers' eyes."

"But then the yo-yo would hit bottom, wouldn't it? And start reeling the string back in."

"And here we'd be again. And not even bored with it. This moment has legs. It won't go away."

"More like it's one of those moments that keeping going away, but you know they'll come back without even calling first or warning you to get dressed."

"I'm warning you right now. Don't even think about getting dressed. I like your concept though. I'm trying to think if there could be a theorem for it. Chiang's Law of Conservation of Eroticism."

"Physics, pah. It fades in the light of antiquity. It's the Myth of Eternal Return."

"Got a ring to it. Joseph Campbell?"

She shook her head, whisking him off with her sun-damaged hair. "Eliade, Trask and Smith. Princeton Press. But the first time I heard 'eternal return' my immediate thoughts were my mother terrorizing Nordstrom's and The Bon shopping for clothes... oh my *God*."

"You can just call me OB. I mean you've seen me naked, and all."

"My mother! I haven't called her in three weeks! She'll be frantic. She'll call out the Marines! I have to get to a phone."

"Okay. Tomorrow we'll hit Tobacco Caye. They'll have something. Probably a soup can with a string."

"Tomorrow's great."

"Which leaves tonight. What's left of it?"

"Well, speaking of Return and Steady State and Infinite Expansion..."

"Have you ever wondered what came immediately after The Big Bang?"

"Oddly, no."

He pushed, then handed her their tropic isle cocktail. "The Big Coconut."

She pushed the drink aside and moved over on top of him. He felt her breasts flatten on his chest, her legs straddle him. She leaned her head forward and all that thick black hair fell around him, like a cloak of starless night that engulfed them both and wrapped them away from the world.

SINS OF THE MOTHER

So they arrive a bit late and languid, paddling along just inside the reef, passing strings of islets like an emerald necklace strewn along the spine of the sea. Talking the multi-level language of new lovers, saying some pretty silly stuff for noted scientists. But in the mid-afternoon, Tuan pointed at a somewhat larger clump of greenery far ahead and said, "There should be a phone there."

"Oh, yeah, the phone." MeiMei felt one more stab of guilt at having neglected to call her parents. Then had the sudden thought, "How about you, OB? Isn't your Mom worried sick by now and just waiting to make you guilty about it?"

She was unprepared for the bitter grunt from behind her. And the harsh way he said, "She's dead."

She stopped paddling and looked over her shoulder at Tuan, who continued to steadily paddlewheel the kayak forward. She thrust her paddle out so his would strike it, and held it there until he stopped moving and stared at her. She said, "You're generally pretty good at talking. Tell me about it."

He drew a deep breath and looked past her to the horizon. "My father was as All-American as they come. He was in the Navy. Retired now. He's probably responsible for my noted 'generalism'."

"A sailor," she said, just wanting to hear him get to it.

"An officer of a nuclear submarine. Most people don't realize it, but submariners are the most educated military personnel in the world. Every man on a U.S. submarine is cross-trained to every other job on the sub. In a disaster, people get killed or sections flooded, so any man on board has to be able to step in and do the job of any other crew member. No other branch of the service can make that claim."

Intrigued with the size of that despite herself, MeiMei said, "Wow. So the cook knows how to run a nuclear reactor?"

"Exactly. Dad was a navigation officer going in, but after a couple of years on the Ashville and New Orleans he was also a mechanic, cook, gunner, nuke physicist...during the Carter admin he wanted to be physicist and peanut farmer. And he just kept on learning. He's in school now...I think he wants to cross-train with everybody on the planet."

Let's get back on the hot topic, MeiMei thought. "So he met your mother in the Philippines."

"Yep," his voice had taken on some animation, but slammed flat again.

"Subic Bay. Ever heard of it?"

"Don't think so. A navy base?"

"A huge navy base. 'Pubic Bay', the swabbies called it before Aquino kicked us out. And with good reason."

He stopped for a minute and MeiMei waited him out. Then he shrugged, still without looking at her, and said, "San Diego has such a big Filipino population because a couple of generations of sailors married prostitutes and brought them home, then they dragged their families over."

"Come on, Tuan." she didn't care if it was an exaggeration or not, she could see the hurt starting to ooze out of it.

"My mom, the war bride. And she didn't change her ways much after she hit the States, apparently. Very common, you get these Flip fleet widow places, ex-Luzon whores hanging out looking for kicks and tricks. And Mom was the queen of the pack."

"Oh, Tuan. That's really a..."

"...shame? I felt that way at the time. Got me in fights. Might have driven me to the books. Definitely drove me to martial arts."

"Any in particular?"

"Aikido, mostly. I always thought the best offense was a good defense."

"That's a good one all right."

"You too?"

"Yeah, my dad was a devotee, used to teach me. Sent me to Roger Chun's dojo--the most brutal sensei in Seattle. Then he developed other martial interests."

"Such as?"

"NFL football."

"Ah, the Way of the Empty Helmet." "Tuan..."

"Ah yes, our backstory continues. Dad divorced Mom and kicked her out when I was in third grade. He told me she was dead."

"Harsh. But maybe easier on you."

"Possibly. I saw her a couple of times later and know what? He was right."

MeiMei palmed the paddle to brace her hands on the gunwales and carefully turned around to face him. He stuck a blade into the water for more stability as she pulled off the tricky maneuver and ended up on her knees, facing him. She slid her hands along the hull until her face was a foot from his. She hadn't had any idea of what to say, but as she faced him it bubbled up out of her.

"Give me time, Tuan. I'll make it up to you."

He let out something that could have been a cry of joy or a sob of pain or anything in between, and reached to embrace her.

So they tipped right over into the sea.

Bobbing in the water, both of them laughed uproariously. He grabbed the turtled boat with one hand and pulled her close with the other.

"I've got all the time in the world," he said. "And it's all yours."

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