

indymag

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INDIANA JONES

and the
Feathered Serpent



Translated by
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indymag *publication*

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CHAPTER 1

June 8, 1929 Piedras Negras, Yucatan

Fire still rained from the sky. The last hard tremor was now five minutes past, but the earth hadn't yet stopped its shaking and roaring. And the forest was filled with bright flames- not only at the foot of the volcano, where the current of blazing white lava had begun, but the *whole* forest, as far as he could see. The air smelled of sulfur and brimstone and was so hot that every breath was agony. Here and there, the ground smoldered, and even down here, over two miles from the fire-spitting heart of the volcano, red shimmered through the earth in some places; a web of thin, jagged tears crisscrossed the ground, and sometimes a gust of pungent, acidic air hit him, so boiling hot that Indiana groaned in pain.

He wasn't sure if he would make it. Directly in front of him, perhaps only one or even half a mile away, a steep hill towered out of the forest; a steep dome of black, glassy lava, on which no plants had taken root and therefore there was nothing that could burn. But this half mile could be a half mile *too long*.

From the flank of the volcanic dome still flew both large and small bits of rock, which shot towards them like the deadly arrows of a furious Maya god; the ground shook so hard that Indy sometimes had trouble staying on his feet; he could barely breathe and thought that he would suffocate; and the ground

around him constantly exploded in small, roaring geysers of burning rocks and suffocating, boiling hot steam.

And Swanson was heavy.

For the first few minutes, Indy had barely felt his weight, because he had started running out of pure fear of death, and alone the thought of the white-hot stream of lava that followed them- not very quickly, but with the inexorable persistence of nature's power- alone the thought of the roaring stream of white liquid rocks that seemed to come directly from hell had lent him nearly superhuman strength.

But even superhuman strength granted by fear had its limits, and Indy sensed that he would soon have reached that limit. He stumbled much more often. Twice he had fallen and had only been able to hold onto Swanson with trouble, and in the meantime the motionless body on his shoulder seemed to weigh several tons. And as if the dark, ancient powers that their blasphemy had awakened realized that their victim may escape them in the last moment, the eruptions had now become more forceful. Not only the mountain, the whole land seemed to jerk beneath his feet and writhe around like a humongous, mortally wounded animal.

Indy reached the foot of the lava pile and turned hastily to the left, as the ground in the direction he had been running broke open and a thick jet of brimstone shot into the air. He instinctively tucked his head between his shoulders. Two, three drops of white-hot lava hit him and burned tiny, smoking holes in his jacket and the skin below.

Indy gasped in pain and doubled his efforts. The forest's edge lay seemingly within reach. But no matter how fast he ran, the apocalypse he fled followed him. And as if it were playing a cruel, wicked game with him, it always moved a bit faster than he did.

Even here, some of the bright flames already licked at the underbrush. The leaves of ferns as tall as men had turned brown and curled up; black smoke darkened the sky; and through the crackling of the flames rang a choir of screeching, panicked animal cries. When the volcano erupted, the animals had fled from the area around the mountain in panic, but the forces of

nature were simply faster. In a diameter of three, perhaps even four or five miles, flames and burning stones rained down from the sky. And there was nowhere left that they could run. The whole jungle seemed to have become one giant trap. Not just for the animals.

Indy stopped for a moment to take a breath. He looked around hastily. He could no longer see the hill from here. Flames and black, greasy smoke obscured his vision. And from the jungle, a wave of suffocating dry heat hit him, but he knew that the rise must lie directly in front of him. They had to get there- because if not, he may as well just stand there and wait for death.

He shifted Swanson's weight onto his shoulder and tried with a quick glance to find a somewhat safe way through the burning jungle. Then he rushed on.

The way from the volcanic crater to here had been bad enough; he had thought that it couldn't get worse. But this was worse. The whole forest was on fire. The ground was so hot that, despite the thick soles of his boots, he could barely step on it, and burning branches were constantly falling down on him and Swanson. The heat and the glaring, flickering light brought tears to his eyes so that he was nearly blind. He just rushed straight ahead, collided hard with a tree that had appeared so abruptly out of the smoke that Indy wasn't able to react fast enough, and fell hard to the ground. Swanson slid off of his shoulder and fell with a pained gasp into a bush; for a moment Indy remained lying there, dazed.

As he laboriously stood up again, he thought he suddenly saw a figure.

It was only a shadow that he detected out of the corner of his eye, barely more than a flat, distorted outline before the background of the roaring wall of flame, like a demon, huge and black and with a distorted, blood-red grimace, something that hell itself seemed to have spewed out to stop his escape at the last moment. Indy flinched up, shocked, but in that moment the mountain threw out a new, roaring explosion and filled the sky with white embers, and as Indy looked again, the figure had vanished.

For a second, he stared at the place where it had once stood, then he came to the conclusion that it had probably just been an illusion, and he leaned down to pick up Swanson.

Swanson moaned in pain as Indy heaved him onto his shoulders, groaning. His fingernails scratched Indy's face as he instinctively tried to stop the agony. Indy ignored this new burning pain, balanced Swanson's weight on his shoulders the best he could, and swayed on.

That he found the rock outcropping was pure chance. His feet suddenly hit something hard, he stumbled, regained his balance at the last moment, and reached forward with his free hand to find some sort of hold. His fingers scratched at the black, glassy lava that cut deep into his skin like the edge of a knife. And through the curtain of smoke and gray ash he could see the steeply rising slope of a broken hill that suddenly towered in front of him.

Even under normal conditions it would have been difficult to climb up this hill; with Swanson's weight on his shoulders, it was nearly impossible. But fear again gave him additional strength, and he somehow managed this task.

Gasping for breath, half blind from exhaustion and pain, and with his last bit of strength, he crawled up the steep slope and dragged himself into the shelter of a massive black chunk of lava. Against the rain of fire from the sky the rock provided no cover, but it stopped a few of the flames and drove the burning wind back a little.

Indy collapsed from exhaustion. For a while he just lay there, gasping for breath, in and out, and waited for the world to finally stop spinning around him. For several minutes, he couldn't do anything but just lie there, breathe, and listen to the racing staccato of his own heart, which hammered in his chest as if it would burst at any moment. He didn't seem to have a bone in his body that didn't hurt; not a single muscle that wasn't pulled; and no square centimeter of skin that wasn't burned, boiled, or scraped. The bitter taste of vomit filled his mouth, and his eyes teared up from the thick smoke and the bright light into which he constantly had to look.

It wasn't the first dangerous situation in which Dr. Indiana Jones had found himself; but it was the worst. What had begun

as a harmless stroll and continued as an adventure had transformed into an inferno. Now he barely remembered how it had started- it had all gone so fast and everything had seemingly happened at once so that the images in his head all blurred together into an insane kaleidoscope of terror. Although he tried with all of his might to defend himself from the memories, the same image constantly appeared before his mind's eye: Swanson, who suddenly cried out and threw himself between Indy and the orb of fire that had shot out of the crater of the volcano without any warning. Well, they had been warned, thought Indy bitterly. Oh yes, they had been warned, more than once, but they hadn't listened- as usual. For a moment he thought that he could again see the face of the old Indian who had stepped in the way of their truck with outstretched arms; a thin, ragged figure, looking nearly pathetic as he stood on the dusty main street of Piedras Negras and tried to stop the roaring colossus from a different time.

"What do you want?" Swanson had asked as soon as the truck had come to a stop and he had jumped out of the driver's seat and onto the street, where the native still stood with outstretched arms, shaking, his face lacking any color, and his scrawny legs beneath the threadbare poncho standing only centimeters from the bumper of the truck, but not moving, and, despite the clear fear in his eyes, he had a dignity that completely confused Indy.

"Are you suicidal, you crazy old man?" roared Swanson. He was also pale and his whole body shook, but Indy also realized that what he had originally thought was fury was just an expression of his fear. Not much farther and the five-ton truck would have just rolled right over the old man.

The Indian answered Swanson's agitated words in a calm, resonant voice that stood in deep contrast to his wretched appearance. Indy couldn't understand what he was saying, because the old man used a dialect that Indy had never heard before. Twice he thought he could hear the word Quetzalcoatl, but he wasn't sure, because Swanson interrupted the Indian immediately, and this time the American scientist was really roaring in rage; and this time he spoke the same guttural language as the old man.

For a moment, the Indian looked at Swanson with an expression that swung mysteriously between sorrow and anger, then he turned around and shuffled away with drooping shoulders.

“What did he want?” asked Indy as Swanson climbed back into the truck and hit it into gear with an angry gesture; so forceful that it nearly broke the old, weak lever.

“Nothing,” answered Swanson- more than just a bit too hasty to sound convincing. “Nothing at all.”

Indy looked at him questioningly. “Nothing at all?” he repeated doubtfully. “You mean that he had nothing at all against being nearly run over?”

Swanson had finally started the motor and hammered it into gear so hard that the transmission audibly groaned. “You know how superstitious these old Indians are,” he said. He laughed tensely. “He saw the truck and claimed that we will be desecrating holy ground if we go to the mountains with this demonic machine.”

“And then he threatened you with the curse of Quetzalcoatl,” Indy guessed.

Swanson flinched slightly and slammed on the gas pedal so hard that Indy was hurled back in his seat. The truck’s ancient motor screeched in protest. “Quetzalcoatl? What made you think that?”

“He said it,” answered Indy.

“He did not,” growled Swanson. “You must have been mistaken.”

“But I definitely heard it,” Indy argued. “Twice.”

“Then you must have been mistaken twice,” claimed Swanson. “The old man was crazy, nothing more.”

But he wasn’t crazy, and Indy hadn’t been mistaken. They had invoked the fury of the ancient Maya gods, and now Swanson was lying there, dying, and if no miracle came, then Indy would only live a few moments longer than him.

He dismissed this dark image as he heard a sound near him that he only recognized after a few moments as a human’s pained groan. Swanson was moving. His burned hand raised with trouble, felt around blindly for a moment, shaking, and finally

touched Indy's shoulder. Slowly, with troubled movements, it moved farther, slid up his throat, and finally reached his chin. They were the movements of a blind man who felt over a person's face since he couldn't see it.

And Swanson *was* blind.

I have no right to be alive, thought Indy, horrified, as his gaze moved over his friend's contorted face. Swanson's face was black, not dark, not just sooty, but black. Only here and there through the piles of cinder and soot on his face shimmered the bright red of burned flesh, lines reminiscent of the face he knew, drops of blood channeling through burned-black flesh. It was a sight that constricted Indy's throat; and not just because this face was so terribly disfigured.

I should really be in his place, thought Indy weakly. It had been he who had been the first to the edge of the crater, and it had been he who the volcano had spit its fiery breath at. Swanson had saved his life and sacrificed himself.

Indy knew that his friend would die. It was a miracle that he was even still alive. No doctor in the world could save him now. And even if they conceivably could- the way to the city was a seven, if not eight or nine hour trek on foot, the truck had been lost on the way, and Indy's strength just wouldn't be enough to carry him so far.

"Indiana?"

Indy smiled, although his friend's dead eyes could no longer see it. Carefully he reached for Swanson's hand, took it, and held tight. He felt how hot the dying man's skin was. His heart beat very slowly, but so hard that every single beat shook Indy like a tremor.

"I'm here," he said.

Swanson tried to smile, but what had become of his face turned it into a terrible grimace. "Are you... okay?" he asked with trouble.

Indy nodded. Only then did he realize that Swanson could no longer see that, no longer see anything at all. "I'm fine," he said. "I only got a couple of scratches. But you got it pretty bad, old boy."

"I know," whispered Swanson. "It is... bad."

“Yes,” answered Indy. “But you’ll make it. Don’t worry.”

Swanson coughed: A gruesome, rattling sound that made the blood in Indy’s veins run cold. “Don’t... lie to me,” he whispered. And as if to underline these words, the mountain threw out another roaring cloud of fire in the same moment. Indy looked up instinctively.

This movement saved his life.

Like the first time, he saw the shape only out of the corner of his eye, and only as a distorted black shadow. But something told him with unshakable certainty that it was anything but a shadow and reacted instinctively.

A fraction of a second after Indy tipped to the side, the edge of an obsidian axe crashed into the lava rock exactly where his face had just been.

Indy fell, rolled onto his back, and pulled his legs in. With all of his strength, he kicked at the giant figure who had suddenly appeared over him and Swanson.

He hit him. The figure staggered back, fought with wildly waving arms for a moment to keep his balance on the glass-smooth lava, and finally fell hard to the ground. Indy and his attacker got back up onto their feet simultaneously. Although Indy had almost doubted at first that he really was standing, because the other man towered over him by a good half meter! And it wasn’t just his enormous size that caused Indy to gasp...

The man was a giant with a shoulder width that must nearly double that of a fully-grown man. Beneath the skin of his arms and legs, his muscles curved strangely so that they nearly seemed misshapen, and to put the cherry on top of his already terrifying appearance, he was wearing only a loincloth, but was painted from head to toe with bright colors. His face was a devil’s grimace; beneath the bright green and red and yellow-painted demon face, his real features were barely recognizable.

Yet Indy didn’t waste a second on thoroughly studying the Indian’s war paint. Because the native leapt at him with a furious, almost animalistic growl, and Indy dodged him with a swift movement to the side and took the whip from his belt. The native’s weapon shattered, and he threw the useless handle aside-

but the giant didn't need a weapon to deal with a normal-sized opponent. Or even five.

The Indian seemed to also see his odds this way, because he didn't even glance at the whip in Indy's hand, instead turned around and leapt towards him for a second time, arms spread wide, in an attempt to simply crush him.

Indy waited until he was very close, dove beneath his grabbing arms at the last moment, and kicked him in the kneecap as the giant stumbled over him. The Indian grunted, surprised, took two, three clumsy steps, and fell to his knees for the second time.

As he got up this time, he was far enough away from Indy for him to be able to use his weapon. The whip cracked. The tip flew at the Indian's throat like a striking snake, wound around it, and pulled tight with a jerk. The blow would have been enough to leave any other man on the ground, unconscious, or at least convince him that he really had more important things to do in the next few minutes than kill harmless archaeology professors—such as learning to breathe again...

The Indian wasn't convinced.

Instead of collapsing on the spot, he grabbed with both hands for the whip and tugged at it; and a fraction of a second too late, Indy got the idea to let go of the handle, as he was suddenly the one being dragged helplessly towards the Indian.

When he finally did it, it was too late.

The Indian let go of the whip and instead grabbed onto Indy's shoulder. Indy felt himself leave his feet and be pulled into the air and whirled around, and a second later he was flung with such force between the razor-sharp rocks that he saw black.

The collision knocked the air from his lungs so that his pained scream became a whistling gasp. For a fraction of a second he felt as if he would fall unconscious, and as his gaze cleared up again, the Maya was already back over him. The man was a giant, but he didn't have any of the cumbersomeness shared by most big men, instead moved with the energetic elegance of a predatory cat. Indy raised his hand in a weak defensive movement, but the Indian simply shoved his arm to the side, threw himself at him, and pressed him to the ground with his

knees as his powerful hands closed around Indy's throat like an iron cuff and began to mercilessly press down.

Indy pushed back desperately. Three, four, five times in a row he punched the giant in the face, but he seemed not to even feel the blows. Indy's lungs screamed for air. He futilely tried to shake off the Indian, threw himself back and forth, and finally reached for his hands with the last of his strength to push his thumbs back and release the grip. But he soon sensed that he didn't have the strength. His senses were already starting to blur. The Maya's body swam before his eyes, his face seemed to expand and fill his whole field of view...

And then something completely unexpected happened. The Indian's grip loosened. First haltingly, but after a second, he finally pulled his hands back from Indy's throat and stared at his neck.

Indy struggled for breath, gasping. The Indian stood up, looked at him for a moment, confused, and then turned around with a sluggish movement.

Indy sprang at him as he leaned down over Swanson.

He used every last bit of strength left in his maltreated body in this movement, and the collision was enough to knock even this giant from his feet.

But no more. The giant fell, but he rolled even as he fell and grabbed Indy, and a second later he found himself lying on his back with an at least five-hundred-pound living mountain of muscle and bone on his chest for the second time. And the expression on the Indian's face made it clear that this time, he was serious.

The Indian balled his hands into fists to bring this matter (and probably also Indy's life) to an end once and for all. Lightning-fast, Indy pushed two fingers of his right hand into the man's eyes.

The Maya roared in pain, whipped both hands up towards his face, and tipped backwards off of Indy's chest. Indy helped the movement with a kick, leapt up onto his feet- and fell for a third time as the Maya grabbed at his ankle and brought him back down with a hard jerk.

This time they got back up onto their feet simultaneously. Indy dove beneath a punch from the Maya, hit him three, four times one after another in the chest, and took a terrified hop to the side as the giant's arm flew towards him like a thresher.

He wasn't fast enough. The Indian's fist missed him, but his arms closed with deadly strength around his upper body and squeezed.

Indy tried to release his grip, but he may as well have tried to pry the jaws of a fifty ton press apart with his bare hands. His ribs cracked audibly. Whistling, the air left his lungs. The Indian tore him into the air and whirled him around so that the pressure on Indy's chest increased even more. He desperately pulled his arms up and slapped the giant on the ears; several times and with all of his strength. The Indian groaned in pain, but didn't let go, instead pressed down even tighter. Before Indy's eyes, colorful stars began to dance, and he thought that he could hear his backbone creak. With a last desperate movement, he pulled his right knee into the air and jammed it with all his might between the Indian's thighs.

The Maya roared, dropped Indy, and stumbled backwards in a grotesque, half bent posture. But his pain-filled screech turned into an angry growl after only a few moments, and as Indy got back up onto his feet, stumbling, the flicker in his eyes was no longer pain, but pure bloodlust. If he got ahold of him again, thought Indy, he would kill him. Quickly and mercilessly and probably without Indy being able to do the slightest thing about it.

But at least he could try.

As the Maya got up completely, Indy rushed towards him and rammed his head into his stomach with all of his might.

He felt as if he had just run into something with the size and mass of the Pyramid of Cheops. A dull pain raced through his head, ran down his spine, and exploded in his back. His mouth was suddenly full of blood as he bit down on his own tongue.

The Indian didn't even sway.

Indy fell to his knees as if in slow motion, sagged forward, and stopped the fall at the last moment with his hands. Everything around him spun. Groaning, he lifted his head and looked at the

giant Maya above him, who he saw as only a shimmer, towering monstrously over him.

The Indian still didn't move.

A second passed, then another and another, and the giant still didn't take the chance to grab Indy and simply tear his head from his shoulders. He just stared down at him; out of huge, oddly frozen eyes.

Then Indy noticed two things.

The Indian was no longer even looking at him, instead stared off into the distance, eyes wide.

And the smell.

The stench of braised hair and burnt flesh.

Nevertheless, he nearly reacted too late when the Indian started to fall.

Stock-still, in the same frozen posture in which he had previously stood, the Maya tipped forward, and Indy found just enough time to throw himself to the side with a hasty movement before the giant collided with the ground like a meteor of flesh and bones where he had just knelt.

Between his shoulder blades, like the broken blade of an axe, stuck a triangular, glowing-red splinter of lava.

Indy stared, stunned, at the horrifying scene for a second, then leapt into the air with a terrified hop and took two, three steps back from the dead man.

He looked around, alarmed. The mountain continued to spew fire and burning stones, and the Maya's fate clearly showed him how false the security was that this lava hill offered them. Nevertheless, he made sure that this Maya was the only one and that there were no more deadly surprises hiding between the splits and cracks of the hill. Only then did he go back to Swanson.

His friend had lost consciousness. But at least he was still alive: His chest rose and fell with fast, irregular movements, and his lips shook. As Indy knelt down next to him and put his hand on his forehead, he opened his eyes and tried to lift his head.

"Don't move," said Indy hastily.

"What was... that?" murmured Swanson weakly. "Where did you... go? I... I... heard. Is someone else... here?"

Indy looked over at the dead Maya for a heartbeat. He had hoped that maybe Swanson hadn't noticed any of what was happening.

Finally he shook his head and said aloud: "No. It's nothing. I was just looking around briefly."

"And what does it look like?" asked Swanson.

"Not good," Indy said after a short pause. "But we'll make it. I think this damn mountain is starting to calm down."

"Go, Indy," murmured Swanson. "Leave while you still can. Save yourself."

"Nonsense. You can't seriously think I'll just leave you here?"

"I'm dying," said Swanson. His voice sounded almost relieved, and there wasn't even a trace of fear.

"Nonsense!" retorted Indy. "You don't look that bad. Let me rest for a couple of minutes, then I'll take you to the village. The doctors will put you back together."

It was a lie and they both knew it. But for a moment Indy nearly believed himself, just because he wanted to.

"Leave me... here," said Swanson with trouble. His voice grew softer. It shook now, but not from fear, just from weakness. Indy had to place his ear close to his friend's destroyed face so that he could even understand the words.

"Save yourself!" whispered Swanson. "Get yourself to safety. I'll die anyway."

This time Indy didn't answer. But he didn't move from his spot. He knew that Swanson wouldn't survive the next few minutes, and Swanson himself seemed to know that Indy wouldn't go. He couldn't. The least that Indy could do for his friend was continue to sit next to him until this was over.

He lifted his head and looked up at the mountain. The peak of the volcano was bathed in bloody, flickering red; the same color that was reflected on the underside of the roiling clouds covering the sky above the mountain. Flames and whole avalanches of burning chunks of stone constantly flew out from the crater, and on all sides, new fiery red cracks formed. The forest burned as far as he could see, but yet, they had found fortune in misfortune: The rainy season had come in full force only a few days before,

and the tropical rainforest was completely saturated with moisture so that even this hellfire from the volcano couldn't fully engulf it.

Perhaps he still had a chance. Him.

The thought nearly filled him with fury. It just wasn't right! For a moment he nearly hated himself for still being alive. Then he realized how absurd these thoughts were and how wrong. Because it would turn what Swanson had done for him into nothing. He was ashamed by his own thoughts.

Indy's eyes filled with tears as he tore his gaze away from the peak of the mountain, still spewing fire, and looked back at his dying friend.

If only they had never come here! He hadn't had a good feeling about this from the start, but the adventurer in him had been louder than the weak voice of reason. Swanson didn't even really have to try to convince him to come on this improvised expedition. Alone the idea that they might find something in the crater of this extinct volcano that no human eye had seen for five hundred or even a thousand years had taken away his last doubts.

Extinct volcano...

The words reverberated in Indy's head like an evil taunt. The last eruption of this volcano had been over two hundred years before. At least they had told them that. And then of all moments for it to erupt again, it had to be as they approached the crater's edge!

He also dismissed these thoughts, brushed the back of his hand across his face to wipe away the tears that he tried futilely to convince himself were only due to the smoke and heat, and leaned back over Swanson. His lips moved. At first, Indy had trouble even understanding the whispered words. Swanson's voice was no louder than a breath.

"...daughter," Indy understood. Swanson said more, but this one word was the only one he could really identify.

Swanson's hand slid off of his, moved slowly along his upper body, and tried to pull something out from beneath his shirt. Indy saw a slight golden flash and stretched out his hand. Very carefully, so as not to cause Swanson even more pain, he removed the thin chain with the small gold pendant from his

friend's neck and dropped it into his open hand. Swanson's fingers closed with a jerk, held it tight with all of his strength for a moment, and opened again.

"Give this... my... daughter," he said. He seemed to have mobilized all of his strength to speak these four words, because his voice was again clear and understandable. "Take it... her. Tell her... that..."

He didn't go on.

And it was almost ten seconds before Indy realized that he would never finish this sentence.

He was dead.

Again his eyes filled with tears, and this time he didn't try to hold them back. For several minutes he looked down at him and let his pain run freely until he had himself under control enough to stretch his hand out and carefully remove the chain with the small gold pendant from Swanson's fingers.

The pendant was tiny, nearly unremarkable; barely larger than the nail on his little finger. At first glance it looked like a worthless trinket, but when one looked closer they could see a hidden elegance and craftsmanship beneath the seemingly rough lines. It depicted a coiled serpent, from the skull of which grew a large bushel of feathers: Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent god of the Maya.

The history of the ancient people of Mesoamerica had been Swanson's area of specialty. Indy remembered the countless evenings and nights that they had sat together and talked about the secrets of this lost advanced civilization. And it was ultimately also the reason for their presence. Right up to the end, Swanson hadn't told him anything truly definitive, but he had made a few comments from which Indy had judged that he had hoped to find something sensational within this extinct volcano.

The only thing that he had found, Indy thought bitterly, was death.

For two endless minutes he just sat there and looked at the tiny, glimmering pendant, then he stood up, moved to put the chain into his pocket, and reconsidered at the last moment. With a quick movement, he slid it over his head and hid the pendant carefully beneath his shirt.

Indy went back over to the dead Maya. He was now certain that he hadn't imagined the shape in the forest, it must have been this same man. He must have followed him here from the mountain; and maybe even before.

Carefully and filled with the absurd, but very intense feeling that he was doing something that he shouldn't be doing, he sank down onto his knees next to the dead giant and turned him onto his back.

The giant's face was contorted in death, but not even the permanent suffering and the thick sheet of paint could hide the characteristic features: The sharp nose, the wide chin, and the slightly receding forehead. The man was a full-blooded Maya.

Indy remained sitting there for a long time and looked back and forth between the face of the dead Indian, the tiny Quetzalcoatl pendant, and the volcano spewing fire. What on earth had Swanson hoped to find up there?

He paused for one last time before he got up and slowly climbed down the hill. To just leave Swanson lying here felt like a betrayal, but he had no other choice. And Swanson wouldn't want him to act like a fool now and possibly die anyway.

The price he had paid for Indy's life was too high for that.

And suddenly Indy felt something almost like defiance. It was as if his life no longer belonged completely to him. With what Swanson had done, he had also taken on a bit of him, and he wouldn't allow this damn mountain to kill his friend for a second time.

Around him, the forest was on fire, and maybe hidden somewhere in this jungle were more ancestors of Montezuma who strived to kill him, the earth shook and ash, burning rocks, and flames rained down from the sky, but somehow he would find a way out of here.

Somehow.



CHAPTER 2

3 Years Later: New Orleans

The Palladium was a dump. The only distinguished thing about it was its name, which wasn't even a remnant of better times, it was the owner's way of showing delusions of grandeur, plain and simple. The bar normally had room for thirty, with some luck, forty guests, but the doorman outside made sure that there were seldom fewer than seventy or even eighty people present. That in turn led to such pushing, shoving, and confusion that those present simply found it impossible to reach the door again once they had made the mistake of being lured in. The air was so thick and smoky that it was completely senseless to try to gesture towards the man behind the bar; one had to scream to put in an order. Which only a few guests did. It also wouldn't have made much sense- there were only two drinks to choose from: Lukewarm beer and whisky, and they said that the owners of the Palladium concocted these from the remnants of unfinished glasses every night. Judging by the taste, this was the truth.

But Indiana Jones was currently paying no attention to either the crowd around him or the gold-brown brew, the color of which was probably the only thing about the drink that was truly

reminiscent of whiskey. He concentrated completely on the cards in his hands.

It was a full house. Perhaps the most beautiful full house he had seen in years. Three aces and two kings that he had been dealt without having to trade a single time: A one in a million chance.

His opponent seemed to fear something along these lines, because the gaze with which he seemed to pierce Indy had become more nervous over the last few minutes. Of the five original participants in this round of poker, they were the only two left. The others had folded and watched this silent duel eagerly; just like the twenty or thirty spectators standing around the table in a thick circle.

Which was also no wonder. The Palladium was known to be a gaming den where huge amounts sometimes passed over the table- but stakes like those that now lay between Indy and his opponent on the table were something that they didn't see every day, even here. Indy had long since lost track of how much there was. He had come here tonight with only one hundred dollars in his pocket, like he always did when he wanted to gamble. An amount that might hurt if he lost it, but wouldn't ruin him. But he hadn't lost, instead constantly won. In the course of the night his one hundred dollars cash had slowly become a thousand, then two, finally three, and, in the end, over four thousand dollars- and all of this now lay between them. That, the same stakes which his opponent had laid out, and at least that amount again: The raises of the other poker players, who had eventually folded. Even Indy, who didn't normally place that much value on worldly goods, felt a little queasy as he looked at the pile of crumpled, green dollar bills.

His opponent seemed to be somewhat more than just a little queasy.

José's eyes had widened, on his forehead were beads of sweat, and the hand with which he held his cards shook. It wasn't the first time that Indy had played a round of poker with José, and previously he had thought him a cool, calculating player who could always remain calm. But he had also rarely played with these stakes. Indy had actually never seen him gamble for more than two or three hundred dollars at once. And the sight of the

small fortune that was piled between them had shattered his proverbial calm.

Neither of them had actually planned on risking so much. It had, like earlier meetings, really just begun with the normal banter between them: Indy had gotten his cards and just shook his head when the dealer asked him how many new cards he wanted, and José, who Indy knew more as a hobby player than a pro, had mockingly creased his brow and smiled at him. The ten hundred-dollar bills that he then threw onto the table between them was probably mostly to show Indy what he thought of this supposed bluff. And it was only out of malicious pleasure at the thought of the expression his old peer would make when he saw this amazing hand that Indy counted out the same number of notes from the stack in front of him and put them down.

And then... then both of them were caught up in it, as they said.

This one game had now taken close to half an hour, and they had mercilessly goaded each other on. The other players had slowly dropped out, although several of them had also contributed considerable amounts, and the friendly struggle had become a bitter combat. Since Indy had placed the last two hundred dollars in front of him on the table between them to match José's bet, a good five minutes had passed. None of them had spoken a single word in this time, but the suspense was becoming nearly unbearable.

José put down his cards and reached into his wallet. He had done this several times during the last quarter of an hour, and the bundle of money within was constantly becoming thinner. Indy studied this with worry. He knew José. They weren't friends, but they were good acquaintances and colleagues (at least nearly) and he knew that the Mexican normally had the same method of playing as he did: With relatively small stakes so that he either lost, after which he then went home, or doubled or tripled the amount, only to lose his winnings again or- very infrequently- took it home with him. But now José was breaking those habits. He had used up his playing capital, just like Indy, and what was in his wallet was probably last month's wages.

“Please don’t do that,” said Indy, as José took two hundred dollars out of his wallet and threw it on the table. “If you lose, then I’ll have to feed and put up with you all month,” he added with a derisive smile.

José remained serious. “Are you going to keep going or not?” he asked. His voice sounded strained, and his eyes flashed.

Indy was tempted to say no. The table before him was empty, everything that he had won that evening, including the hundred that he had come here with, now lay in the pot. Logic told him that he should leave. If he lost, then he had lost exactly a hundred dollars, nothing more and nothing less. If José lost, then he was ruined for the next month.

His appearance also worried Indy. Until this evening, José had been a casual gambler, just like Indy. What he now saw in his eyes was the flicker of an obsessed gambler who just couldn’t stop. Perhaps a little shock would do him some good. Indy decided to give him back at least a portion of the winnings later so that he could get through the next few weeks. A small, wholesome shock would probably do José some good.

He put down the cards in his hand, reached into his jacket, and opened his wallet. Within he found three hundreds and a fifty. He took two hundred dollars out, placed them on the table, and looked at José questioningly. “You should stop,” he said once more.

José pursed his lips defiantly, reached for his wallet again, and opened it. Indy saw that there were exactly three hundred dollars within.

Don’t do this,” he said in warning. “You’re ruining yourself, my friend.”

José looked at him almost hatefully, took the three bills, and threw them onto the table. “Can you keep up, or will you fold?” he asked defiantly.

Indy looked into his own wallet. He couldn’t keep up. His cash on hand wasn’t enough. “Will you take an IOU from me?” he asked. Without waiting for José’s response, he pulled a pen out and searched for a piece of paper- but José shook his head.

“Hey, hey,” protested Indy. “I’m good for fifty lousy dollars, aren’t I?”

“No IOU,” said José tersely. “Put the money on the table or fold.”

“That isn’t fair,” protested Indy. “You’re trying to force me out.”

José shrugged his shoulders calmly. “Anyone playing for high stakes should have enough money for it,” he said. “Do you have it?”

Now Indy was really angry. “No,” he answered, pressed. “But if you give me a minute, I’ll get it.” He pointed with an agitated head movement at the bar. “I think that I have sufficient credit here.”

He prepared to stand up, but José suddenly lifted his hand and waved him back. “Spare yourself the trouble,” he said.

Indy sat back down and looked at him questioningly.

José looked a bit embarrassed. Obviously he already felt bad about saying those words. “Sorry,” he said. “Of course you’re good for fifty. Will you match me?”

Indy nodded.

José pressed his lips together, looked at the back side of his cards, which lay in front of him on the table, for several seconds, penetrating, and reached into his jacket pocket. As he pulled his hand back out, he held a bundle of crumpled-up dollar bills. He carefully smoothed them out on the table, counted them out, and threw them out onto the pile of money. “That’s another eighty-seven,” he said.

Indy sighed. “You’re completely insane,” he murmured. “But fine, if this is what you want- I’ll match.”

José looked at him.

“That makes it 137 dollars that I owe you if I lose,” said Indy, furious again.

“Would you mind giving me some collateral?” asked José.

Indy thought that he really would mind. He felt sickened by this completely unreasonable mistrust. After all, he wasn’t a total stranger, and even if he enjoyed a somewhat doubtful reputation, one certainly couldn’t accuse him of being someone who usually didn’t repay his debts. He furiously pushed back his sleeve to take off his watch, but José shook his head.

“No,” he said.

Indy stopped in the middle of the movement and looked at José angrily over the table. The South American pointed at the chain that was visible under Indy's shirt. "What is that?" he asked.

Indy paused. For a moment he was tempted to just stand up and leave José sitting there with his damn pile of money, but then he reached beneath his shirt and pulled the chain out so that José could see the small Maya pendant.

"That's gold, isn't it?" asked José.

Indy nodded grimly. "Yes, and it's worth a damn lot more than a miserable 137 dollars," he said.

"Then I'll put in another thousand," said José, continuing with a thin, malicious smile: "If I'm good for it, that is."

"But of course," answered Indy, pressed. "You have unlimited credit with me, my friend."

With a jerk, he pulled the chain over his head, threw it onto the table, and stared at José. "Then show me what you have."

"You first," said José.

Indy shrugged his shoulders, laid down his two kings and three aces and leaned back. He had really wanted to enjoy the moment and turn over the cards one after another in an order so that José wouldn't know what he really had until the last one. But he had long ago stopped having fun with this game. It truly didn't matter to him if he won or not. The only thing he wanted was to teach José a lesson.

A couple of seconds later he realized that it was he who would get a lesson this night.

José's eyes widened as he saw Indy's full house, but it wasn't terror that he saw within, but a wild triumph. For a moment, he smiled, then he started to laugh, picked up his own cards, and threw them at Indy across the table. Indy caught them, turned them over, and sighed, disappointed, as he saw what cards José had.

It was a straight with an ace; the only thing Indy had been missing.

"Oh well, Dr. Jones," said José mockingly. "It seems as if you could learn a few things from me." Grinning, he reached over the table and raked in his winnings- well over ten thousand dollars,

calculated Indy. With an expressionless face, he watched as José sorted the money into tiny, even piles, but as the Mexican moved to reach for the chain, Indy held his hand back. “That was just collateral,” he reminded him.

José nodded. “I know. You’ll get it back- as long as you bring me the eleven hundred thirty-seven dollars that you owe me.”

Indy spared himself from answering. The lesson had gone spectacularly, he thought angrily. It was just too bad he was the one who ended up learning from it.

He stood up. “Tomorrow morning,” he said furiously. “I’ll bring your money to the hotel. Will ten o’clock work?”

José shook his head. “Come by around twelve,” he said. “I have the feeling that this will be a late night. I have reason to celebrate, you know.”

Indy turned around so abruptly that he knocked over a chair in the movement, and stormed off. It was almost midnight when he stepped out onto the street. His head rang, his eyes burned, and he had drunk too much. But the clear, cold night air helped him. He took a couple of steps away from the bar, stopped, and leaned against a wall with closed eyes for a moment, doing nothing but breathing in the fresh air.

And finding himself again.

He was furious- and this fury was directed more at himself than José. At the same time, it wasn’t even the lost money that made him so furious. He would certainly survive this without having to go to the poorhouse or shoot himself. What was much worse was that he had deviated from one of his firm principles, namely that he never gambled more than he had with him. And the worst thing was that he had gambled with something that didn’t even belong to him.

Indy hadn’t forgotten the promise that he had made to Swanson. He had constantly worn the small pendant for the last three years, and he had searched intensely for Swanson’s daughter, but he hadn’t found her so far. Although he had often visited the city, it was mostly because of this pendant that he was now in New Orleans: He had come here during the semester break after a colleague had told him that Swanson’s daughter was here. The next day, he had an appointment with a lawyer who he

had written to three months before and asked for help with finding her.

Well, there was still enough time left to get the pendant back.

He went on. It was very dark; there was no moon in the sky, and during the hours that he had spent in the Palladium, it had become overcast. On the other side of the harbor, it was already raining, and the air around him, which had seemed so refreshing only moments before, was already becoming uncomfortably cool.

Indy pulled the collar of his jacket up, rammed his hands into his pockets, and continued with his head down and steps growing faster. He had to hurry to get back to the hotel in time and not get a cold shower in addition to the disaster at the poker table.

He crossed the street, turned to the right, and stood there uncertainly for a moment. The way to the hotel wasn't far, but it was constantly growing colder and the wind was sharp. The rain was obviously coming faster than he had thought. But there was a shortcut. Only a few steps away, he could see a small alleyway between two houses- not a real alley, just a gap that for some reason hadn't been blocked off- and beyond, a not even two-meter-high brick wall. He knew that the street with the hotel on it was on the other side.

He turned into the alley and approached the wall, having to weave around so as to evade overflowing trash cans and empty cardboard boxes. His foot kicked a trash can lid, which flew away, rattling. A moment later, a furious hiss rang from the back of the alley, and a shaggy shadow vanished into the darkness.

Indy reached the wall, stretched his hand out towards the top- and turned back around with a jerk.

Something was behind him.

He saw nothing. He didn't even hear anything suspicious, he just sensed that someone was following him. He had just been pursued and chased a few times too many not to have developed a sort of instinct for this kind of threat.

His gaze bored into the darkness. The shadow there- was it really a trash can, or a hunched-over figure? And that movement- he was no longer sure that it had really been a cat.

"Is someone there?" he called into the darkness.

No answer.

“Hey- friend!” called Indy. “If you were going to steal my wallet, spare yourself the trouble. It’s empty.”

He still got no answer, but the feeling that he was being watched grew more intense.

Indy’s hand moved to his jacket, which he hastily pushed back, then crawled towards his belt. His fingers closed around the grip of the short handled, rolled-up whip that he nearly always had when he wasn’t standing at his lectern at the university and teaching about archaeology and history. Especially when he visited places like the Palladium.

And suddenly, everything went very fast.

A clanking sound rang out as one of the trash cans was knocked over, then a shadow sprang at Indy lightning-fast and tried to knock him off his feet. In the last moment, he dodged the attack and ducked down. Something whooshed right over his head, knocked his hat off, and sparked on the wall behind him, and almost simultaneously, a punch hit his shoulder and made him stumble back.

But in the same moment, he released his whip and got ready.

Indiana Jones realized just a moment too late that a whip was a pathetic weapon in a not even half-meter-wide alleyway. He struck, but the woven trip collided with the wall long before it really gained any momentum. And he didn’t have time to think of another tactic. His shadowy attacker turned around, punched at him for a second time- and this time, he hit him.

Indy stumbled back beneath a heavy blow, hit the wall very hard for a second time, and collapsed to his knees. His head rang. The left half of his face was numb, and he could no longer really see. The man must have the strength of an ox, or he had hit him with a weapon.

A hand grabbed Indy by the lapels, tore him back up with a jerk, and threw him into the wall for a third time. The back of his head collided hard with the wall, and the pain caused colorful stars to dance before his eyes. But it also infuriated him.

He dropped the useless whip, ducked down instinctively as he more sensed another punch coming than saw it, and took a step to the side. A dull crash rang out, followed by an only half

suppressed cry of pain. And Indy allowed himself the luxury of a hurried grin as he imagined the fist that should have hit his face crashing against the wall with considerable force.

But the triumph didn't last long. He still couldn't really see his opponent in the darkness, but he could at least tell that he must be a true giant. A man who was over two meters tall and with a shoulder-width beyond any description. And if the punch to the wall had hurt him, then his fury had certainly risen. Indy suddenly had to duck beneath a hail of blows and stumbled back from his aggressor. Two, three of the furious swings hit him, and each time he had more trouble staying on his feet.

His foot caught on something. He stumbled, fought with wildly waving arms for his balance, and finally fell back. He succeeded in catching his fall and stopping at least most of its force, but the other man used his second of weakness to throw himself at him and press his body against the ground with his knee. A giant, somehow strange face appeared above Indy, and an even more gigantic fist balled up for the decisive blow.

Indy's wildly groping hands gripped something hard. He blindly grabbed it, pulled together every last bit of strength he had left, and struck.

There was a sound like a kettle drum as the trash can lid landed hard on his opponent's face. At first, Indy feared that not even this would be enough to stop the giant- but then the figure above him began to sway. He heard a quiet, sighing groan, and after another second the man simply tipped over and remained lying there.

Indy pulled himself up with trouble, took three, four, five steps back from the motionless giant as a precaution, and gasped for breath. He was anything but a weakling, but he knew that he had just barely won this unequal struggle.

But he had, and when he thought about it- he had won, and that was all that counted. And these circumstances made up for a bit of the bad luck he had experienced before.

"You see, friend," he said to the unconscious man. "Sometimes intellect does triumph over brute force."

Or maybe not.

The last thing that Indy could recall for the next two or three hours was the sight of the same trash can lid that he had hit his opponent with. Only now it was suddenly in the hand of the second giant shadow and flew at his face very, very quickly.

Maddeningly quickly, in fact.

The next morning, he had a headache. Sometime over the course of the night, he had awoken in the filthy alleyway and dragged himself to the hotel, where an incredibly shocked porter had met him and led him to his room. Not without asking him at least twenty times whether he wanted the police or a doctor or, better yet, both, which Indy had only stopped him from doing with much trouble.

Sometime long after sunrise, he had awakened with a ringing head and a revolting taste in his mouth, completely dressed, including hat and boots, lying on the bed. And then, after he had taken a shower and held his head under ice cold water for five minutes, he discovered a surprise.

He hadn't been robbed.

His watch was still there, his wallet with all of his papers and his Bank of America credit card that he reserved for emergencies, and all of the contents of his pockets.

Instead, the man had torn his shirt to shreds.

He didn't understand- why had these two tramps gone to the trouble of attacking him and then not even taken any of his valuables?

But no matter how long he thought about it, he found no answer. Maybe he had shaken the two of them so much with his unexpectedly fierce resistance that they had been glad to get away and just left him lying there.

He suspected that this wasn't the whole truth, but he felt much too miserable to think about this question any more now. He used the next half hour to shower for a long time in the ice-cold water and put his bedraggled clothes back in order. When he finally started to feel halfway human again, it was nearly eleven. And a look at his watch reminded him that more had happened the night before than the failed robbery.

He had a meeting with José. And since his hotel was nearly on the other side of the city and his stomach was now growling audibly, maybe he should stop wasting time standing around here and feeling sorry for himself.

Indy pulled together the last bit of money that he could find in his clothes- all in all, not even ten dollars- left the room, went down the hall, and entered a breakfast room where two bad-tempered waiters were busy putting away the last of the dishes. After he convinced one of them with a folded-up five-dollar bill to serve him breakfast anyway- cold coffee, papery bread, and two disks of sausage that were clearly older than the whiskey in the Palladium- he gulped it all down listlessly and left the hotel. He only had half an hour to go to the bank and then arrive punctually at his meeting with José. Close, but he could make it.

As always, when one really needed a ride, there was no taxi nearby, and to make this day even worse, the sky was covered with dark clouds; it looked like it could rain. Indy sighed in surrender, rammed his hand into his jacket pocket, raised his shoulders, and moved out.

The bank was only two streets away. It took him barely ten minutes to reach it, and then not even three quarters of an hour to move far enough through the line to reach the only open counter so that he could whip out his credit card and relieve his account of the small amount of \$1500.

The sight of the cleanly bundled stacks of money reminded him again of how foolish he had been the evening before. And really, he had been lucky: Had José not happened to be an old acquaintance of his, he wouldn't have even been able to get the amulet back. The value of the gold in the tiny pendant wouldn't even come close to the one thousand one hundred dollars that was the cost of the deposit, but under these conditions, a collector would certainly pay more.

Indy carelessly stuffed the money into his jacket pocket and turned around. He was running out of time. He was already going to be much too late to his meeting with José, but if he continued to dawdle here, he would also miss his appointment with the lawyer. He just hoped that José wouldn't keep him long.

As he walked through the big, marble hall, he collided with a tall figure. Indy murmured an apology, walked on- and then stopped again.

Something about this figure was...

He didn't know what- but something about him demanded his attention. Conspicuously he turned again and studied the big, broad-shouldered man who he had nearly run over more closely.

He couldn't see his face. The man strolled- seemingly aimlessly- through the hall, he had his right hand in his jacket pocket, in his left, the stump of a burning cigarette without a filter. But that which Indy saw from behind was already odd enough: The man was a giant, well over two meters tall and with broad shoulders. He wore a tailored suit that curved over the muscles of his upper arms and chest, and highly polished black leather shoes. His hair was the same color: A dark, almost blue, shimmering black that one rarely ever saw.

And he moved strangely.

It took a moment for Indy to realize what was so disturbing about his way of walking: They were the movements of a man who wasn't comfortable in his surroundings or his clothing. He seemed uncertain, out of place, and nearly fearful. At once he stopped and turned to the side. And Indy could see him, at least in profile.

And what a profile!

The powerful, jutting jaw, the slightly bulging cheeks, the sharp nose, and the slightly receding hairline: The man was an Indian, a South American Indian, judging by his skin color and characteristic profile, he was probably Aztec or Maya. And Indy now understood why he was moving so awkwardly and uncertainly. Even in a city like New Orleans where strangers and unusual characters were the norm, a giant like him must still stand out.

The foreigner finished his turn and looked Indy directly in the face. And after a couple of seconds, Indy realized that he had been staring at the man. He smiled, embarrassed, nodded pointedly, and hurried to turn around and finally leave the bank.

This time he found a taxi, and he was lucky- the driver decided against ferrying the obviously lost passenger all over the

city, instead was content with the money that Indy carefully pushed into his hand before entering the vehicle and took him the direct way to José's hotel.

Indy had half-way expected to meet José down in the entrance hall as they had arranged, but the hotel hall was empty except for a dark-haired South American beauty who sat on a small chaise lounge near the entrance and studied him searchingly as he approached the reception desk.

He gave José's name and expected a room number in answer, but instead, the man behind the desk looked at him for a moment, almost shocked, and then said:

"You're Dr. Jones, I assume."

Indy nodded, confused. He suddenly couldn't get rid of the feeling that this day may still hold uncomfortable surprises for him.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Jones," continued the receptionist. "But Señor Pérez left this morning."

"Left?" repeated Indy, surprised.

The receptionist nodded. "Yes. But do you see the lady there by the door?" He lifted his hand and pointed at the South American woman who still stared at Indy as if hypnotized, and Indy nodded. "She has a message for you, Dr. Jones."

Indy thanked him, turned around, and went over to the woman. She watched him, but didn't move, just sat there motionlessly until he had reached her and stopped. Between her eyebrows appeared a deep crease, and the expression on her face was... odd. Questioning, but also a bit uncertain, Indy thought; nearly fearful.

He cleared his throat artificially, and finally the dark-haired woman broke her silence. "Dr. Jones?"

Indy nodded. "Yes. I was with..."

She interrupted him with a gesture. "You look just like José described you," she said. "I just wasn't quite sure. Forgive me for not talking to you right away."

"It's fine," Indy answered automatically. "Can I ask who you...?"

“Oh, I haven’t introduced myself,” said the black-haired woman with a quick, fleeting smile. “My name is Anita. I’m José’s wife.”

Now it was Indy who was surprised. “I didn’t even know he was married,” he said- and regretted those words almost immediately, because the woman before him didn’t have herself well enough under control to prevent a short, dismayed look from crossing her face. It seemed as if he had opened an old wound.

“I’m sorry,” he murmured.

Anita made a dismissive hand movement and pointed smoothly at the chair across from her. Indy sat down and looked at her questioningly. For several seconds, neither of them said anything. And the silence that spread between them in those moments was somehow uncomfortable. Indy suspected that what José’s wife had to tell him wouldn’t be pleasant.

“Is something... wrong with José?” he asked uncertainly.

Anita shook her head. “No,” she said. “Or maybe. Yes. One could say that.” She smiled briefly and continued with an explanatory gesture. “Please forgive my husband for not being able to speak with you himself, Dr. Jones. But he had to leave suddenly. And unfortunately, I also don’t have much time.”

“That doesn’t matter,” said Indy. “It’s just...”

He was again interrupted. “I know why you’re here,” said Anita. She reached into her handbag and took out a white paper envelope. “You want this,” she said.

Indy stretched out his hand and took the small package. He knew what was inside even before he opened it. Surprised, he took out the golden chain, held it motionless for a moment, and dropped it into his closed hand. “José told you what happened?”

Anita nodded again, and again the look on her face showed that there was much more to this question than he had thought. “Yes,” she said. “You gambled and you lost, Dr. Jones.”

Indy smiled remorsefully, quickly dropped the chain with the golden pendent into his pocket, and took the money he had gotten from the bank out of the other pocket.

To his surprise, Anita shook her head, nearly shocked. “That isn’t necessary, Dr. Jones,” she said hastily.

“Not necessary?” Indy creased his brow, surprised. “You mean that José...”

“You should have never gambled with this medallion,” Anita interrupted. “José is very sorry about what happened last night. I’m supposed to tell you that he regrets his behavior and apologizes.”

“But I was the one who...” began Indy, but only to be interrupted again:

“He shouldn’t have taken this collateral. I just stayed here to return it to you.”

“And the... money?” asked Indy hesitantly.

Anita waved that away. “I think that José won enough last night,” she said. Then she stood up with a hurried, almost too hasty movement, and Indy also noticed that she looked around very quickly, but also very attentively. Her gaze slid quickly through the hall, remained on the staircase for a moment, and finally fell on the street on the other side of the hotel’s huge window. Outside, there was very little traffic. There was only someone standing on the other side of the street, who could only be seen as a shadow at this great distance. Yet Anita’s gaze hung there for a moment, and Indy saw her pupils widen. The sight of this figure didn’t surprise her, Indy thought, alarmed, but it did scare her. What was going on here?

“I have to go now,” said Anita. “It has been a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Jones.”

“Hey!” called Indy. He jumped up, but José’s wife had already turned around and walked as quickly towards the entrance as she could without running.

Indy watched her, confused, took a step to follow her, and then thought better of it. He stopped and waited for her to leave the hotel and get into one of the waiting taxis on the street. Then he went back to the reception desk and turned to the man behind the desk.

“When did Señor Pérez leave?” he asked.

The receptionist looked at him questioningly and it seemed as if he could no longer speak English.

Indy sighed, reached into his pocket once more, pulled out one of his just reclaimed eleven hundred thirty-seven dollars, and

pushed it across the desk. The bill vanished like magic and the receptionist found his ability to speak again.

“This morning, Dr. Jones,” he said. “Before breakfast. It was before my shift began, but I think it must have been six or earlier.”

“Had he planned on travelling on today?” inquired Indy.

The man shook his head. “His room is reserved until the end of the week- and he paid in advance,” he continued.

“And you don’t know why Señor Pérez left so suddenly?” asked Indy as he placed another bill on the table.

The receptionist let it disappear into his jacket pocket before he shook his head and answered: “No.”

Indy was disappointed. He sensed that something didn’t add up here. The woman- if she was really José’s wife- had acted more than a bit odd. Meanwhile, he was certain that the expression he had seen on her face as she had looked across the street and noticed the figure on the other side had been fear.

He left the hotel and looked, concentrating, in the same direction. The sidewalk on the other side of the street was empty. If someone had been standing there, then they were gone now. The whole affair was becoming even more mysterious.

But the main thing was that he had his amulet again.

He put his left hand in his pocket, closed his fingers around it, and with the other waved over a taxi. He had about an hour’s time until his meeting with the lawyer who was helping him track down Swanson’s daughter. But his day had already gone so badly that he didn’t want to test fate anymore. He probably had the least chance of something happening to him in a chair in the waiting room of the lawyer’s office.

This wasn’t the first mistake he made.

But it also wasn’t the last.

The law offices of Marten, Marten, Marten, & Marten were located on the fifth floor of a massive sandstone building that stuck out like a foreign object between the petite wooden buildings of New Orleans. The street was near the harbor, and through the open windows in the waiting room came the scent of sea water and the cries of a lonely seagull. If Indy had taken the

trouble to walk over to the window, he could have seen the harbor and a large part of the city, because the building rose on one of the highest hills in New Orleans.

But he didn't go to the trouble. He was confused, he was angry, and above all, he was much too occupied with looking at something else: An extremely charming something.

She was a hand span shorter than him, had light blond, short hair, and she was at that age where she was no longer quite a girl, but certainly wasn't a woman. Her small face had a pair of big, very alert, light blue eyes that stared at Indy coolly and calculatingly before returning to the magazine that lay open on her knees. Her hands were slim, but didn't look fragile, and around her neck shimmered a thin gold chain with a pendant that vanished beneath her blouse.

It usually wasn't Indy's style to stare at women, but something about this woman interested him; maybe even fascinated him. It was something that was hard to put into words, but there. It was a feeling as if he knew her, although he was completely certain that he had never met her. But something told him that he should meet her.

After a while he cleared his throat and leaned forward slightly in the just as expensive as uncomfortable chair he was sitting in: "Excuse me," he began. "But..."

It seemed to be his fate on this day to never finish a sentence, because the blond lowered her magazine with a jerk, lifted her head just as sharply, and looked at him so angrily with her light blue eyes that the rest of his sentence just stuck in his throat.

"If you're going to ask me if it's possible that we've met before," she said with a smile that was nearly as warm as an iceberg, "I'm going to throw a chair at you."

Indy sat back down and shut his mouth.

But the blond, already wound up, continued to look at him angrily. "You've been sitting there for the past fifteen minutes, just staring at me," she said. "Do I have four eyes on my face or a third leg under my skirt or something?"

Indy smiled weakly, tried to crawl back into a crack in his chair, and murmured a half-hearted "Sorry."

This obviously wasn't enough, because the girl just looked more furious and gathered together her breath for a new attack.

Indy decided to avoid the argument threatening to break out and stood up. He quickly crossed the waiting room, stepped through the doorway without knocking, and was again met by a reproachful glance; this time from the old secretary who had greeted him a quarter of an hour ago and who had asked him to sit out in the waiting room.

"Excuse me," he said, clearing his throat artificially, "but is Mr. Marten free now?" He made a clarifying gesture. "I don't have that much time, you know."

The secretary sighed in submission and shook her head, but nevertheless stood up and came out from behind her desk with small, pattering steps. After she made a hand gesture towards Indy to stay and wait for her, she stepped to one of the five doors that led out of the massive reception area, knocked, and stepped in without waiting for an answer. She closed the door again behind her, but Indy heard her speaking quietly with someone, and when she came back in, she didn't seem as agitated as before.

"Dr. Marten can see you now," she said. "Please, go on in."

Marten sat in a leather chair that was so massive that he seemed to sink into it, and spoke on the telephone as Indy entered. He looked exactly the way one pictured a lawyer: Gray-haired, small, and in an old-fashioned suit with a bow tie. But in contrast to this dusty impression, he lifted his hand and smiled jovially at Indy, inviting him to sit, while he continued to talk on the telephone. But he also didn't interrupt his conversation, instead turned his massive chair to the window, nearly dragging the telephone off of the desk, swung his feet up, and placed them one on top of the other on the window sill to continue talking. And continue talking. And continue talking.

He spoke for nearly five minutes, loud and fast, but in a type of jargon so that Indy could barely understand a word, until he finally turned around, hung up the telephone, and looked at Indy with an apologetic smile.

"Dr. Jones, I'm sorry that you had to wait," he said. "But we were..." he reached into his pocket, pulled out a pocket watch,

and looked at the face for a very long time "...to meet at two," he finished.

Indy looked demonstratively at the big clock that sat on the desk. It was three minutes until two.

"Well, that doesn't really matter," continued Marten patronizingly. "You're here now, so we can start. I just happen to have a few minutes free."

He pulled open a desk drawer, took out a small file, and opened it up. The glance he threw at it wasn't quite long enough for him to have read more than two or three words, but he still nodded contentedly, and Indy decided to begrudge him this little performance. If he enjoyed it, why not?

"You hired the law firm Marten, Marten, Marten, & Marten to find the daughter of a certain Greg Swanson who lived here in New Orleans three years ago," he began circuitously.

Indy's patience was nearly worn to the end. "That I did," he said, a bit more unfriendly than he had originally planned.

Marten smiled as if he had given him a compliment. "You made a good choice, Dr. Jones," he said. "You must know that the law firm Marten, Marten, Marten, & Marten is the oldest and-as I can't say without justified pride- the most renowned in New Orleans. Our clients..."

"Have you found her?" Indy interrupted.

Marten paused for half a second and looked at him reproachfully. He seemed a bit irritated; but not very- at least not enough to considerably stop his continuous flow of words. "We are a firm that places the highest value on always making our clients happy," he answered, "even when it comes to a somewhat unusual job such as this one."

Indy sighed. "So you found her?" he asked.

Marten nodded. A contented smile crossed his small face. "As I told you from the start, Dr. Jones," he answered, "it was a good choice to turn to the law offices of Marten, Marten, Marten, &..."

"Marten," Indy interrupted, agitated. "I know."

"...& Marten," continued Marten, unfazed. "It wasn't easy. You must know that Dr. Swanson vanished without a trace three years ago."

“I think I know that better than you,” Indy interrupted him. “He’s dead. I was there.”

For half a second, dismay filled Marten’s face. “Oh,” he said. “I am sorry. Was he a friend of yours?”

“A very good friend,” answered Indy. “And right before he died, he asked me to give his daughter something. That’s why I hired you to find her.”

Marten smiled contentedly and folded his fingers on top of the desk in front of him. “Well, Dr. Jones,” he said, “it was good that you turned to us with this task. We have succeeded in finding where Joana Swanson has been staying, but it wasn’t easy, as I must admit.”

Indy thought about the steep bill that he had already gotten from the law offices and swallowed back his comment at the last moment. He had little desire to listen to a one or even two hour lecture about how many expenses Marten, Marten, Marten, & Marten had accrued.

“Listen here, Mr. Marten,” he began.

“Dr. Marten,” Marten interrupted. “You must have time for that much, Mr. Jones.”

“Dr. Jones,” said Indy irritably. “Please, Dr. Marten, I truly thank you for your troubles, but it would really be enough if you just told me where I can find Miss Swanson now. Then I can take care of everything else on my own.”

“But that isn’t necessary,” said Marten. “You don’t have to go find her, Miss Swanson is here.”

“Here?” Indy repeated, surprised.

Marten nodded so heavily that Indy nearly expected his head to hit the top of the desk a couple of times. “We decided after your call that you would want to find Miss Swanson as quickly as possible. That’s why I took the liberty of arranging a meeting here,” he said with a smile.

Indy was suddenly overcome by a very uncomfortable feeling. But he said nothing, and Marten seemed to interpret his silence more as surprise, because his smile grew even broader. He stood up- which made him no taller, but shorter, because the massive leather chair in which he had sat really was as big as Indy had originally assumed- and spread out his arms as if to

embrace Indy in sheer joy. Indy tensed a bit in his chair as Marten walked around the desk with short steps.

“Mary,” he called loudly. “Please bring Miss Swanson in.”

A few moments later, the door to Marten’s office opened and Indy’s discomfort became certainty as none other than the blond beauty from the other room entered.

Her eyes widened in astonishment as she saw Indy, and this time Marten seemed to realize that the expression on her face was something other than overjoyed surprise, because he looked very helpless for a moment.

“I should introduce you,” he began uncertainly. And with a gesture at the girl: “Miss Joana Swanson.” He pointed at Indy. “Dr. Indiana Jones. I told you about him, Miss Swanson.”

“You did,” answered Joana. “But I must confess, Mr. Marten, that judging by your words I had imagined Dr. Jones a bit... differently.”

Indy felt the same way about her. Joana didn’t at all match how he had imagined her. He and Swanson had been good friends, but it was a friendship based on their profession and their hobby (which was the same thing to them). They had talked about very few private matters. Indy had known that he had a daughter, but neither whether she was his only child nor how old she was. And Swanson was still relatively young, a bit older than him, but certainly not so old that one would assume that he had grown children. Consequently, Indy had expected a child, a ten, maybe even twelve-year-old girl, not a nearly grown woman.

Marten cleared his throat exaggeratedly. “I see,” he said, “that you seem to both be overcome with joy.”

He smiled, embarrassed, as Joana threw him an angry glare, and continued hastily: “I think that it would be best if I just left you two alone for a moment. Since we already had an appointment for two, Dr. Jones, I don’t need this office for the next fifteen minutes. I’ll just excuse myself.” He didn’t wait for an answer, instead nearly fled from the office.

“So you’re Dr. Jones,” began Joana after a while. She looked a bit embarrassed.

“Indiana Jones,” said Indy. “Right. And you’re Joana. Your father told me a lot about you,” he added, which was a total lie, but he had the feeling that it was appropriate for the moment.

“I heard a lot about you as well,” answered Joana. She came closer, looked around searchingly for a moment, and suddenly, in the absence of another possibility, sunk down into the same chair that Marten had sat in before.

More seconds passed in which neither of them said a word. They just looked at each other silently over the massive desk between them, and a strange feeling overcame Indy.

Now he realized why he had thought that he knew this girl. The similarity with her father was striking. Of course, she was a woman, she was very young, no older than eighteen or nineteen, but her awake gaze, the energetic expression on her face, and the small, incredibly conscious movements, all was exactly like Greg Swanson. He should have recognized her right away. And really, he had.

“Indiana,” began Joana thoughtfully. “An unusual name.” She suddenly smiled. “Is it true that was your father’s dog’s name?”

Indy smiled, but it seemed much more forced than Joana’s. “It’s true,” he said quietly. Simultaneously, he mentally cursed himself. There were a few things that it was better if one kept to themselves; even when it came to their supposed best friend.

“I... am sorry if I was rude before,” began Joana again after a while, as Indy made no attempt to open up a conversation. “But I had a very unpleasant morning. This seems like the kind of day that would be best if it were removed from the calendar.”

Indy could agree with this. Aloud, he said: “It doesn’t matter. I really was staring at you. Please forgive me. But I...” For a moment, he searched desperately for words. “I really had the feeling that I had seen you before. You look so much like your father.”

Joana made a hand movement as if brushing this aside and smiled, and for the first time it seemed truly genuine. “I have a suggestion, Dr. Jones,” she said. “We’ll just forget that nasty incident and start again from the beginning. Agreed?”

“Agreed,” he nodded.

“I wondered what kind of man you were,” she began anew. “My father told me a lot about you, you know.”

Indy shook his head, and Joana continued with a heavy nod: “He spoke of you with the highest respect. He said that you were the most capable archaeologist he had ever met.”

“Nonsense,” said Indy. “Greg was...”

“But he was being serious,” Joana interrupted. “He planned to take you along on his last expedition.” Suddenly a shadow crossed her face, and her voice became a little quieter and sounded audibly sadder. “But you probably know that better than I do.”

“Yes,” said Indy quietly. “I’m sorry that we had to meet under these circumstances.”

Joana sighed, stared past Indy for a second, and then forced out a new smile. “It doesn’t matter. It’s far enough past. I’ve gotten over the pain.” But her gaze and the tears that suddenly shimmered in her eyes claimed the opposite.

Indy looked away tactfully and cleared his throat a few times. “I’m here for a very specific purpose, Joana,” he began. “You know that I was there when your father died.”

Joana nodded. She said nothing, just looked at him questioningly.

“It was terrible,” said Indy. “You know, I tried to stop him from going, but he didn’t want to listen to me. I am to blame for some of what happened.”

“It was a volcanic eruption, right?” asked Joana.

Indy nodded.

“No one can be responsible for something like a volcanic eruption,” said Joana. “And I know well enough what kind of man my father was. If he got something into his head, then no one and nothing could stop him. Not even you.”

Indy looked at her very seriously. He found it hard to keep going, but he could also no longer stop. He had carried this around with him for too long. Too long with no one he could really talk to for him to be silent now. “Did you know that he sacrificed his life to save mine?” he asked.

Joana pressed her lips together into a small line and shook her head heavily. “How?” she asked. “But I believe you. He would definitely do something like that.”

And again, Indy was silent for a long time. This time not for seconds, but several minutes in which Joana just looked at him and no longer even tried to fight against the tears that silently rolled down her face.

And finally, he began to speak in a quiet voice. He told Joana about their last journey together, of their trip through the jungle and their side trip to the crater of the volcano in which her father had suspected that he would find an ancient secret. “When the volcano suddenly erupted,” he said finally, “I was standing directly at the edge of the crater. It all went so fast that neither of us knew what to do. I would have been killed if Greg hadn’t pulled me back and stood in front of me himself.”

“Was he... killed instantly?” Joana asked quietly.

Indy shook his head sadly. “No. I wish that I could tell you that he didn’t suffer, but that wouldn’t be the truth. He was badly injured. I carried him down the mountain and tried to get him through the jungle, but it didn’t work. Our truck had broken down, and I didn’t have the strength to carry him back to town. He died in my arms.” For a second he considered telling her about the Maya, but he didn’t. It had been long ago, and it no longer mattered.

He slowly reached into his pocket, closed his hand around the small golden pendant, but didn’t pull it out. “His last words were for you, Joana,” he said. “He asked me to give you something that...”

Out in the front room, a sharp scream rang, a crash, and a fraction of a second later a terrible blow shook the door to Marten’s office, nearly tearing it off of its hinges. Crashing, it flew against the wall and stopped there, shaking, and a massive figure appeared in the opening.

Indy was so confused at first that he could barely react. It wasn’t just the size of the man who had created this violent entrance. It was the fact that he knew him!

It was the giant he had run into that morning at the bank.

And he didn't waste a second staring at Indy with the same confusion as he did, instead ran at him with an angry growl. And suddenly, the biggest knife that Indy had ever seen flashed in his hand.

Joana let out a ringing scream and Indy instinctively dove sideways off of his chair as the Indian's machete carved a whistling path through the air and cut twenty centimeters into the back of the chair.

Lightning fast, he rolled to the side and tried to get back onto his feet. But no matter how fast he was, the other was faster. He swung his machete at him again. Indy twisted around in the middle of the movement and once again lost his balance, and what his own momentum couldn't accomplish, the giant achieved with a kick that landed directly on Indy's face. The blow hurled him to the ground with dreadful force, made him slide helplessly across the polished wood floor, and he collided against the desk with such force that colorful stars and circles appeared before his eyes. For a moment, all of the strength left his limbs. He collapsed, tried futilely to keep his eyes open, and felt dark unconsciousness reaching for his thoughts.

But then he heard Joana scream again, and moments later came the clattering noises of a bitter struggle. And he realized that it wasn't him, but her who was really being attacked.

With all of his strength, he forced himself to open his eyes, blinked away the bright stars and dots that continued to dance there, and stumbled to his feet.

The giant had now thrown his machete onto the desk and fought Joana with his bare hands. Her strength was hopelessly inferior to his, but she defended herself with the strength of desperation, and she was amazingly skillful. The Indian was holding onto her very tightly, but she twisted and wriggled in his grip with all her might and simultaneously tried to scratch at his eyes. With an angry growl, he hastily turned his head away, but Joana's fingernails still left deep, bloody gashes on his cheeks. She simultaneously kicked him in the shins, alternating between her right and left foot.

Indy's hand reached to his belt- but there was nothing there, only a belt. He had left his whip in the hotel room. Why wouldn't

he have? He had just been going to visit José and meet a lawyer later.

He decided that he could worry about this lapse later, was around the desk with two steps, and leapt at the giant Indian. His hands closed around his throat from behind, simultaneously clinging to him with his legs and trying with all of his might to drag him off balance.

It remained an attempt.

He might as well have tried to uproot a tree with his bare hands. The Maya never even swayed. He just growled more furiously, tried to shake Indy off, and suddenly turned around with a jerk when he was unable to. With all of his might, he twisted around and crushed Indy's body between his own and the desk.

A terrible pain shot through Indy's back. But he didn't let go, instead just clung tighter to the giant and tried to pull his head back. Simultaneously, Joana continued to scratch at his face- and at Indy's hands, which held onto the giant's face with all their might.

The Maya shook himself, took a step forward, and then threw himself backwards lightning fast for a second time. This time he didn't try to push Indy into the desk, instead threw himself backwards over the table.

Indy felt as if he were being buried beneath a collapsing mountain. The collision drove the air from his lungs so that he couldn't even scream and nearly paralyzed him completely. His arms became limp. He felt his hands slide off of the giant's face, then a dreadful jab hit his ribs, and before his eyes again danced colorful dots and stars. With a jerk, the Indian got up, turned around with a dreadful growl, and balled one of his massive fists to punch Indy in the face.

Joana screeched, threw herself against his arm, and was simply dragged along. But her movements did take enough momentum away from the giant's punch that Indy managed to turn his head aside at the last moment so that the blow didn't hit his face, but the top of the desk next to him.

The Indian pulled a couple of steps back, simply dragging along Joana, who still clung to his arm, grabbed her with his other

hand, and shook her so hard that Indy could hear her teeth rattling together. Then he pulled back and slapped her hard.

Joana stopped screeching. She stumbled back weakly, collided with Marten's leather chair, and knocked it to the ground with her as she collapsed, unconscious.

Somehow, Indy managed to work his way back up even though he had the feeling that there wasn't a single bone left in his body that wasn't broken. But his fear for Joana once more gave him strength. As the Indian turned around and approached the unconscious girl, he leapt up, grabbed his shoulder, and twisted him around. Simultaneously, he hit him with all of the force he could muster.

The punch landed. But it didn't have the slightest effect- aside from a new explosion of harsh pain that ran through Indy's fist to his elbow and then up into his shoulder. The native blinked, looked at him for a moment with an unmoving expression- and then gave him a slap just like the one he had given Joana moments before.

And like her, Indy stumbled helplessly three, four, five steps back though the room before he tripped over something and fell. He still didn't lose consciousness, but he remained lying there, dazed, and was unable to move. He could hear the giant going back around the desk, knocking Marten's heavy chair aside so that it hit the wall and broke, crashing, and then kneeling down next to Joana. A grinding sound rang out. Fabric ripped.

Indy could no longer tell what happened next, because his senses now began to fade. He didn't really lose consciousness, but for several minutes he balanced on the thin line between fainting and being awake and couldn't truly tell what was going on around him.

As the gray spider webs over his thoughts were finally pulled away, he heard a quiet sob.

Sighing, he opened his eyes, pushed himself up, and put his face in his hands for a moment, groaning. He felt as if Attila's Huns had galloped over him. Twelve times. From twelve different directions. He wanted nothing but to lie on his side and suffer. But there was still this groaning and he suddenly realized that it was Joana, who may be injured and need his help.

With trouble, he got up, took an uncertain step, and had to hold onto the edge of the desk because he felt dizzy. Step by step, he dragged himself on until he had rounded the desk, and saw Joana lying on the ground.

She whimpered quietly. Her face was red and would probably be black and blue in another hour, and her left eye was beginning to swell shut. Her blouse was torn, and around her throat ran a thin red line. More staggering than walking, Indy dragged himself towards her, fell to his knees next to her, and raised her head.

She opened her eyes as she felt the touch, blinked- and quickly landed a fist on Indy's nose.

Indy fell hard to the ground and put his hand over his nose while Joana looked at him for a moment, completely irritated, before her gaze finally cleared.

At first, he saw nothing but terror in her eyes, then she recognized him, and her fearful whimpers finally became uncontrolled sobs. She stretched out her arm, grabbed onto him, and started to cry ceaselessly.

Indy didn't struggle against her embrace, but tried to turn his head to the side so as not to soak her blouse with the blood that ran from his nose.

"Are you okay?" asked Indy. Under the circumstances, this was a rather pointless question, but Joana nodded anyway as her tears soaked through Indy's shirt and Indy's blood left nasty flecks on her blouse.

He gave her a couple of moments to cry and fully recover from the worst of the terror, then he stood up, pulled her carefully up with him, and led her to the chair he had sat in before. He carefully placed her in it, sunk into a crouch in front of her, and lifted her face with his hands to study it. Her eye looked bad- she would have a wonderful shiner before an hour passed. But she seemed- at least outwardly- not to be seriously harmed.

"Is everything alright?" he asked again.

Joana hid her face between her hands and sobbed even louder. But she nodded, and after a couple of moments she took her hands away again and looked at him, terrified. "Who was that?" she asked.

Indy shrugged his shoulders. He had seen this man earlier that morning, but he knew who he was just as little as her, never mind why he had attacked them.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I saw him this morning, but I thought it was just chance.”

Joana looked at him, confused. “You too?”

“What do you mean, me too?” asked Indy, confused.

“I... saw him too,” said Joana. “He followed me through half of the city. I was afraid.”

Indy was silent for a moment. This could no longer be a coincidence. But he couldn’t bring enough sense to this puzzle.

His eyes once more moved over Joana’s torn blouse, and he cleared his throat in embarrassment. She might still be a child, but physically she was nearly a woman; and she wore neither an undershirt or a bra. “Your blouse...” he said.

Joana lifted her hand, shocked, in order to close her ripped blouse, and then she flinched again and reached for her neck. “My necklace!”

She jumped up, forgot about her torn-up blouse, and felt around her throat wildly for a moment with both hands. “My necklace is gone!” she yelled. “He stole my pendant!”

“What kind of pendant?”

“My father gave it to me!” said Joana. She was completely distraught. The loss of her necklace seemed to worry her more than what had happened a moment ago. “It was a thin golden chain with a pendant shaped like some Indian god. Quedsa...”

“Quetzalcoatl,” said Indy and placed his left hand into his pocket. Between his fingers he saw the small golden pendant that Greg had given him. “Quetzalcoatl,” he said again. “The Feathered Serpent.”

Joana’s eyes widened. She stretched her hand out to reach for the chain, but didn’t finish the movement. “That’s it. But how...?”

“That isn’t your necklace,” said Indy seriously. “This is the reason I’m here.”

Joana looked at him questioningly.

“But that must be it. I recognize it.”

Indy shook his head. “You had the same one?”

Joana nodded. Her gaze wandered, confused, between the small golden pendant and Indy's face, to and fro. "Yes, but why... I mean... how did you get it?"

"Your father gave it to me," answered Indy. "It was the last thing that he asked me to do. He gave it to me so I could bring it to you. This is the only reason I'm here."

"But why would he... do that?" wondered Joana. "I mean, if I already had the same pendant."

"I was wondering that too," said Indy. "But I'm also wondering why this guy came here just to take the necklace. And something else," he continued thoughtfully. "I was attacked last night as well. They knocked me out and searched my pockets, but they didn't steal anything. They only tore up my shirt."

Joana looked at him out of wide eyes. "You mean... sorry, you mean..."

"Calm down," said Indy. "Just take a moment."

Joana smiled and began again: "You mean that they were looking for this necklace?"

"Do you have a better explanation?" Indy replied.

Joana shook her head, but she didn't look very convinced. "But it's completely worthless," she said. "I mean, of course it's made of gold, but even that isn't so valuable."

"I don't think that he was looking for it for the gold," said Indy thoughtfully.

"But why then?"

"Why?"

Indy paused for a moment. Then he told her about his first meeting with a murderous giant with a Maya face; three years ago. "I didn't tell you this because I thought it was meaningless," he said. "But now... you know, the longer I think about it, the more certain I become that the Indian wanted the necklace, nothing else. He already had me. I mean, I was defenseless. He could have killed me had he wanted to. But then he suddenly lost all interest in me and turned to your father. It must... have something to do with this pendant."

Indy shrugged his shoulders, closed his hand around the pendant again, and dropped it into his pocket again after a brief hesitation. He thought about giving it to Joana or wearing it

around his own neck, but neither seemed advisable at the moment.

“I don’t know,” he said. “But I think I will pay the lovely Señora Pérez another visit.” For the next two hours, though, he had no chance to do so. Marten had called the police, and Indy and Joana had to tell the story of the attack and the fight with the Indian about a dozen times to a dozen different police officers. Before the police arrived, they had agreed on a story that left the two medallions unmentioned. Indy didn’t know exactly why, but he had the feeling that for now it would be better if he withheld this story, and Joana had immediately agreed. Maybe she felt the same way as him, maybe she was just still enough of a child that it gave her a feeling of adventure to hold back such an important detail.

So they had agreed on a version where the native just stormed in and tried to overpower Joana, and Indy had finally managed to send him running. A story that none of the police believed, judging by their expressions.

Nevertheless, for better or for worse, they had to be content with this version, as both Indy and Joana insisted on it, and after they had been told that firstly, they were expected at the police station in the afternoon to sign their statements, and secondly, they weren’t allowed to leave the city for the next forty-eight hours, they were allowed to leave.

Indy waved a taxi over and took Joana to the nearest department store, where he purchased a blouse for her. Then he escorted the girl back to the same taxi and gave the driver the address of the hotel in which Joana was staying. She protested this and insisted on accompanying him, but Indy wouldn’t budge on this. The incident from the night before and that which had happened now convinced him that this was no joke. The Indian wouldn’t have hesitated for a second to kill him had it been necessary. It was enough for one of them to be in danger.

He promised Joana to visit her later that day and tell her what he had found out, waited for the taxi to drive off, and then waved over another cab. Not even ten minutes later, he got out in front of José’s hotel and told the driver to wait for him.

The man behind the desk looked up in astonishment as Indy came over to him for the second time that day. “Dr. Jones? Can I do something for you?”

Indy nodded, looked uncertainly to the right and left, and asked in a low voice: “Has the room where Señor Pérez and his wife were staying been cleaned yet?”

Confused, the man shook his head. “Not yet.”

“That’s good,” said Indy, placing ten dollars on the desk this time. “You know, it would be very important for me if I could take a look inside.”

The man took the ten dollars and stared at him with a fixed expression. “That is a very unusual request, Dr. Jones.”

Indy pushed another ten dollars towards him. “I know. But you know, Señor Pérez and I are good friends. We have unfortunately missed each other, and I don’t know where he went. Maybe he left something behind that can help me.”

The man still paused. His gaze briefly and greedily moved over the pocket from which Indy had pulled both of the ten dollar bills, and Indy did him the favor of pulling out a third ten, but this one he kept. “I’m not planning on damaging or stealing anything,” he said. “If you want to, you can come with me. I just want to look around.” For a few seconds, the expression in the man’s eyes shifted between sense of duty and greed, but to Indy’s relief, greed gained the upper hand. He turned around, took a room key off of the hook, and came out from behind the desk.

They took the elevator to the third floor, where the porter looked around briefly again before he pushed open the door to the room at the very end of the corridor and allowed Indy past him with an inviting gesture. Indy slipped him the ten dollar bill and the man was tactful enough to take it and declare: “I will leave the key with you. Please close the door and bring it back to me when you are finished, Dr. Jones.”

Indy closed the door behind him with a grateful nod and turned around.

The hotel room was surprisingly large and bright. Through a window that took up nearly the entire south wall streamed in bright sunlight. The furnishings were very economical, but of high quality.

And it was completely empty.

Indy fought back the feeling of disappointment that overcame him at the sight of this completely clean room, turned around in a circle, and looked around the room attentively before he began to thoroughly search it.

He opened every drawer, pulled the sheets back, even looked beneath the bed, and finally went into the small bathroom to look around thoroughly there.

But he found nothing, and his disappointment grew. Pérez seemed either to have suspected that his room would be thoroughly searched, or he was an orderly person- which didn't seem to fit at all with the José who Indy knew. He didn't even find the tiniest evidence of his presence, no note, no scribbled letters, no forgotten bit of paper- nothing. If the hotel porter hadn't lied and the room hadn't already been cleaned, then Pérez must have hidden every tiny trace of his presence. And that would mean that he had a reason to hide his tracks. A very good reason.

But maybe there was still something.

Indy's gaze fell on the notepad that lay on one of the two nightstands, and on the pencil next to it. On the other night table also lay a notepad with fine, white paper and a pencil. But this pencil was sharper. Obviously it hadn't been used, but the other had been.

Indy was suddenly excited, went over to the bed, and threw a glance at the notepad. The top sheet had obviously been written on and torn off, but if one looked very closely, they could see the impression that the pencil had left behind on the next sheet. Indy grinned down at it. If that old trick that Conan Doyle had tested out through Sherlock Holmes didn't work, he thought, then his name wasn't Indiana Jones. Maybe the oh so careful José had made a mistake.

Indy stretched out his hand towards the pencil, moved it carefully over the sheet, and leaned forward, and almost simultaneously he heard something crash through the window pane and whistle by so close to his neck that he could feel the breeze, before it hit the wall over the bed with a dull slap.

Indy instinctively dropped to the side.

Holding his breath, he waited for something to happen- a second projectile fired at him or someone entering or anything at all.

But everything remained silent.

Nevertheless, he remained lying there, pressed against the ground, for over a minute, and only then risked lifting his head to study the shattered window.

From his point of view, he could see nothing but the sky. The shot must have been fired from one of the nearby buildings. From there or from a roof.

Indy turned his head carefully and studied what had nearly hit him. It was a tiny dart, barely longer than a finger, with three red-green feathers at the back. It wasn't much thicker than a sewing needle. But Indy found that it looked somehow evil.

Slowly he crawled around the bed, worked his way over to the window on hands and knees, and carefully raised himself up onto the radiator. He expected that he would need to return to cover at any moment, but still, nothing happened.

Finally, he dared to carefully raise his head out of cover and look at the building opposite him.

It was a hotel like the one he was currently in. Most of the big buildings on this street were hotels or stores. Several of the windows opposite Indy were open, but he couldn't make out anything there. If the malicious marksman was standing there, waiting for him, then he had camouflaged himself well.

Indy crawled back to the nightstand, carefully lifted his hand, and pulled the notepad down. Then he worked himself centimeter by centimeter up onto the bed with taut nerves, ready at any time to throw himself quickly back into cover. He carefully stretched up his hand and pulled the dart out of the wall.

It had been stuck into the plaster with so much force that Indy couldn't completely get it out, and in the end he broke it. It was probably better this way, he thought. That thing was certainly poisoned.

He placed the broken dart in his right hand and the folded-up top page in his left and crawled again on his knees and elbows to the door. And even then he didn't get up, instead just raised his arm quickly, turned the handle, and crawled out into the hallway

before he dared to stand up and hastily close the door behind himself. On the other side, something hit the door with a dull thud, and he congratulated himself on his caution. Bad luck, my friend, he thought.

With an audible sigh of relief, Indy turned the key, pulled it out, and dropped it into his pocket.

As he turned around, he realized that he wasn't alone. An old married couple had stepped out of one of the rooms in the hall and looked at him with wide eyes.

Indy smiled crookedly, tipped his hat in greeting, and went to the elevator with quick steps. The two old people looked at him, stunned, and he said with a smile: "It's a very small room, don't you know? I asked about it, but somehow they must have misunderstood."

The old man's eyes grew so big and round with astonishment that it seemed as if they would fall out at any moment, and his wife's jaw dropped. Indy smiled once again in parting and hurried to step into the elevator. The two made no attempt to follow him, even though the doors closed very slowly.

Indy's smile vanished as soon as the elevator began to move. It didn't take too much imagination to figure out who had shot this dart at him. Thoughtfully, he turned to the broken dart he had pulled out of the wall of the hotel room in his hand.

It was no normal dart, but one of those needle thin, nearly always poisoned projectiles that South American Indians shot from their blow dart guns.

South American Indians just like the one who he had met that morning in the bank. The same that, little more than two hours ago, had tried to cut him in half with a machete.

Indy couldn't explain why, but he had no doubts: Someone was trying to kill him. And they weren't very particular in their choice of methods. But very imaginative...

He stepped out of the elevator and walked quickly over to the reception desk. As he did so, his gaze wandered through the room. It was no longer as empty as it had been in the morning. Two, three couples sat around the small tables and talked quietly; in the chaise lounge that Anita had sat in that morning now sat a gray-haired man who studied the newspaper attentively, and near

the door slumped a ragged man who had the look of a thief, perhaps waiting for someone to come out who would give him a penny for carrying their suitcases to a taxi. Or steal them, whichever.

“Is everything okay, Dr. Jones?” asked the hotel porter as he placed the key on the desk.

Indy nodded. “Yes. Why do you ask?”

The man seemed embarrassed and smiled briefly and not particularly genuinely. “You look a little pale,” he said.

“That’s just from disappointment,” he lied. “I unfortunately found nothing. My friend is a very organized man, you must know.”

“If you tell me what you were looking for...”

Indy hesitated. The man was a bit too curious for his tastes. But maybe he was just starting to see ghosts. Especially after what had happened. “Actually, it was nothing in particular,” he admitted. “As I said, I absolutely must speak with Señor Pérez. I thought he may have left behind some hint, but the room is completely empty.”

The porter hesitated for a moment while a thoughtful expression spread across his face. “Maybe there is still one chance,” he said.

Indy was listening now. “Yes?”

“Like I said,” began the porter, “I wasn’t on my shift yet, but I know from one of my colleagues that Señor Pérez left in a taxi. And I know all of the drivers who park on this street. I can speak with them.”

“That would be fantastic,” said Indy. His hand crawled back into his pocket, then he realized that this was the best way to ruin the prize, and pulled it out again, empty. The porter seemed a bit disappointed, but he didn’t comment on it.

“Perhaps you should do that,” said Indy. “I’ll come back later and see what you found out. It won’t be without advantages for you.”

Then he left the hotel with quick steps, crossed the street, and stepped into the building next to the hotel from where the unknown marksman must have shot at him. It wasn’t that he held

a grudge- but he did want to ask the Indian a question or two. For example, why he was always trying to kill him...

This hotel was considerably larger and more expensive than the one that Peréz had stayed in. Behind the reception desk stood three porters who looked extremely official in their fantastic gold-trimmed uniforms; and certainly not the type to willingly tell Indy something or give up information for a bit of money like their colleague next door.

Indy went to the counter, chose the oldest of the three men there- a tall figure with graying temples and the face of a bad-tempered bulldog- and tried to seem as helpless as possible.

“Excuse me,” he began.

The porter measured him with a quick, calculating glance and the result seemed not to be too positive, but he conjured up a professional smile and approached. “Can I help you, Sir?”

“I hope that you can,” answered Indy. “You know, I have a slight problem.”

“And that is?”

“Well, it’s a little delicate.” Indy cleared his throat. “Can I rely on your confidentiality?”

The porter seemed simultaneously offended and flattered. “Naturally, Sir,” he said.

Indy sighed exaggeratedly and lowered his voice to a quiet whisper. “You see, this is what happened: Last night, I was with a few friends in a certain... establishment, if you understand what I mean.”

He grinned, embarrassed, and the porter answered his words with a dutiful smile and a pointed nod, while his eyes studied Indy with clear contempt.

“Well,” he continued. “And as it usually is, I was amusing myself with several of the women there and spent a bit too much money. In the end, I didn’t have enough money left to pay the bill at the bar.”

“That was certainly very unpleasant, Sir,” said the porter, and his gaze added silently: And what the hell do I have to do with this?

“Now, I was somewhat lucky,” continued Indy. “A stranger was kind enough to help me out with a few dollars. A man who I

had never seen before, just imagine that. There truly is camaraderie among man. He gave me his name, but unfortunately I forgot it.” He smiled again, and this time he didn’t have to make an effort to look embarrassed. It was real now. The story he had told this poor man was completely outrageous. But he knew from experience that one sometimes got much farther with crazy stories than those that were more believable.

“You know, I had a little bit too much to drink there and just can’t remember his name. But he said that he was staying in this hotel, and you must know him if I describe him to you. He is very tall, probably over two meters, and as broad-shouldered as a prizefighter. I think that he was a Mexican or something.”

“You mean Señor Guzman,” guessed the porter. “Yes, he has been staying here for a couple of days.” He turned around and threw a glance at the key board behind him. “He is in his room. If you would like, I will send a page boy to take him the money.”

Indy waved this aside hastily. “That isn’t necessary,” he said. “I really want to thank him myself. Maybe you can just tell me which room I can find him in, and I’ll just go up.”

His words seemed not to make the porter that enthusiastic, and mistrust flickered in his eyes. Indy hurried to add: “Or the page can go up there with me. Maybe that would be better, before I get lost in this massive building.”

The porter paused again, but then he waved over a young boy in a beige and blue uniform, and a moment later Indy stepped into the elevator along with him and went up to the fifth floor.

He gave the young boy a tip, prompting him to give the Indian’s room number and discreetly stay behind when the elevator stopped and the doors slid open. To his relief, this floor of the hotel was empty. From behind several of the doors rang muffled voices, but he saw no one as he approached the room with the number 538 and stopped in front of the door. For a moment, he paused. It was very likely that the Indian wasn’t there. He must have seen that his attack had failed and had either left- or lay in wait here somewhere because he had watched as Indy left the other hotel and entered this one.

He knocked.

No one answered.

He knocked again, counted to five in his head, and then turned the door handle slowly down.

The door wasn't locked. Indy opened it carefully, looked around with a quick glance to convince himself that no one was standing behind the door, waiting for him, and then slipped inside.

The room resembled José's, but was considerably bigger and more comfortable-looking- and just as empty. As if the Indian had known that Indy would turn up here and search for clues and had wanted to spare him the trouble, all of the closet doors and drawers were open, allowing a view of the empty boards within. The window was open, and as Indy went over to it, he could see that it really did have an outstanding view of the hotel next door and José's room. He could even see the tiny hole that the dart had left in the window.

He shuddered. Had he not by a mere chance bent down at the right moment, then one would now see more than an empty room through this window: On the bed would be a curled up, dead figure with a blue-tinted face.

He searched the room just as thoroughly as he had José's. But the result was much poorer. He found nothing here in the cabinets and drawers, and this alleged Señor Guzman wasn't kind enough to leave him a note on a torn-off piece of paper. The room was as empty as if it had never been inhabited.

Disappointed, he left the room and went back to the elevator. The cab wasn't there. Indy pushed the red button and took a couple of steps back as the elevator came up a moment later. The doors slid open. Indy halfway expected to see the boy who had brought him up, but the elevator was empty. He stepped inside, pushed the button for the ground floor, and leaned against the wall with his arms folded across his chest as the doors closed again and the elevator started to move, rattling.

Indy's gaze slid over the lighted numbers above the door. The glowing yellow five went out, was replaced by the four, then the three- and then the elevator came to a stop between the third and second floors with such a hard jerk that Indy was nearly knocked off his feet and was only able to hold onto the wall at the last moment.

Cursing, he got up, looked around helplessly for a moment, and then pushed the button for the ground floor over and over. Each time, there was a loud ringing sound, but that was all: The elevator didn't move.

Indy cursed, unrestrained. This was really what his day had been missing: Getting stuck in a damn elevator and having to wait hours for a mechanic to come free him!

Well, at least he didn't have to worry while he waited. Suddenly, from the roof of the elevator cab rang a dull crash, and only a moment later a camouflaged hatch opened directly above Indy's head, and a dark-skinned man, face framed by glimmering, blue-black hair, looked in at him. The expression he saw wasn't especially friendly...

Indy expected the movement more than he really saw it. Completely instinctively he fell to the side, pulled his knees up to his body, and tried to get back to his feet with a roll, although this was very hard to do in the confinement of an elevator cab. But at any rate, this movement took him out of the flight path of the small axe that the Indian hurled at him with astonishing precision; and with just as astonishing strength, as the blade of the axe continued into the wooden back wall and stuck there, shaking.

An angry growl rang out as Indy tried to get his legs out of a knot and work his way back up onto his feet. He did manage it, but even before he could turn around, another dull crash rang out, and this time the entire cab shook beneath giant feet. As he finished his turn, he found himself looking directly at the Indian's Adam's apple, as he prepared to do with his bare hands what he had begun with blowdarts and throwing axes.

Indy ducked down beneath a hail of blows and punches, and the only reason that he wasn't immediately knocked out was that the elevator simply wasn't large enough for the Indian to truly maneuver his long arms. Nevertheless, he stumbled against the wall and took two, three hard blows to his chest and face that knocked the air from his lungs and, not for the first time that day, bright stars danced before his eyes. Helplessly he lifted his hands and tried to at least protect his face from the worst of the blows.

With an angry growl, the native grabbed him by the collar and dragged him into the air so that Indy's feet suddenly swung twenty centimeters above the ground. Then he pulled back and smashed his helpless victim with all of his might against the closed elevator doors. And Indy mobilized his last bit of strength to pull his right knee up and ram his attacker where even a two-and-a-half-meter tall Maya warrior was especially sensitive.

The Indian's eyes widened. A screeching, nearly ridiculous tone came over his lips, and his tanned face lost all trace of color. He stumbled, took two, three troubled steps back- all without letting go of Indy- hit the back wall of the cabin, and began to fall to his knees in slow motion.

Indy's feet finally rested on solid ground again. With a heavy jerk, he broke the Indian's grip, raised both of his arms, and slapped the giant's ears with both hands.

The native roared in pain, threw his head back, and reached for his forehead, and the posture in which he crouched for half a second, motionless, gasping for breath, was too tempting for Indy to resist the invitation: He smashed his fist into the giant's throat, quickly sprang back a step, and aimed three, four, five fast, powerful punches at his stomach.

The Indian folded up like a two-meter-tall pocket knife, and Indy raised his knee to strike a second time. He kicked the Maya's face with all his might, and, a second later, his head hit the cab wall for a second time with massive force.

And this was too much, even for this giant.

The Maya closed his eyes, made that same screeching sound once more, and slumped down.

Gasping for breath, Indy took a step back and looked around. The Maya was unconscious, but Indy wasn't completely convinced that this condition would last for too long. He had hit him with all of his strength, but the Indian had the strength of ten men; and Indy could easily think of 24,000 other places he would rather be than this elevator cab when he woke up.

He spared himself the trouble of pushing the button again, instead leaned his head back and looked up at the open hatch that the native had jumped in through. He stood up on tiptoe and stretched his arms out, but he wasn't tall enough: The edges of

the hatch were still a good twenty centimeters away from his outstretched fingers. Indy bounced two, three times on his knees, gathered all of his strength, and pushed off.

The first time, he missed it, but on his second attempt his left hand fastened onto the edge of the hatch, and a moment later, the other did as well. With clenched teeth, he pulled himself up, kicked his legs wildly to find some type of support, and stepped on something soft, yielding, that reacted to the rough treatment with a furious growl.

Indy's heart made a terrified leap. The Indian was awake again!

The mere thought gave him enough strength to pull himself up onto the roof of the elevator cab with a single jerk. He hastily crawled a bit away from the hatch, pressed his shoulder against one of the massive pulley wheels that held the giant steel cables from which the elevator hung, and heard a series of crashing, scraping noises from the elevator cab. The Indian's hand appeared in the hatch. He was so tall that he didn't even need to jump to grab on.

Indy cursed, sprang to his feet, searched for a handhold on the steel cable next to him with his right hand, and kicked with all his might. A crunching sound rang out as he stepped on the Indian's finger with his heel, but the Maya let out a scream more furious than pained.

The hand vanished from the opening. Indy pulled back, kicked once more and with even greater force at the other hand, and watched, satisfied, as the native pulled it back.

But his triumph lasted only for a second. Suddenly the ground beneath him seemed to explode, and in the violently created, jagged opening appeared a balled fist that was nearly as big as Indy's head. Indy cried out in shock, made a hurried hop to the side, and gripped the steel rope with both hands. The ground beneath him shattered again, and the Indian's second hand also broke through the cab's roof as easily as if it were made out of cardboard, not inch-thick oak.

With desperate haste, Indy began to climb up. The steel rope was thick and oily and covered with a million tiny, sharp threads that cut into his skin. But pure fear of death gave him superhuman

strength for a moment. Quickly and with a skill that he didn't normally possess, he climbed the slippery steel rope and quickly moved away from the cab.

His gaze scanned the impenetrable darkness of the elevator shaft. If he managed to reach the next floor, then perhaps he could open the door from the inside.

He didn't make it.

Indy was only about two meters away from the door when such a jerk suddenly ran through the steel cable that he nearly lost his grip. With a desperate movement, he clung tight and looked down.

The Indian had climbed up onto what remained of the elevator's ceiling. He looked at Indy out of wickedly glittering eyes. With his left hand, he pulled at the cable Indy clung to, tightening it constantly, then letting go, like the strings of an oversized, steel-stringed harp. With every single jerk, Indy found it harder to hold on. Only three, four more times, he guessed, and he would lose his hold and fall down. Not very far, maybe five or six meters, but if the collision with the car's ceiling didn't break all of his bones, the Maya would take care of the rest.

But obviously this wasn't fast enough for his opponent. Because suddenly he stopped tugging at the cable and pulled something out of his belt: The axe he had thrown at Indy.

Indy eyes widened, horrified, as he saw the native holding the short-handled throwing axe with both hands, then smashing the blade against the steel cable with all his might.

The cable tore. For a moment, Indy had the terrible feeling that he was hanging weightless in space as the cut cable started to run through the pulley system five or six floors above him at the roof of the hotel. And for a precious half second, he clung to the useless rope with all of his might. But at the last moment, as he was nearly starting to fall, he whirled around and grabbed one of the other cables.

The jerk seemed to tear his body in half. The steel rope tore his hand up, and the cable was suddenly slippery with Indy's blood. But he ignored the pain, clenched his teeth together, and clung tight with all his might.

For about forty-five seconds.

This was how long it took for the native to evade the falling steel cable, find firm footing again, and swing his axe for a second time.

This time, Indy immediately grabbed for another rope.

The rope he had just been hanging onto also broke with a whip-like crack, and a second later, a sound rang out from above, whistling and constantly growing louder. Indy looked up, and then pulled his head back, shocked, as he saw the whirring cable coming towards him through the shaft like a steel whip.

The Indian beneath him threw himself to safety with a frightened movement so as not to be struck by the steel cable, and Indy used the short break to climb up another meter. His hands hurt terribly. He barely had any strength left, and his torn-up fingers now bled so heavily that the steel cable became even slipperier. Nevertheless, he forced himself to continue climbing, hand over hand. The elevator now hung from only two of the original four cables, and the moment was approaching in which the weight would simply snap the two remaining; although he wouldn't put it past this madman to cut the third cable too.

As if he had just been waiting for this thought, the Indian did exactly that. Indy grabbed with an almost desperate movement for the last cable, gaining another half meter in the process, and twisted around as the third cable also fell from the ceiling. This time, he didn't completely escape it. The cable hit him and tore his left pant leg from his hip to the top of his boot, but, as if by a miracle, didn't even touch the skin beneath.

Indy looked down. The elevator now hung on only a single cable. He thought that he could feel a slight shudder, but he wasn't sure, and he also didn't waste any time trying to figure out if he had been right, because in that moment, the Maya straightened up again, looked briefly up at him, and bent down to pick up his axe, which he had dropped.

Indy stared at him, stunned. For several seconds, he refused to believe what he was seeing. What that guy down there was doing was suicide.

"Leave it alone, you idiot!" he roared.

The Maya really hesitated for a moment. He tilted his head, looked up at him, and started a movement as if to throw his axe,

but he didn't follow through, instead suddenly grinned, pushed the axe into his belt, and begin to climb the steel rope with nearly ape-like skill.

Indy cursed and doubled his efforts to reach the door. The Indian moved astonishingly fast and with a skill that one didn't expect from someone of his size and weight. But Indy had a lead of five or six meters. The closed door to the next floor was now nearly within reach. With clenched teeth, he climbed on, wrapped his legs around the steel cable, and searched with his left hand for a sure hold, then he stretched his right arm out and felt for the trace of a gap between the two halves of the door.

He broke three fingernails before he saw that this wouldn't work. Hastily, he looked down. The Indian was no more than an arm's length away from him. He climbed up the steel cable with such natural calm as if he had done nothing but this for his entire life.

Indy decided to go for broke. As the Maya stretched out his hand to grab his feet, he simply tipped to the side with outstretched arms. For a short moment, it looked as if he would fall. But at the very last moment, his fingers found hold on a small cement step beneath the door. With all of his strength, he clung tight to it, clenched his teeth again as his knee painfully hit the wall of the shaft, and pulled himself up centimeter by centimeter. The native behind him growled in disappointment, but, of course, he didn't give up.

Just the opposite: He took his hands and a foot from the rope and tried to hit Indy with the other fist. In spite of his enormously long arms and the close quarters, he couldn't quite reach him. His fingers only lightly touched Indy's back, and he pulled his hand back with a disappointed sound. But not to finally give up, which Indy realized a fraction of a second later, terrified, but to pull his axe from his belt so that he could lengthen his range by twenty centimeters and finally finish him off.

Indy ducked desperately as the axe hissed towards him and came a finger-width from his cheek, sparking on the stone. He hastily worked to get a bit more to the right, but the native matched the movement, swung over to him like Tarzan on a vine, hanging on with only one arm and foot, and swung at him with

the axe for a second time. The axe blade splintered the wood of the door a hand-length above Indy and stuck there. The Maya started to furiously tug at the handle of his weapon, and Indy risked everything again and removed his right hand from the small concrete step.

With all of his might, he smashed the edge of his hand into the Maya's wrists. The Maya roared in pain and opened his hand. Hastily, Indy grabbed the axe.

He swung it, not looking back at the Indian and not thinking about the chasm that lurked beneath him, just swinging the axe with all of his strength and letting it crash against the gap in the door.

It was probably pure chance that he hit it; but the blade hit directly between the two halves of the door and widened the hair-thin crack into a finger-width gap. Indy gripped it with both hands, squeezed and pulled and pushed until the doors slid back open with resistance, and finally, he got an arm through the gap. Now he had a lever that he could push at with all of his might. Grinding, the two halves of the door slid apart, and Indy took a stumbling step out into the corridor. The axe fell to the ground next to him with a crash.

As he moved to take a second step, he stumbled, then a hand wrapped around his ankle and held onto it with relentless strength.

Indy twisted around, kicked out blindly, and saw that the Indian was, like him, risking everything, and had simply thrown himself forward. His left hand gripped the piece of cement that Indy had also found a handhold on, while his right hand held Indy's ankle with the strength of a vice and slowly, but relentlessly tried to pull him back into the shaft.

Indy dug his hands into the carpet and kicked out with his free foot. Three, four, five times, one after another he hit the Indian's face. His lip split open, and now blood flowed from his nose, but he didn't give up. Just the opposite; the pain seemed only to make him more furious. Harder and harder, he pulled and tugged at Indy's foot so that he was pulled back towards the elevator shaft.

At once his gaze fell on the axe that lay on the carpet. Without really thinking, he grabbed it, turned around, and swung the blunt end angrily at the hand that clung to his foot.

The Indian howled in pain, let go of Indy's foot, and hung for a moment over the abyss by just the fingertips of his left hand: Just long enough for Indy to get back up onto his knees and smash the dull end of the axe onto his fingers for a second time.

With a gasping scream, the native tipped backwards and vanished into the depths. Indy leaned forward to see what happened. The Maya fell like a rock, collided with the only remaining steel cable of the elevator cab halfway down, and hit the roof with the same force so that he simply broke through it. A fraction of a second later, a ringing scream rang out, and then a long-lasting splintering and crashing and breaking from inside of the elevator cab. And suddenly, the floor of the elevator also vanished. A jagged hole gaped where the Indian should have been...

The elevator shook. The last steel cable started to unravel like a tendon, and for a moment Indy seriously expected it to tear and the entire cab to fall. But as if by a miracle, the cable continued to hold the elevator in place, despite its weight.

Indy straightened up, rested his hands on his knees, and breathed very deeply, in and out, gasping. Everything spun around him. His hands burned like fire, and the muscles in his arms felt like overstretched rubber bands. The fact that he was still alive was simply luck. The Indian may have the strength of an ox, but also the brains of one. Had it been any different, Indy would have barely had any chance of escaping him.

He stood up, then bent back down to pick up the small axe and turned it thoughtfully in his hand for a moment. It was no native weapon, but a completely normal axe with a short handle, like one could find in any iron ware shop. Disappointed, he shrugged his shoulders and threw it into the elevator shaft.

The axe collided, clinking, with the shattered roof of the elevator and bounced off of it like a ricochet, and in the same moment, there came a grinding, cracking sound, the loud squeak of iron, and the screech of strained rivets and screw joints. Indy had just enough time to take a horrified step back as the last steel

cable gave way and the torn end flew through the shaft like a steel whip and tore deep gashes in the stone. With a massive crashing and cracking, the elevator car started to fall through the shaft, where it constantly collided with the wall and already started to lose many of its various parts. Then there was a last monstrous crash that seemed to shake the entire hotel to its foundations.

Now that everything was over, Indy's hands and knees suddenly began to shake. He was bathed in sweat, and in the palms of his hands suddenly awakened pounding, burning pain that reminded him that he had treated them much too roughly. He reached into his jacket, pulled out his handkerchief with his fingertips, and started to blot at the mixture of blood and oil on his hands with teeth clenched. The pain brought tears to his eyes, and he was making it worse rather than better, so he gave up after a few moments and threw the balled-up handkerchief down the elevator shaft. Then he looked to both sides- it seemed incredible, but no one on this floor seemed to have noticed the hellish noise- and turned to the stairs. Understandably, he wasn't eager to take the second elevator at the moment.

The noise hit him as soon as he reached the second floor, and in the reception area, he noticed a large crowd of people pressed around the open doors of one of the two elevators. Quickly, but not so fast that his haste would draw attention, he crossed the hall, turned his head dutifully to look for the reason for the excitement with acted curiosity, and approached the doorway discreetly. A couple of the people who were gathered around the elevator doors looked at him in astonishment. Naturally he stood out in his torn up, blood and oil soaked clothes. But obviously what had happened in the elevator was more interesting than a man with torn pants and bloody hands, because no one really took notice of him, and Indy took this opportunity to continue on faster and approach the exit. But then, he stopped again. In the excited confusion of voices and screams, something had suddenly changed. Suddenly, the crowd stepped back in surprise and created a gap through which Indy could see the elevator door.

That- and the gigantic, bloody hand that clung to the threshold!

Suddenly, he was in quite a hurry to leave the hotel. Without looking to the right or left, he crossed the street and went over to the taxi stand on the opposite corner, as suddenly the glass doors of José's hotel opened and an excited porter came out and waved to him.

"Dr. Jones!"

Indy rolled his eyes, but he could see that, if he didn't stop, the man would just yell louder and end up bringing his pursuers back onto his trail. Resigned, he turned around.

The porter ran to him with long strides and stopped in front of him, breathing heavily. "Dr. Jones! I have your information."

At first, Indy didn't even know what the man meant. Then he realized: The taxi.

"Good," he said, and reached into his pocket. The porter's eyes followed the gesture. His expression turned surprised as he saw Indy's wounded, bloody hand and noticed the terrible condition of his clothing. But the greedy glimmer in his eyes didn't get any weaker.

Wordlessly he waited for Indy to hand him a ten-dollar bill, stuck it into his pocket despite the oil and blood, and said: "Señor Pérez went to the harbor this morning. He was in quite a hurry."

"And is that all?" asked Indy, disappointed.

The porter nodded, but he continued to smile. "That isn't so bad," he said. "I talked to the taxi driver, you must know. Señor Pérez offered him a large tip if he could reach the harbor by seven."

Indy understood. He could only think of one reason for this haste: Namely that José had to catch a ship that left at seven. At least he hoped so; because if not, then he had lost his only lead in these less and less comprehensible events just as quickly as he had found it.

He thanked the man with a nod and turned to leave, but the porter held him back again. "I already told your assistant about all of this," he said.

Indy stopped as if he had been struck by lightning. "My what?" he asked in disbelief.

"Your assistant," repeated the porter. "That was okay, wasn't it?"

Indy raised his eyebrows. “A young woman?” he asked. “Seventeen or eighteen, with short blond hair?”

The porter’s face lit up. “That was her, then,” he said.

“How long ago was that?” asked Indy.

“Not very long. Five minutes at the most. She got right into a taxi and went to the harbor.”

Indy cursed under his breath, turned on the spot, and ran as fast as he could to the corner. Indiscriminately, he threw himself into the first taxi and yelled “To the harbor!!!” even before he had completely closed the door behind himself. “And fast!” he added in the same tone.

Which he regretted barely a second later. The taxi driver stepped on the gas pedal so recklessly that Indy was thrown back and pressed into the upholstery as the Ford shot off with screeching tires.

With trouble, he pulled himself back up, threw the man behind the steering wheel a sideways glance, and balled his bloody hands into fists so that he couldn’t see them.

“On the run, or after someone?” asked the taxi driver, smirking. Indy threw him a hostile glance and spared himself answering, but the man wouldn’t give up so easily:

“I only ask because everyone seems to be in a hurry today,” he continued. “The girl who just got into the car with the Spaniard...”

Indy sat bolt upright. “What girl?!”

The taxi driver shrugged his shoulders and turned into a side street, tires screeching. A pedestrian made a horrified leap to safety and sent a wave of curses after the car, but the man didn’t seem to notice. “A young thing,” he answered, shrugging. “Sixteen, maybe eighteen years old. Seemed to be in a damn hurry.”

“Thin? Blond?” Indy inquired.

The man nodded. “That’s right. Do you know her? Are you following her? Or the lad she was with?”

Indy looked at him questioningly.

“Such a giant man,” said the driver. “Must have been Mexican or Spanish or something like that.”

“Around two meters tall? Black hair and a tailored suit?” asked Indy with a pounding heart.

A new nod. “That’s him. And he walked as if he were stepping on eggshells.”

Indy sunk back in his seat and closed his eyes. For a moment he had the feeling that the ground beneath his feet was gone. Something here didn’t fit. The Indian couldn’t be in two places at once. Aside from the fact that his tailored suit certainly no longer looked like a tailored suit...

“Are you sure that they went to the harbor?” he asked.

“One hundred percent. I was furious, you know? It should have been my fare.” The taxi driver made a clarifying hand gesture and let the car skid around the next corner on two wheels, as Indy clung desperately to the door handle. “That’s the way it works for us in that row. The first in the row takes the first passenger, the second the second, and so on,” said the driver. “But that big oaf leapt into the car behind mine and offered the man a ten, and off they went.”

Indy understood.

Grinding his teeth, he reached into his pocket and pulled out another bill. “You’ll get a ten from me too,” he said, “if you catch up with your colleague.” The driver grinned and floored the gas pedal, and Indy added hastily: “And another ten if we make it there alive.”

They made it. Indy didn’t know how, but they got to the harbor alive and nearly unscathed. He stopped keeping track at some point, but before he stopped, he counted about twenty-four traffic violations and at least seven, probably eight or nine situations in which they were in actual danger- not counting those that he didn’t notice. But the gods seemed to be on his side that day, at least as far as this drive went. Not even ten minutes later, the car stopped with screeching brakes near the harbor entrance and Indy stumbled out with shaking knees and a green tinge to his face.

He wasted a valuable two minutes searching for a bathroom and washing at least the worst of the muck off of his hands. Then he asked the first person he met for the location of the harbor

master's office and rushed up the three steps. He ran through the door without knocking- and then stopped in his tracks.

The room offered a sight of almost complete destruction. Most of the chairs and a desk had been smashed, and one of the big file cabinets had been overturned so that its contents covered the entire room; thousands of white sheets with tiny writing, creating an unholy chaos over the ground, on the furniture, and even in the shutters. In the middle of this chaos crouched a small, gray haired man in a white shirt, vest, and oversleeves who held his head, groaning, as his nose bled. A second man, clothed in the same way but without the gray hair, his face pale from shock, crouched near him on his knees and felt his incisors gently as if he wasn't sure that they were still there.

As Indy rushed in, both looked up, and on the face of the gray-haired man was an expression of deep terror, which, after a few seconds, changed to one of cautious relief.

"What happened here?" asked Indy- although he thought he knew the answer already.

"A crazy man," murmured the younger man. "Stormed in here and just smashed everything because he wanted information."

"A giant man with black hair, dragging a girl along with him?" asked Indy.

The terror in the gray-haired man's face flared back up, and the other man also looked at him with more distrust than surprise. "That's him," he said. "How did you know that?"

"I also need some information," answered Indy, ignoring the man's question. "This morning, a friend of mine left on a ship. I need to know what it's called and where it's going."

"Oh no," groaned the younger man, "not again." Indy looked at him, confused.

"It's the Santa Roga," he said very hastily. "It left for Cuba five minutes after seven."

"But we really shouldn't tell you..."

Indy looked at the gray-haired man threateningly, and the man stopped in the middle of the sentence.

"Fine," he said. "If that's all you want..."

"What pier did it leave from?" asked Indy.

“Twenty-seven,” answered the gray-haired man hastily. “And before you ask, the next ship in that direction leaves in four days.”

Indy thanked him with the friendliest smile that he could muster, turned around on the spot, and left the office. As quietly as he could, he closed the door behind himself and went with measured steps down the stairs so that he didn't stand out- and then ran. The words of the taxi driver and, most of all, the condition of the office and its two unfortunate inhabitants, meant that Joana and the Indian could only have a few minutes' head start. Had they already left the harbor again, then he would have seen them, because there was only the one street that the taxi driver had brought him down.

And anyway, he had damn little time. The two men inside would sooner or later recover from their shock and do the only logical thing, namely alert the police, and Indy had no desire to answer another few dozen curious questions; or simply be locked up under suspicions, which, after everything that had happened in his presence over the past 24 hours, would be the most likely reaction from the police.

He ran away from the building, turned right at the harbor, and looked around as he went without slowing. Pier 27- that was almost the other end of the harbor. If Joana and the native were on their way there, then he had a good chance of catching up with them. Although he didn't know Joana very well, he just couldn't picture Swanson's daughter just being dragged along without resistance.

Unless, whispered a thin, wicked voice in his head, she was working with them. After all, he had no proof that the attack in Marten's office had been directed at Joana and not him. After all, the Indian had tried twice to kill him, not her.

He banished these thoughts and continued on faster, ignoring the irritated looks thrown at him by the harbor workers and passengers. Indy was completely clear about the fact that he must stand out. His clothing was completely torn-up and coated with dirt and blood, and the expression on his face was probably anything but cheerful.

He approached the quay wall and with it the first pier, threw a quick glance around, and rushed on. He deflated as he saw how many ships lay in the harbor. There were only three or four really big ones, but there were dozens, if not hundreds of small yachts, barges, and motor and rowboats, and in every single one, the Indian and Joana could hide easily and he could just run right past them.

But he had no other choice than to continue blindly searching. If he lost Joana, then everything was over. Cuba was large, definitely too large for him to track down a single Indian there, especially if the man didn't want to be found.

But this time, he was in luck. He ran a few hundred meters, and he was already starting to get short of breath, when he suddenly stopped. He saw Joana and the giant, black-haired native.

They were in a small rowboat that was leaving the pier at that moment, not very far away from Indy. Joana lay slumped over in the bow of the ship- the Indian had probably tied her up or knocked her unconscious- while the Maya rowed so that the small ship moved with nearly the speed of a motorboat. Indy tried to follow out its course in his head and flinched, surprised, when he realized where it was going.

It was no ship, but a small airplane that floated in the harbor on two massive pontoons. The motor was already running, and Indy could see a distorted shadow beyond the cabin window.

He ran as fast as he could. He knew that he had no chance of catching up to the Indian in the water. Even if he could manage to find a motorboat in the next few seconds, the commotion would have alerted the Maya, and Indy's first experience of a struggle with this giant didn't make him want a rematch. But there was a small docking area that was about thirty or forty meters away from the pontoon plane, but lay in a way that the man behind the wheel could barely see it.

Indy raced on, increased his pace again, and threw himself forward with a massive leap so that he reached the end of the gangplank. With an elegant dive, he landed in the water, swam under, and went a good ten or fifteen meters underwater before he surfaced again, coughing, and started to swim with quick,

powerful movements. The rowboat was nearing the pontoon plane on the other side from approximately the same distance. He didn't know whether anyone had noticed him or not, but he would just have to deal with that if it happened. Indy breathed in deeply again, dove down, and went the rest of the way underwater.

With screaming lungs and a pounding heart, he resurfaced between the pontoons of the Cessna, gasped for air for a moment, retching, and stretched his hand out. His fingers found a sure hold on a strut, while the rowboat hit against the other skid behind him with a dull thud. Indy heard a word in an unfamiliar language, then a harsh laugh. Obviously no one had noticed him. At least he hoped that the laugh wasn't due to his presence...

He carefully worked his way up onto the pontoon, looked around, and straightened up the best he could. The door on the left side of the Cessna was closed, but not locked. Carefully, Indy pulled himself up, threw a quick glance through the window into the machine, and saw that the pilot had leaned through the open door on the other side to drag in a struggling Joana.

He tore the door open with a jerk and swung into the airplane. The pilot straightened up, surprised, and turned his head- just at the right moment and in the right direction, conveniently enough, for Indy's fist to hit his chin at full force.

The man's eyes rolled up and he collapsed silently. He simultaneously let go of Joana, who tipped backwards with a short scream.

Indy leapt over the seat and the motionless pilot, grabbed Joana's hand at the last moment, and pulled her back up and halfway into the cabin. The Indian down in the boat yelled something, but his tone betrayed to Indy that he didn't realize what had happened. As Joana's eyes widened in amazement, Indy placed a warning finger on his lips and hastily pulled her completely into the cabin.

A moment later, a huge hand appeared at the lower edge of the airplane's door and clung tightly to it, then a second, and then a pair of terribly broad shoulders over which rose a sunburned Aztec face with black hair.

Indy kicked with the heel of his right boot a hand-length beneath the black hair and heard, satisfied, as the native's nose broke at this rough treatment. The Maya roared in pain and fury, instinctively pulled both hands up to his face, and realized a fraction of a second too late that he didn't have a third to hold on with. He helplessly tipped backwards and vanished into the water with a massive splash.

Indy hastily pulled Joana completely in through the door, closed it, and shifted the bolt into place. He turned around in almost the same movement, leaned down over the unconscious pilot, and heaved him with the last of his strength out the other side. This man was also an Indian. And he resembled the one who had kidnapped Joana like an identical twin, only that he wasn't wearing a tailored suit, but simple blue overalls. He seemed to weigh a ton. It took every bit of Indy's strength to push the motionless body to the edge of the cabin and out to join his brother in the waters of the harbor. With a last effort, he pulled the left cabin door closed and bolted it as well.

"That was close," he said, gasping for breath, while he turned to Joana. "Damn it, what were you thinking, spying on me? They nearly caught you!"

Joana seemed not to hear him. Leaning forward and with an expression of concentration on her face, she sat down behind the wheel of the airplane and studied the instruments.

"What are you doing?" asked Indy indignantly. "We need to go. The two of them could come back."

He had no illusions. He had locked both of the doors, but the Indians were certainly strong enough to easily tear them out of their frames. And his chances of surprising them for a second time were anything but good.

"Stop that nonsense!" he said as Joana's fingers began to glide over the controls of the Cessna. Joana still didn't react to his words. But the expression on her face suddenly brightened. Without even throwing him a glance, she leaned forward, quickly pushed a switch, then a lever, and placed both hands on the wheel.

“What are you doing?” Indy repeated his question. In his voice was a slight, almost hysterical undertone. “You can’t be planning to...”

But she was planning to. And she did.

The Cessna’s engine roared to life as Joana pulled down on the lever and simultaneously turned the wheel. The airplane began to move clumsily, travelling in a clumsy half circle, moving away faster and faster from the two Mayas who splashed around in the water behind them.

Indy’s fury vanished as if it had been blown away. And suddenly he could no longer fight off a gloating smile. He should have also thought of just escaping the two of them with the help of their own airplane.

He gloatingly watched as the two shook their fists angrily from the water. But the airplane was meanwhile moving a good three times faster than the fastest swimmer, and it was getting faster.

“My compliments,” he said. “That wasn’t a bad idea.” He looked searchingly around and pointed at a place on the other side of the harbor, perhaps three or four miles away. The thin white strip there must be a sandy beach where they could comfortably go on land and get out of the plane.

“Over there,” he said. “By the time they can swim there, we’ll be at the other side of the city.”

Joana still ignored him, and to Indy’s horror, she didn’t make the slightest move to direct the nose of the airplane towards the beach, instead turned the Cessna in the opposite direction, where only the open ocean lay- and pulled down on the lever with a jerk, pushing it as far as it would go.

Indy cried out in shock as the Cessna leapt forward and started to plow through the water with unexpected speed. “Have you gone mad!?” he screeched. “What are you doing?”

For the first time, Joana looked at him. She looked pale and very shocked, but still smiled. She didn’t answer him now either, but what she did answered Indy’s question much better than she could have herself: The airplane continued to pick up speed, and she suddenly started to gently pull up on the wheel. Indy was completely horrified as the hull of the Cessna started to vibrate,

rose out of the water, splashed back in a couple meters later with a heavy jerk- and then lifted off completely.

“You can’t be serious about this,” he roared. “Stop this foolishness, child.”

But, just the opposite, Joana pulled the nose of the airplane even higher. There was suddenly five meters of air beneath them, then ten, fifty, a hundred... And finally, the harbor lay beneath the airplane like a toy landscape.

Joana steered the Cessna into a gentle left turn, went down a bit lower, and made a lopsided loop back over the harbor before she pointed the propellers in a southern direction and reduced their speed a little. As the angry roar of the engines became an even hum, the machine stopped its shaking and bucking.

“You... can fly this thing?” Indy inquired.

Joana nodded. “I don’t have a pilot’s license, if that’s what you mean,” she said. “But my father was an enthusiastic hobbyist. I was eleven years old the first time I sat behind the wheel,” continued Joana, unperturbed. “And at fifteen, I made my first landing.”

Indy looked at her in disbelief.

“Didn’t I say that you would need me?” asked Joana.

Indy shook his head grimly. “No,” he growled, “you didn’t say that.”

“Then I just did,” answered Joana cheerfully. “So, the way I see it, you plan to catch up with your friend José and ask him a few questions.”

“Right,” said Indy in annoyance. “And maybe break a few of his bones, too. But you have one thing right: I plan to do it.”

“But you don’t know where he is, do you?” guessed Joana.

Indy looked at her angrily and nodded again.

“See,” said Joana cheerfully. “I do.”

“Then tell me,” answered Indy, “And then set this damn crate back down. We’re far enough away from the harbor now.”

Joana shook her head, threw a glance at the instrument panel, and shook her head again, heavier this time. “That would be incredibly foolish,” she said. “The tanks are full, the fuel will be enough to get there.”

“Where?” Indy asked with a very bad feeling.

“We’re going to Cuba,” answered Joana. “If we don’t run into a storm or have engine trouble, then we’ll get there two days before your friend.”

Indy sighed deeply. “Now listen to me, girl,” he said, as calmly and seriously as he could. “This isn’t a game. Those men want to kill me, and they won’t hesitate for a second to kill you too if they have to.”

“I know,” said Joana.

“But you apparently don’t know enough about me,” answered Indy seriously. “I’m going to find José and ask him what the meaning of all of this is. But I’m going to do it alone, do you understand?”

“Of course,” answered Joana. “If you insist on that, then I’ll land and kick you out. But then you’ll have to search for a damn long time to find your friend. And, most of all, you’ll have to swim to Cuba. I don’t think you’ll find him while he’s still aboard the ship.”

“Why don’t you leave that to me?” Indy growled angrily. “I’ll track him down somewhere.”

“Of course,” nodded Joana. “But I know where he’s going-do you?”

Indy stared at her furiously for a long minute. “That’s blackmail,” he said finally.

“I know,” answered Joana cheerfully.



CHAPTER 3

Cuba

Contrary to what Joana had claimed, there wasn't enough fuel for a nonstop flight from New Orleans to Havana. They had to land twice to fill up the tanks of the small pontoon plane, and once he had to use all of his powers of persuasion (and a not insignificant amount of his severely diminished money) to persuade a very distrustful harbor master to just hand over the necessary fuel and forget the fact that there was a child sitting at the controls. They made another stop since Joana was tired, and Indy insisted that she stretch out on the Cessna's back bench and sleep uninterrupted for eight hours.

They reached Cuba during early evening of the following day, and Joana raised no objections as Indy directed her not towards the harbor in Havana, but a small bay a few miles away to land and hide the airplane. After all, it was completely possible that they would still need the machine in order to leave the island the same way they had come.

Although there were still a good three or four hours of daylight left, she raised no objections when he suggested that they spend the night there and leave first thing in the morning to go into the city. Despite all of his attempts, Joana had doggedly

refused to tell him the destination of their journey; much like she shared no information about the secret of the Maya pendant or the two Indians. Although Indy was certain that she knew about at least some of it

But during that long flight, they had gotten a little closer. They had spoken a lot: Joana about herself and her father and Indy about himself and Joana's father. Indy had quickly realized that Swanson really must have talked a lot about him, as Joana had said when they had first met; and that he, in his usual way, had exaggerated a few things here and there, creating an image of Dr. Indiana Jones that was really only missing the blue tights to turn him into a sort of Superman. It was almost embarrassing for him to correct all of the exaggerations that Swanson had obviously included in his stories about Indy's adventures.

But at some point, he sensed that Joana didn't want him to. She probably hadn't even believed half of what her father said about the famous Dr. Indiana Jones; but now, after his death, to doubt his words must have seemed to her as if Indy was trying to make not himself, but Swanson, a lesser man.

So he had given it up and finally just answered her questions with a shrug, an embarrassed look, or a smile. To be honest, none of what Swanson had told his daughter about him was a lie- it was just the difference between one who took part in the dangerous expeditions and spent weeks, if not months wandering through the jungle, the desert, or a plain of rock and ice, and one who was told about this time and all of the dangers that one had to survive in just a few sentences and moments.

Indy could have told her that most adventures were filled with trouble, sweat, hunger, thirst, and despair, and most heroic deeds were born of pure fear. But Joana probably knew that just as well as he did, and certainly wouldn't want to hear it.

As they sat together that evening in the cabin of the Cessna and watched the fantastic spectacle of the sunset, an odd feeling of comfort overcame Indy. Joana was more like her father than he had realized at the start.

She didn't just look similar, she was a younger, more naïve version of his friend.

She had the same forceful way of approaching problems, meaning that, like her father, she sometimes tended to overestimate herself and underestimate the dangers she was plunging into.

She had the same way of talking, and accompanied her words with small, nervous gestures, and she had the same dreamy expression in her eyes when she spoke of unsolved riddles, fallen cultures, and well-preserved mysteries.

Indy had the feeling he had known this girl not for two days, but for years. And as she suddenly snuggled up against his shoulder and leaned her head against his neck, it was the most natural thing in the world for him to stretch out his arm and place it around her shoulder. Of course, he completely understood the fact that he was lying to Joana and, most of all, himself; but for those short, precious moments, he thought about neither the past dangers nor those that might still lie before them. Neither about the trigger-happy Indians nor the police in New Orleans, who were probably had a few burning questions to ask him. Neither his friend José, who he was no longer certain was really a friend, nor the fact that Joana had practically blackmailed him to bring her along. He allowed himself the luxury of forgetting all of this and just enjoying the beauty of the moment: The splendid sunset outside the cabin window, the pleasant feeling of Joana's face and warmth on his shoulder, and the beauty of the empty, sandy beach that shimmered in the last light of the sinking sun as if it were covered in liquid gold.

An oddly pleasant form of tiredness overcame him, a relaxation that he so rarely allowed himself, and so seemed all the more comfortable. So he didn't feel it at first when Joana shifted on his shoulder and turned her head so she could look at him. Only when she lifted her hand and almost playfully brushed his cheek with her fingertips did he open his eyes again and meet her gaze.

Something new was within, something that Indy hadn't noticed before. She smiled, and she did it in a very specific way, and the feeling of complete bliss that had gripped Indy mixed with a vague worry, without him originally being able to recognize the reason.

“Aren’t you tired?” he asked.

“Not really,” answered Joana.

“You should try to get a little sleep,” Indy advised. “You’ve been flying this thing all day and we need to leave early in the morning. It’s quite a distance to Havana.”

“I know,” answered Joana, “but we have time. The ship will be here in three to four days at the soonest.”

Indy sighed. “This would all be much easier if you just tell me what’s going on here,” he said.

Joana laughed quietly and shook her head. “No chance. I don’t trust you that much, Dr. Jones,” she said mockingly. “You’ll decide you’re done with me and sneak out in the middle of the night, leaving a poor, helpless girl completely alone in this wilderness.”

“That’s right,” admitted Indy seriously. “If only you could realize that I’m just worried about you, Joana. This isn’t a game.”

Joana laughed again. “What’s wrong?” she asked. “Is the famous Dr. Jones suddenly afraid?”

“Yes,” said Indy seriously. “But not for myself, just for you.”

“I can take care of myself,” replied Joana, but Indy continued on, unfazed:

“I don’t doubt that. But your father was a friend of mine, you know. A very good friend. I could never forgive myself if anything happened to you.”

Joana made a pouting expression. “Well, then you’d better take care of me, Uncle Indy,” she said mockingly, and continued after pausing for a second:

“I always thought that you were in your element in dangerous situations?”

Indy remained serious. “There are also people who claim that I attract trouble like a magnet,” he answered.

“I’m not afraid,” said Joana once more.

Indy sighed deeply again and shook his head. He looked at Joana very seriously. “Joana, this isn’t a game! And this also isn’t one of those adventures your father told you about. There’s a difference.”

“And what’s that?”

“We all survived those adventures,” said Indy seriously. “Otherwise, your father couldn’t have told you about them.”

Joana laughed. “And you don’t think that we’re going to survive this?”

Indy remained serious. “This is a matter of life and death, and I don’t even really know what’s going on, damn it.” He stopped for a moment. “It has to do with these pendants, doesn’t it?” he asked. “And the one you had?”

Joana nodded. “Yes, and…”

She didn’t continue speaking, instead pulled her lower lip between her teeth and bit down quickly. The words had slipped out against her will.

“And?” asked Indy.

But Joana just shook her head. “I’ll tell you everything,” she said. “Later. Maybe tomorrow. And now stop talking. The night is much too beautiful to worry about anything. At a moment like this, there are better things one can do.”

And then she did something that surprised Indy so much that he was completely defenseless at first: She sat up a little, took his face in both hands, and kissed him.

At first, Indy was completely perplexed. Her lips were soft and warm, and he sensed that he certainly wasn’t the first man she had done this with. And for the first fraction of a second, he even enjoyed it. But then he realized what he was doing, hastily lifted his arm, and pushed Joana roughly away.

“What are you doing?” she asked, confused. “Have I done something wrong?”

“No,” said Indy. “That isn’t it.”

Joana looked a bit hurt. “Didn’t you like it?” she asked.

“Yes,” admitted Indy. “Very much. That’s the problem.”

For a moment, Joana looked at him, confused. Then the smile in her eyes vanished and was replaced by an expression of childish anger and wounded pride.

“Am I too young for you?”

“No,” answered Indy, pushing himself a bit away from her. He suddenly felt as lost as a grade school student on his first field trip. “Or maybe so,” he continued. “You’re… I mean… I could almost be your father.”

“But you aren’t,” said Joana seriously. She stretched a hand out and touched him on the shoulder. Indy moved a little farther away until he hit the door, and Joana pulled her arm back, offended.

“You don’t like me,” she guessed.

“You’re Greg’s daughter,” said Indy quietly, without really looking at her.

“That’s nonsense!” Joana shook her head furiously. Indy didn’t look at her, but he saw her movement as a distorted reflection in the cockpit window. “I mean, every woman is someone’s daughter, aren’t they?”

“But not every woman is my best friend’s daughter,” answered Indy. He felt even more helpless. He found it hard to talk. Why did she ask these questions? Why did she do this?

“Please, Joana,” he said. “Stop it. This is already hard enough.”

“I understand.” Joana’s voice was suddenly hard.

“No, you don’t understand at all,” Indy hissed. He furiously tore the door open, leapt out of the machine, and waded through the knee-deep water to the shore. Joana called out something that he didn’t understand- it was probably better that way- but he didn’t turn around, instead went quite a distance away from the machine before he stopped and, angry at himself, at Joana, and at the world in general, he rammed his hands into his jacket pockets.

What was wrong with him? It usually wasn’t hard for him to deal with unexpected situations. Why did this foolish child throw him so off balance? Situations like these weren’t foreign to him: At his university, there was more than one female student who had her eye on the good-looking professor who not only had a reputation of being just as much a passionate adventurer as a brilliant scientist, but was also especially charming. He had more than once found himself in a situation where he had to use every bit of his skill and a great part of diplomacy to save the day. Now...

No, he didn’t completely understand it. Joana confused him more than he had previously realized. He liked her. Before, he had convinced himself that the feelings he felt towards her were due only to the fact that she was Greg’s daughter, but maybe that

wasn't true, maybe there was more- and if that were so, then it was a feeling that simply shouldn't be. Her father had practically died in his arms, and his last thoughts had been of his daughter, and in promising to fulfill his last wish, Indy had simultaneously promised- even if only to himself- that he would take care of his daughter. He just hoped that the oath he had sworn to himself was stronger than his feelings.

It was a long time before Indy had himself under control enough to turn around and go back to the airplane. As he got back into the cabin, the sun had long since set. When he awoke the next morning, Joana was no longer there. He also hadn't slept very well that night; the cabin was narrow, and the uncomfortable seats hadn't been created to sleep in. At first, he felt dazed and had trouble even staying awake. Blinking and yawning, he looked around, and stared at the empty seat next to him for a full ten seconds before he realized that he was alone. Then he got up with such a sudden jerk that his forehead hit the metal window frame, and he sunk back down, dazed.

All possible thoughts shot through his head. The fact that Joana wasn't there could have a dozen different reasons- but with how she had been acting the night before, he completely expected that she could have turned the tables and left him here alone to figure things out for himself.

He hastily pulled open the cabin door, leapt out, and ran around the airplane. The beach was empty. Indy called out Joana's name a couple of times, got no answer, and ran across the small sandy beach with growing worry, towards the bordering hills. Once he got there, he stopped and called out for Joana again.

Again, he got no answer. But then he spotted her: She swam a good hundred, if not a hundred and fifty meters away from the shore in the ocean. She was no more than a bobbing dot with blond hair in the glass-clear water.

Indy created a funnel with his hands in front of his mouth and called her name again, and this time she heard him. He watched as she stopped swimming and turned her head.

But she made no move to return immediately, instead swam a good bit farther out so that Indy could no longer see her, before

she finally decided to turn around and swim back to shore with powerful strokes.

Indy walked towards her. He reached the beach and the place where she had left her clothes at almost the same moment she had swum close enough to stand up in the water and wade the rest of the way through the surf.

She wore no bathing suit, just thin, silky undergarments that were now soaked and clung to her body so she might as well have not been wearing anything at all. For a moment, Indy didn't know where to look. Then he turned with a jerk, buried his hands in his jacket pockets, and started to nervously kick at the sand with his feet as Joana's footsteps grew louder behind him.

"Good morning, Dr. Jones," she said sharply. "Do you always watch young women bathe?"

Indy cleared his throat, embarrassed. He was continuing to look in the other direction, but her shadow appeared clearly in the white sand while, behind him, she knelt down, grabbed her things, and started to pull them on delightfully slowly.

"You weren't there when I woke up," he said. "I was worried about you."

"Oh?" answered Joana. "Sure, you really have to keep a close eye on little children, don't you?"

"Joana..." sighed Indy. "Please understand me. I..."

"Save your breath, Dr. Jones," Joana interrupted him. "You can turn back around now."

Indy obeyed- and averted his eyes again only a second later. Joana was now wearing her skirt, socks, and shoes, but hadn't buttoned her blouse yet, instead hung it limply over her shoulders.

"Stop this nonsense," he said angrily. "Get dressed. We need to go." For a moment, he was uncertain whether he should be angry at Joana's behavior or just laugh.

Joana frowned and glared at him. "I thought that I meant nothing to you, Dr. Jones," she said.

Indy cleared his throat and looked away again. "I'm not made of stone, after all," he answered.

"Last night I had the feeling that you were," answered Joana snappishly.

Indy prepared a sharp answer, reconsidered at the last moment, and turned away silently to walk up the sloping beach. After a short pause, Joana followed him. Indy walked very quickly, and he resisted the temptation to turn back to Joana to see whether she was keeping up. Joana's actions really angered him, but much of that anger was actually directed at himself. He meanwhile doubted that Greg's daughter really realized what she had nearly done the night before. Of course, he had reacted correctly- but he could have done it a bit more diplomatically. At the moment, it was just that she was more in control than he was.

They crossed the hill that he had climbed earlier to look for Joana, went down on the other side, and worked their way through a five-hundred-meter-wide strip of thickly-growing jungle. Beyond this lay the road to Havana. They had seen it the previous evening, before Joana had landed the plane in the bay.

When the piece of forest lay behind them, Indy's lead had grown to a good hundred meters. He stopped, now looked back briefly to Joana, and waited patiently for her to catch up. But she never completely did, instead came only within ten meters of him before she stopped there and glared at him angrily.

"Satisfied?" she asked angrily.

Indy didn't even understand what this question was supposed to mean. He wasn't sure he wanted to.

"You won't get any farther like this, girl," he said.

The expression on Joana's face darkened again, and Indy hurried to continue, quickly and in a raised voice: "I really didn't mean to offend you last night. I like you, really! I like you a little too much, did you know that?"

"What do you mean by that?" inquired Joana distrustfully.

"Damn it- I've already told you once- I'm not made of stone!" answered Indy. "Of course I see that you're a woman, a damn beautiful woman even. But I... I..." He sighed, struggled for words for a moment, and finally said: "You're Greg's daughter. And besides, you're too young."

"Oh?" asked Joana sharply. "How old does a woman have to be to be with the famous Indiana Jones?"

Indy gave up. He knew that he wouldn't be able to convince Joana with reasonable arguments.

“At least of age,” he said angrily. Then he turned around with a jerk, walked out onto the road, and waited for a car that was on its way to Havana and that he could stop.



CHAPTER 4

Havana

The street was in a dilapidated quarter of Havana; one of the quarters in which the street was wide, but unpaved, so that with every rain it was transformed into a muddy pond; where most of the houses were small and built of wood and seemed to be held together by their owner's prayers more than by the handiwork of their architects (and most of them were identical), and they had once probably been white, but over the course of the years, they had become the same color as the people who owned them: black. It was one of those streets that one would avoid at night; and preferably during the day as well. Although the houses were thick on both sides, they saw only a few people- here and there, a face peered out the window, sometimes light blue eyes glimmered in ebony faces otherwise obscured by the shadows they watched them from.

The building stood at the very end of this street, and it fit in as poorly with this part of the city as a cheap wooden house would in the heart of Manhattan. With a white façade, the man-thick columns flanking the entrance, and the large, framed windows, it looked more like a luxury hotel from the colonial period than a museum. But that's exactly what it was- at least according to the small copper plaque next to the door.

“What are we doing here anyway?” asked Indy. After the car had brought them here to the city, they had gone on foot for a good three quarters of an hour, and Joana had turned to several passers-by and policemen to ask about the way; she had obviously never been here before. His conviction that it had been right to trust Joana’s leadership vanished in the same moment as the expression of uncertainty filled her face. And Indy had certainly noticed Joana’s sigh of relief as the building finally appeared before them. Although she tried to hide it from him, Indy clearly sensed that she felt just as uncomfortable in this neighborhood as he did.

“You’ll see soon, Dr. Jones,” she answered nervously after a few seconds.

But that wasn’t enough for Indy. Joana moved to open the door, but he stretched out his hand quickly and held her back with a rough movement.

“That’s enough, child!” he said forcefully. Joana moved to pull away, but Indy held her back with an iron grip.

“You now have two choices,” he said seriously and pointed at the door. “Either you can stop this nonsense and tell me what all of this really means, or you can go in alone and see how far you can go.”

“Without me...”

“I’ll go look for a comfortable hotel where I can spend the next two days and wait for José’s ship to dock,” interrupted Indy, calmly, but in a tone that made it clear how seriously he meant those words. “I’m going to find out what all of this means. Believe me. I have a lot of experience with such things.”

Joana looked at him calculatingly. Her eyes still flickered with anger, but she knew that it wouldn’t work this time. “You won’t do that,” she said suddenly. But it just sounded defiant, with no real conviction within.

“Of course I will,” replied Indy grimly. “I’m really tired of this, getting dragged deeper into events when I don’t know what’s really going on and probably don’t really have anything to do with them. As far as I’m concerned, go ahead and play cops and robbers on your own. I just fear that you won’t stay alone for long,” he continued on after a short, almost measured pause.

“The two gentlemen we stole the plane from certainly won’t try to swim all the way here. And they will be in anything but a good mood if they see you again.”

This time, Joana was visibly dismayed and looked quickly to the right and left as if she expected to see the two Indians appearing around the next corner as if conjured there.

“So?”

Joana paused for another moment, but suddenly she nodded jerkily and bit her lower lip again. “I’m looking for... Professor Norton,” she said suddenly. “He’s in charge of this museum. He was one of my father’s friends.”

“And?” asked Indy curtly.

“He will... help us,” answered Joana, faltering, after which she continued to chew at her lower lip, and Indy looked at her calculatingly. Obviously she was considering how much she had to tell him to take care of his curiosity; but also how little so as not to betray more than necessary.

“And then?” asked Indy, maintaining self-control with trouble.

“He also has one of these pendants.” Joana finally revealed.

“A necklace with a Quetzalcoatl pendant?” inquired Indy. “There are more of them?”

“Yes,” said Joana monosyllabically.

“How many are there all together?” Indy asked.

“I don’t know that,” answered Joana. “Really. That’s the truth. I have no idea,” she added hastily. “But Norton knows. I heard him talk to my father about the necklaces once. I couldn’t understand enough about what they were saying. If I’m honest, it didn’t especially interest me then. But it sounded very important. The two of them were acting very mysterious about it. And I think that... José probably wants to see him.”

Indy paused. He still had the feeling that this girl wasn’t telling him the whole truth, but he sensed that he wouldn’t get any more out of her at the moment.

He pulled his arm back and suppressed the impulse to apologize as he saw her lift her hand and rub a pained joint. His grip had been tighter than necessary. He felt bad about being so

rough with Joana- but she had to understand that both of their lives depended on him knowing the whole story.

“Fine,” he said, still in the same consciously unfriendly tone. “Then we’ll go talk to this Professor Norten.”

Joana sent him another hostile glance, but she said no more, instead turned around with a jerk and pushed the museum door open.

The inside of this building confirmed Indy’s first impression: Behind the door stretched an extensive hall tiled in a black and white checkerboard pattern, from which branched off many doorways and a gigantic white marble staircase. To the left was even an old reception desk. Behind the desk was no longer a key board or pigeon holes, instead two large glass display cases in which crafts and artwork were displayed. Several other display cases rose where before, when this building had really been a hotel, small tables and chairs must have stood.

Indy looked around again. The hall was completely empty, and such a complete silence ruled throughout the building that it seemed almost eerie at first. “It seems that there’s no one here,” he said, disappointed.

“That doesn’t matter,” answered Joana. “I know where Norten’s office is.” she pointed with a head movement at the stairs.

“You’ve been here before?”

Joana shook her head. “No. But the professor showed me pictures and told me about everything. He’s very proud of this museum. I think he set it up almost completely on his own. This was a hotel once, did you know? It went broke and sat empty for years and was in terrible condition when Norten bought it.”

Indy was barely listening.

He didn’t like the silence. He knew places like this. He had practically grown up in museums and had spent more time in them than most others did in their entire lives. But it wasn’t the respectful calm of a museum that hit him here. Something was... missing. The whole building seemed deserted, dead. Without another word, he followed Joana, who had already reached the stairs, taking two steps at a time.

The uncanny silence that filled the building continued up above. The hotel rooms had become three brightly-lit halls by combining four, five of the formerly small rooms, and these took up the entire upper floor of the building and were filled with cabinets and glass display cases. Under normal conditions, Indy would have probably stopped here and there to glance at an exhibit or an especially interesting piece. But now he didn't even waste a thought on them, instead followed Joana with long strides. He sensed that there was just... something wrong here. He wanted to get back out as quickly as possible. That was all that interested him at the moment.

At the end of the third hall, Joana stopped and opened a door that was hidden between two display cases. For someone who had apparently never been here, she knew her way around damn well, Indy thought. But he kept that to himself as well and quickly followed her into the room beyond.

And stopped, surprised.

The room was a great deal smaller than the others around it and was a mixture between an office, drawing room, and museum. But the pieces here were completely different from those they had seen out there.

Every single piece here was carefully hidden behind glass. There were large feathered headdresses, shimmering with bright colors; daggers and short swords made of slick, razor-sharp obsidian, stored in artful leather holsters; oddly-formed throwing axes with curved ends that reminded him of the beaks of giant birds; a massive amount of jewelry, almost all made of gold; potsherds and jugs; woven baskets and colorfully-painted death masks. On the wall above the desk hung a life-sized copy of the famous Maya calendar, and near the window was a display dummy wearing a colorful loincloth and a splendid red and green feathered cloak: The ceremonial garb of a Maya priest.

Everywhere he turned in here, he saw something having to do with the Maya. This must be one of the biggest- and probably also most valuable-collections in this area. In a place like Mexico City, the sight would have amazed Indy, but certainly not surprised him- but here?

“What is this?” he asked in astonishment.

“Professor Norten’s private collection,” answered Joana. She had stopped, just like him, and looked around in amazement, but simultaneously looked a bit disappointed; probably because she hadn’t found Norten behind the desk like she had expected to.

“The Maya are his hobby. Just like my father. The two of them spent many nights together talking about nothing else.”

Indy remained skeptical. This was more than just a hobby. What Norten had put together here must not only be the fruits of whole generations of archaeologists and treasure hunters, it was also unimaginably valuable. Most of the pieces here were undoubtedly real. On its own, the raw material value of the gold must have gone into the millions, not to mention the scientific value of the collection.

“Impressive,” said Indy. His voice had sunk to an almost reverent whisper. What he saw here, as an archaeologist, made his heart beat faster; but he realized in the same moment that something wasn’t right with the things here. It wasn’t that he doubted for a moment that these objects were genuine- just the opposite: He simply knew that every one of these pieces was real and unique, that each piece of jewelry displayed was unimaginably valuable, that every one of those carefully draped pieces of clothing had really been worn by a Maya priest a thousand years ago, that every weapon had really been used.

But they didn’t belong here. Not in this inconspicuous little private museum, the existence of which basically no one knew of and that would seem like a ticket to paradise for any art thief in the world.

Nothing here was well-secured. The display cases were made of normal glass, and Indy’s expert eyes noticed no trace of an alarm system. Some of the weapons and ceremonial pieces- even some made of pure gold!- lay in the open on blue and red velvet pillows. Anyone who came in here had only to reach out their hand and help themselves!

“This is... incomprehensible,” murmured Indy.

Joana nodded a couple of times. Her eyes glowed. “Yes,” she said. “It is fantastic, isn’t it?”

Indy looked at her for a moment, confused, before he figured out what she meant. Then he shook his head. “I don’t mean the

collection,” he said. “I do- but not just that. It’s fantastic, but... why is all of this stuff just lying around here?” He looked around demonstratively. “And why is no one here?”

Joana shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know either,” she said. “Normally there are always a couple of museum employees here.”

“And a whole army of guards,” guessed Indy.

Joana nodded again. “Norten has an old man who comes in at night and sleeps on a cot in the hall.”

Indy widened his eyes in disbelief. “A night watchman?”

“Sure,” answered Joana in a nearly confused tone. “Every museum has a night watchman, don’t they?”

Indy stared at her for a second, disbelieving, then he spun in a circle again and looked, stunned, at the collected pieces. “And... nothing is ever stolen here?” he asked.

“Not as far as I know,” answered Joana. “But now you mention it...” she paused for a moment and finally shrugged her shoulders. “Maybe just no one knows about this museum.”

The explanation didn’t convince Indy in the slightest. But it also didn’t sound any less logical than anything else he could have thought of.

“Why is no one here?”

He uncertainly took a couple steps, called “Hello?” two, three times, and finally stepped over to one of the glass display cases. Beneath the glass on blue satin lay a massive bracelet made of pure gold in which rubies as thick as thumbs had been set. Indy was no specialist on Pre-Columbian artwork, but he guessed that just this piece must be worth tens of thousands of dollars among collectors. He understood less and less what was going on here. Behind him, Joana let out a loud, sharp scream. Indy turned around- and froze. Like himself, Joana had approached a display case and picked up one of the pieces to study it more closely. What she now held in her hand was no piece of jewelry, but something thin, twisting, poisonous green in color. “Don’t move!” said Indy, horrified. “No sudden movements! Stand completely still!” Carefully and in a wide arc around Joana so as not to end up in the animal’s field of view and possibly provoke it to bite with a hasty movement, he approached the girl. Joana

stood there, frozen like a pillar of salt, chalk-white, with fearfully wide, dark eyes and lips clenched tightly together. But she didn't move. Not even her fingers shook as the snake slowly slithered over her hand and began to wind around her wrist like a bizarre, living piece of jewelry. Its small, barely pin-sized eyes seemed to study the girl mockingly, as if feeling her fear and being amused by it. Its split tongue flicked nervously, and although Indy knew it was impossible, he thought he could see its tiny, poisonous teeth flash like small, sharp needles.

"Don't move!" he whispered once more while he slowly lowered his hand to his belt and pulled out a dagger. His heart started to pound. He felt like his stomach was tied together in a tight, hard knot, and beneath his tongue gathered acidic saliva so that he constantly had to swallow hard. Cold sweat broke out, and every single hair on his body seemed to stand on end.

His fear was almost overpowering. Spiders, rats, crocodiles, or lions- there were barely any animals that Indiana Jones feared. For many he had a healthy amount of respect, but he was only afraid of snakes. The sight of them paralyzed him, they affected something within him that he had no influence over and was stronger than his logical thoughts, and it didn't matter whether he encountered a harmless slowworm or a tiger python. The sudden appearance of a snake had more than once caused Dr. Indiana Jones to jump back like a terrified child and scream.

And even now he wished for nothing more than to turn around and run out of this room and this building and this part of the city so that he could put as much distance as possible between himself and this tiny, light green animal. But if he made a hasty movement now, then this snake would bite and Joana would be dead even before she found time to feel the pain.

"Don't move!" he whispered for a third time. "No matter what happens!" Slowly, very slowly, centimeter by centimeter, the hand holding the knife neared Joana's arm.

A muscle twitched in Joana's face as the cold steel touched her skin, but she had an amazing amount of self-control and just stood there, completely frozen. Very, very slowly, Indy slid the knife up her lower arm and towards the snake. His own hands shook with fear and were so damp with sweat that he had to press

the knife tightly against Joana's arm to keep it steady until it reached the snake's head. The small animal curiously eyed the flashing steel with its short-sighted eyes, made a movement as if preparing to slither over to it, and then pulled back again. Indy twisted the blade of the knife lightning-fast and pushed it up into the air. He left Joana with a deep cut on her wrist, but the snake had been beheaded and fell from Joana's arm onto the ground, where its body writhed for a moment.

Joana stumbled back, gasping for breath, pressed her left hand against the bleeding cut on her wrist, and looked at Indy with a mixture of relief and fear. Any other girl in her place would have been hysterical now, screaming, or at least made some pained sound, because the cut must have been very deep, as Indy noticed, worried: From between her fingers flowed bright red blood, forming a bizarre pattern on her hand before it dripped to the floor. But Joana just stared at him. "What... was that?" she asked finally.

Indy looked silently at the small green snake body that lay on the ground near his feet. "A snake," he murmured, disgusted.

"I know that," said Joana. Her voice started to shake, and Indy realized that she was probably only now feeling the real terror. "I mean... was it... poisonous?"

Indy took his gaze from the body of the snake and looked up at Joana. "You were damn brave," he said.

Joana smiled tensely. "I was just frozen in terror," she said. "Was it poisonous?"

"I don't know," said Indy with slight hesitation.

The fear in Joana's eyes mixed with something else, and he hurried to continue: "A lot of snakes are poisonous, aren't they? It's better to be safe than sorry."

What he had said wasn't quite the truth. Indy feared nothing in the world more than snakes, but maybe that was just the reason he was also so familiar with them. The seemingly harmless reptile, measuring about thirty centimeters in length, was none other than a green mamba, one of the most poisonous snakes in the world. If it had bitten her, Joana would have been dead in two seconds, three at the most. But he had the certain feeling that it would be better not to tell the girl now.

Joana's eyes widened. "Does that mean that you... you didn't even know if it was poisonous?"

Indy shook his head.

"You gave me the biggest scare of my life and almost stabbed me, just because you wanted to be sure?" inquired Joana, and Indy suddenly heard a clearly threatening undertone in her voice.

"I think it's poisonous," he said hastily. "I'm pretty sure. I wouldn't be surprised if the presence of these nice animals is what protects this mysterious Professor Norten from burglary."

Joana's eyes glimmered with pure hatred, but to Indy's surprise, she said nothing, just removed her hand from her wrist. The wound was deeper than Indy had thought, and it still bled heavily.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to hurt you." He looked around for something that could be used as a bandage, and finally started to dig around in his pocket.

"Where did it even come from?" he asked. "Didn't you see it?"

Joana pointed with her bloody left hand at the open display case. "No. It must have been somewhere in there." She angrily creased her brow. "I almost think you're right. Someone must have put it here."

"Probably," said Indy, digging around in his pocket some more. "But if so, then I'll need to exchange a few words with Norten. Something like that is bordering on murder."

"What are you looking for anyway?" Joana asked.

"A handkerchief," answered Indy. "Or something like it. That cut needs to be bandaged."

Joana leaned over, stretched out a hand to the hem of her skirt, and then pulled it back. "Tear a strip off of my slip," she said. "If I do it myself, the whole thing will get bloody."

Indy stepped over to her, sunk down onto his knees, stretched his hand out- and paused. "Are you sure...?" he began, embarrassed.

"Don't start this now, Dr. Indiana Jones," answered Joana derisively. "Didn't you say before that you could be my father?"

"Well, yes," began Indy. "But..."

“Then do it, Uncle Indy,” interrupted Joana. Although she must be in great pain, she laughed. “Or do you have some inhibitions about reaching under a young girl’s skirt?”

Indy creased his brow, angry, but didn’t answer her, instead lifted her skirt a bit over her knees with both hands and tried to tear the seam of her slip. The fabric was more resistant than he had expected. For a moment, he pulled at it with all of his might in vain, then he lowered his hand back to his belt to draw the knife again.

From behind him came the slam of a door and a surprised cry, and Indy flinched in shock, lost his balance due to the abrupt movement, and fell partially forward between Joana’s knees. He caught the fall at the last moment with both hands, turned himself around hastily, and promptly got stuck in Joana’s slip.

From the doorway rang a shrill, reproachful female voice, saying something in Spanish that Indy couldn’t understand, and when he finally managed to free himself from the confusion and push the hem of Joana’s slip up over his face, he found himself looking directly into the face of an approximately fifty-year-old, overweight matron who stood in the doorway and studied him and Joana with a mixture of horror, disbelief, and, most clearly, anger.

“Hello,” he said, embarrassed. “I hope that you haven’t gotten the wrong impression. This... this isn’t at all what it seems.”

The woman answered in Spanish again. Indy didn’t understand the words, but her tone and the accompanying look made it clear that she certainly hadn’t understood what he had said. For a moment, she looked at him and Joana reproachfully, then she came towards them with small, pattering steps, started to gesticulate heavily, and struck them with a shrill torrent of words that Indy only understood a fraction of. But what he could understand was certainly enough.

He tried to stand back up, promptly slipped again, and this time completely lost his balance so that he fell back between Joana’s legs. Joana laughed quietly and took a hasty step to the side so that her heel left a large scrape on his forehead and knocked the hat from his head. The Spaniard approached them with both arms waving and with a shrill, almost crazy voice,

nagging them, rose up threateningly over Indy, and formed fists over her expansive stomach where her hips should be. Her face flared with anger.

“Listen,” said Indy. “I know that this certainly all looks very strange, but...”

The woman didn’t listen to him, instead cut him off with a torrent of insults and reproaches- and then stopped in mid-word as her eyes fell on Joana’s bloody wrist.

“Exactly!” said Indy in relief. He hastily stood up and took a quick step back as a precaution to get himself out of arm’s reach of the woman. “I just need a bandage for her. Do you understand?” He leaned back down to Joana’s knees, acted as if he was raising her skirt and tearing the material, and simultaneously pointed at the bleeding cut on her arm.

“Bandage, understand?” The woman stared at him, hostile. Her eyes were small.

“Oh,” Indy sighed. “She doesn’t understand.”

He carefully lifted Joana’s arm and gesticulated at it with his free hand as if he were bandaging it. “Bandage, get it?”

No, the Spanish maid obviously didn’t understand. Indy sighed again, decided to do the only thing that he could do- namely ignore her- and sunk back down onto his knees next to Joana. As he raised the knife to cut the seam of her slip, the woman again spoke in Spanish, and Joana answered in the same language.

Indy looked at her, surprised. “You understand her?”

“Yes. Do you want to know what she said?”

Indy nodded.

“Word for word, or just generally?” Joana whispered, smiling. “Generally, she said that you should stop this nonsense. She’s going to go get first aid supplies.”

Indy looked uncertainly at the woman who stood above him like a vengeful angel, still looking down at him as if she were seriously considering attacking him with all two hundred pounds. But then she left it at a dark glance, spun around on her heels, and stomped out of the room. Indy stood up and put his knife away. Confused, he looked at the doorway through which the

woman had vanished. He heard her rummaging around loudly somewhere in a nearby room. “Do you know that woman?”

Joana nodded. “Consuela. She’s Norten’s...” She searched for a moment for the right word and finally shrugged. “She looks after this place and keeps everything in order. Cleans up, dusts, brings him something to eat... Whatever he needs. I’ve known her my whole life.”

“Then maybe you should tell her what we’re really... I mean, what we weren’t...”

Indy started to stutter and felt his face redden as he saw the malicious grin on Joana’s face.

“Yes?” she asked harmlessly.

Consuela’s return spared Indy from having to answer. The Spanish lady brought a scratched-up Red Cross container with her and pulled out a rolled-up gauze bandage with which she began to wrap Joana’s wrist skillfully, but anything but gently. Joana’s lips opened a couple of times, but she accepted Consuela’s help without complaint and even sent the Spaniard a grateful smile as she finally finished.

“Ask her if she knows where Norten is,” requested Indy.

Joana translated, and Consuela answered, throwing a hostile glance in his direction, with a torrent of words and such heavy gesticulations that it seemed to Indy as if they had taken another step back.

“What did she say?” he inquired as she finally finished and placed her fists back on her hips.

“Professor Norten hasn’t been here for a couple of days,” answered Joana. “And the others haven’t either. The museum has been closed for a week. They all went to his hacienda.”

“Closed?” asked Indy. “The door was unlocked.”

“It’s always like that,” replied Joana. “I told you before—nothing gets stolen here.”

Indy threw a quick glance at the dead snake lying on the ground near the display case and didn’t answer.

Consuela asked a question, and Joana translated: “She wants to know why we’re here.”

“Tell her the truth,” answered Indy. “Tell her that we need to speak with the professor. And ask her whether she can tell us the way to his hacienda.”

“I don’t think that she’ll do that,” said Joana. Audibly gloating, she continued. “Somehow I have the feeling that she doesn’t trust you.”

“Then tell her some lie,” answered Indy, throwing Consuela the friendliest smile he could muster. “As far as I’m concerned, tell her I was bitten by a rare, nightmarish beetle and the professor is the only one who has the antidote.”

Joana said something in Spanish to Consuela, and the expression on the woman’s face became even darker. “She seemed not to believe that,” said Joana cheerfully after Consuela had answered.

“Then tell her that I actually came from a university in New York and need to talk to Norten. It’s about a million dollar donation for his museum.”

“I don’t think that will do anything,” answered Joana. “But whatever...” She translated, and this time Indy could tell from the tone of Consuela’s answer what her opinion of this was. “She said that the professor has finally gone to his hacienda for a few days of well-earned vacation,” answered Joana. “He hasn’t had any free time for several years. No one can disturb him.”

“But we have to see him!” said Indy, close to despair. He smiled at Consuela again and said suddenly: “I’m going to break her neck if she doesn’t help us.”

“Shall I translate that too?” asked Joana.

Indy sent her a poisonous glance. “Do what you want,” he said. “But make sure she tells us the way.”

While Joana quietly spoke Spanish with Consuela, Indy went back over to the open display cases and looked thoughtfully between them and the dead snake.

The sight confused him more than ever. In the display case, there was absolutely nothing that the snake could have hidden in; it was empty except for the blue satin pillows on which several displayed pieces lay. An animal like this poisonous green, garish mamba should have stood out to Joana. And there was no

possible chance that this snake could have just showed up here coincidentally.

Without even considering that the museum was in the middle of Havana and not somewhere in the jungle, there was something else he hadn't told Joana along with the fact that she had touched one of the most poisonous animals in the world. Snakes of this sort were normally found in Central Africa. The animal hadn't come here on its own.

Someone had put it here on purpose.

Suddenly, he was in a real hurry to leave the museum.

With only barely suppressed impatience, he turned back to Joana and waited for a chance to interrupt her and Consuela. "Well?" he asked as Joana noticed his nervous gaze and looked up at him.

"Something gives me the feeling that she doesn't like you, Uncle Indy," said Joana cheerfully.

Indy looked at Consuela with the most heartfelt smile he could muster, and answered: "I don't like her either. But we still need to talk to your uncle. Tell her..."

"That isn't necessary," interrupted Joana. "I know where the hacienda is."

Indy looked at her angrily. "You know the way?"

"I didn't say that," answered Joana. "I know where it is. I don't think I could find the way on land. But we can take the plane."

Indy looked at her doubtfully. "It's a pontoon plane," he reminded her.

"I know," answered Joana sharply. "The hacienda is right along a river. It will be no problem to land there."

"Then we should do that," said Indy. "Before your friend decides to call for the Inquisition and have me burned."

"And José?"

Indy looked around demonstratively. "We have enough time before he gets here," he answered. "And I would like to meet the owner of this establishment. I'm certain that he knows more about the secrets of this pendant than we suspect. More than I suspect, at least," he finished.

Joana considered this jab and shrugged. “If you want,” she said. A second later she looked thoughtfully at the clean white bandage Consuela had wrapped around her wrist. “He’ll probably be glad to see me again,” she said. “If he even recognizes me.”

Indy looked at her questioningly.

“It’s been a rather long time since we’ve seen each other,” said Joana. With a last, very warm smile in Consuela’s direction, she turned around and went to the door, while Indy walked back over to pick up his hat.

As he put it on and went to follow Joana, Consuela said, in unaccented English: “Please be careful with the plane, child. And say hello to the professor for me.”



CHAPTER 5

Hacienda de la Torro

As Cuba wasn't very large and the hacienda wasn't all that far from Havana, the flight should have normally taken them little more than an hour. But Joana hadn't exaggerated a bit when she had said that it had been a long time since she had last been here—she got lost three or four times, and although she didn't admit it, Indy could tell by the expression on her face that she was near despair. Partially since the Cessna's fuel gage slowly, but unstopably neared zero. When they finally found the hacienda, they were already down to the reserve tank.

Joana steered the machine down until they were gliding no more than a few meters over the treetops and flew in a wide loop over the massive property. The hacienda was a giant, U-shaped grouping of buildings in the Spanish style: a light-red tiled roof placed atop whitewashed walls and held up by numerous groups of columns. Several hundred meters to the north were the ruins of an old church, the spire of which seemed much too thick and heavy to Indy even from this height: a fortress-like building made of rough stone blocks, topped by a row of almost man-sized turrets. Probably a remnant of the Colonial period on this island.

"Where's the river you mentioned?" he inquired. No matter how hard he looked, he saw no river.

Joana pointed at a thin, glimmering channel that twisted and wound through the pastures and woods that surrounded the hacienda. Indy groaned. “*That’s a river?*”

“What else would you call it?” Joana shot back, shrugging.

“A stream!” replied Indy forcefully. “At the very most!”

“That’s your point of view.”

“You’re going to try to land *there?*” inquired Indy nervously.

“Of course I am,” answered Joana. “Unless you insist on us flying back to the coast. But we wouldn’t get too far,” she continued with a head movement towards the tank monitor. “In about five minutes, we’ll be out of gas.”

Indy looked nervously out the window. Seen from up here, the stream didn’t even look like a stream, more like a brook, at most: maybe knee-deep and a meter wide. Landing a pontoon plane? *There?* Ridiculous!

But, of course, Joana was right. The gas in the tanks wasn’t enough to reach the coast. “Then try it,” he whispered, submitting. “We can’t do anything worse than break our necks.”

Joana threw him a hurried glance and smiled. “I’m honored by your trust in me,” she said. “But don’t worry. I’ve landed in worse puddles.”

She made no move, however, to prove this assertion, instead put the Cessna into a sharp turn to fly another loop over the property.

“What are you waiting for?” inquired Indy nervously. “I thought our tanks were empty?”

Joana shrugged her shoulders, bit her lower lip, and made the machine drop so low that it nearly touched the roof of the hacienda. “I don’t know...” she murmured. “Something isn’t right here.”

Indy looked out the window again and quickly sat back up as he saw how close the ground raced along beneath the Cessna’s pontoons. “What?”

Joana shrugged once more. “I don’t know,” she admitted. “It’s so quiet. Where is everyone? Around a hundred people live here. Not to mention the five thousand cattle Professor Norten keeps.”

Indy leaned over again. Joana was right- the large estate lay beneath them as if dead, although the Cessna, flying low over the roof for the third time, made enough noise to wake even the dead. And not only did all human life seem to have left the property- beneath him, nothing moved in the truest sense. It was almost eerie.

“Maybe they all left,” he murmured. “To go to church, or somewhere else.”

The look that Joana threw him made it clear what she thought of that explanation. But she said no more about it, just brought the machine back up a little higher, then prepared to land.

Indy instinctively clung tighter to his seat as the small blue band of the stream approached. Even if it didn't seem half as large as he would have liked.

It really was just a brook- not quite as bad as he had originally thought, but still only two and a half meters wide and probably knee-deep. On Joana's face appeared a tense expression, and her hands closed even tighter around the throttle of the Cessna. She carefully eased up on the speed a bit, let the machine sink deeper, and, to Indy's horror, closed her eyes; a fraction of a second before the pontoons hit the water.

The destructive collision that he had expected didn't come. For a moment, the Cessna began to lurch and hop threateningly, and two or three times something hard hit the pontoons, but the airplane was constantly losing speed and finally stopped shaking and bucking. Joana sighed in relief. “We made it!”

Indy looked at her distrustfully. “I thought you had already landed in worse puddles?”

Joana nodded heavily. “Sure. Much worse.”

Indy added this to a mental list of things that he wanted to have a serious word with her about, and used the rest of his energy to continue clinging tightly to his seat. He casually wondered how Joana planned on taking off from this stream, but he stopped, deciding not to think over this question anymore, because he had the certain feeling that he wouldn't like the answer. The airplane was still moving very quickly, but was now constantly losing speed. As they approached the main building, it glided over the water at only the speed of a rowboat. About a

hundred meters in front of the property, it came to a complete standstill, and Joana turned off the motor. Indy sent a quick prayer of thanks to the heavens, opened the door, and climbed out onto the pontoon, knees shaking. His heart took another shocked leap as he looked into the clear waters of the stream and saw that it really was only knee-deep. And so small that he only had to take a step to reach the shore.

But he still got wet feet, since he had gotten out on the wrong side of the machine and had to walk around the plane and wade through the stream. But it was so warm that his pants would probably be dry again before he reached the house.

“Aren’t you going to tie up the machine?” he asked as Joana climbed out of the Cessna.

“Why?” Joana shook her head. “Do you think someone’s going to steal it?” She made a dismissive gesture. “No. And even if so, it’s completely impossible to take off from this puddle.” Indy decided against answering and just sent her a furious look. As he moved to turn to the house, he thought he could see a movement at the forest’s edge. But as he looked over there for a second time, the brush lay as still and motionless as everything else here. As if it were dead. Not even a shadow moved between the trees. And this stillness followed them as they approached the house. It was almost eerie- the hacienda lay in an almost paradise-like landscape, hidden by brush on two sides and surrounded by seemingly endless meadows and fields on the other two. But all of these meadows and fields were empty. No birds sang, no dogs approached them, barking, nothing moved at all. Joana was right, thought Indy, alarmed. Something was wrong here. His gaze slid nervously over the front of the building. Only then did he notice that all of the shutters were closed.

That said- not quite all. Several stood slightly open, and as he looked more closely, he could see the muzzles of a good half dozen guns aimed threateningly at him and Joana.

He stopped abruptly.

“What’s wrong?” asked Joana, shocked.

Indy pointed at the house. “Go ahead and ask them what’s wrong,” he said. “Or could this be what Professor Norten thinks is a warm welcome?”

Joana looked at him, annoyed, then looked over at the house with her brow creased and made a helpless hand movement. Obviously she didn’t see what Indy had wanted to point out. “I don’t understand what...”

The door to the main building flew open and a figure in a white linen suit wearing a Panama hat took half a step forward and waved at them hectically.

“Are both of you suicidal?” he screamed. “Run, before they catch you!”

Indy didn’t even find the time to be amazed by the fact that the figure spoke English, because in that moment, the edge of the forest sprang to life. One, two dozen shadowy, hunched figures stepped out from between the bushes, and suddenly the air was filled with whirring shadows. A small arrow passed so close by Indy that he could feel the feather on the end brush his cheek, a second bored into the brim of his fedora, and stayed there, shaking.

Indy grabbed Joana’s hand quickly and ran, zig-zagging. Around them, more arrows rained down to the ground, and they probably would have never made it to the house if the men behind the windows hadn’t opened fire at that moment. The rain of darts didn’t stop, instead grew in intensity as Indy and Joana approached the house with desperate leaps. Many of the small, feathered messengers of death missed them by a literal hair’s breadth. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw two of their opponents run towards them with massive leaps and suddenly fall back as the men in the house concentrated their fire on them. It was a wonder that they weren’t hit, but they did have to hastily retreat to the protection of the forest.

Indy threw himself through the door with a desperate leap, simply dragging Joana with him, so that they both hit the man with the Panama hat and knocked him off of his feet as he stood there, arms outstretched, but not daring to leave the house. One on top of another, they slid a bit across the shining, polished tiles, while someone behind them slammed the door shut and put a

lock in place. A sound like the pounding of hail rang out; a whole volley of small blow dart projectiles bored through the wood of the door.

Indy removed himself with difficulty from the tangle of arms, legs, and bodies that they had fallen in. Completely confused and head ringing, he looked around. Joana crouched next to him on her knees and seemed to understand the situation just as little as he did, and the man with the white Panama hat had lost the hat, but both of his hands covered his face, which, after all, had hit the tiles harder than Indy's head had. A half dozen other figures wearing white pants, sleeveless white shirts, and with South American features stood at the barricaded windows and occasionally shot at something. But obviously there were no longer very many targets outside; there was less and less fire, and the pounding of darts against the door and windows had completely subsided. Their opponents retreated as it became clear that their victims had escaped.

But maybe that wasn't really what they were doing, thought Indy darkly. Maybe they hadn't escaped, instead run straight into the trap they wanted them in.

"Is everything okay?" Indy asked, turning to Joana. The girl nodded, while the man without the Panama hat threw Indy an angry glance over the hand he still pressed over his mouth and nose. The small part of his face that Indy could make out did seem familiar, but he wasted little more than a thought on it at the moment, instead stood up and walked over to one of the Mexicans near the window. The man aimed at the edge of the forest through a small gap in the shutters. But, like all of the others, he had stopped shooting. The shadowy figures that Indy and Joana had seen had vanished. Nothing was moving out there now.

"What in the world is going on here?" asked Indy, turned around- and widened his eyes in astonishment.

Joana and the man in the white linen suit had both gotten up, and the stranger had removed his hand from his face so that Indy could not only see that his nose was bleeding hard, he could recognize him.

"José," he called in astonishment.

José looked up at him darkly, wiped his hand over his nose, and looked reproachfully down at the back of his hand, where red blood glimmered. "I'm glad you can at least still recognize me," he said. "Do you normally hit the people who save your life to thank them?"

"I'm sorry," said Indy. Then he pointed back over his shoulder at the window. "What's going on out there? Who were those men?"

"I have no idea," answered José, pulling a handkerchief out of his jacket, leaving a trail of hideous red flecks on the white fabric. "And before you ask, that was the answer to both questions," he continued, trying with very little success to stop the stream of blood from his nose with the handkerchief.

"How did you even get here?" asked Indy. "I thought you were aboard a ship."

"That's what you were supposed to think," answered José, who pressed the rolled-up handkerchief so firmly against his nose that Indy could barely understand his words. "Damn it, what are you doing here? We're having enough trouble without you!"

"And you're going to be facing a good deal more," Indy added threateningly, "if I don't get a lot of answers for a lot of questions, my old friend."

"Joana!"

Indy and Swanson's daughter turned around simultaneously. In the doorway at the other end of the room had appeared a gray-haired man who was clothed in the same manner as José: white linen suit and Panama hat. But he also wore a wide cartridge belt, from the holsters of which stuck the pearl handles of two long-muzzled Colts, held a submachine gun in his left hand, and in his right, a machete with a good one-and-a-half-meter long blade. These weapons, along with his graying temples, his thin, carefully groomed moustache, his penetrating gaze, and this martial get-up lent him the appearance of a gunslinger who had gotten lost in the centuries; very little like a museum director. But that's what he must have been, since Joana's face suddenly lit up at the sight of him and she ran to the gray-haired man with outstretched arms.

“Uncle Norten!” she called. “Thank God! Nothing happened to you!”

She embraced Norten so tightly that he swayed and nearly dropped his machete. The museum director allowed her joyful greeting for half a minute, then he removed her arms with gentle strength and took a few steps back from her. “Joana?” he asked once more, looking at the girl with a mixture of relief and amazement. “Is it really you?”

Joana nodded so heavily that her short blond hair flew. “Of course,” she answered. “Don’t you recognize me?”

Norten nodded haltingly. “Yes,” he said. “But you’re... so big.”

“It’s been a few years since we’ve seen each other,” replied Joana.

Norten looked at her for a moment, then he turned his attention to Indy. “And who are you, if I may ask?”

“My name is Jones,” answered Indy. His gaze wandered back and forth, confused, between Norten, José, and the armed men at the window.

“Jones? Dr. Indiana Jones?”

“That’s right,” answered Indy. “You know me?”

“Greg told me a lot about you,” answered Norten. But he paused for half a second before he did, and there was a tone in his voice that betrayed to Indy that Swanson obviously wasn’t the only one who had mentioned his name to Norten. And that his enthusiasm at seeing him here was limited- to put it lightly.

“What’s going on here?” he asked. “Who are those men out there? Why... are they besieging your ranch?”

“Hacienda,” answered Norten absentmindedly. “They’re called haciendas here in Cuba, Dr. Jones. And to answer your question, I don’t know. They showed up yesterday at the crack of dawn and started shooting at anything that moves. And since then, we’ve been stuck here.”

“Yesterday morning?” Indy threw a doubtful glance in José’s direction.

“An hour after we arrived here,” said José, and Indy sensed that this was also a lie. But before he could comment on that, José turned around and went towards the stairs.

“José!” called Indy. “Get back here. We aren’t finished with each other.”

José really did stop, but didn’t turn around, instead just threw him an angry glance over his shoulder. “I’ll answer your damn questions, yes,” he growled. “But maybe you could at least allow me to take care of my injuries first. Unless you insist on me bleeding out. I couldn’t answer that many questions if that happened.”

Indy swallowed back the angry remark that lay on his tongue, sent José an evil glance, and followed Joana and her uncle into the spacious living room that lay at the end of the hallway. In here, everything was covered in a shadowy half-darkness as all of the shutters had been closed. A white-clothed Mexican and a giant black man who wore only torn-up old army pants stood in front of them and peered out attentively.

Norten placed the machete and his submachine gun carelessly on a small table near the door, pointed at a set of chairs, and walked over to one corner near the bar, where there was a Spanish style fireplace. “Sit down, Dr. Jones,” he said. “I think you could use a good drink after that scare.”

Indy sat down haltingly, and only after Joana took her seat and threw him a requesting glance. Now that the immediate danger had passed and the terror had halfway subsided, his distrust started to return. The story that José and later Nortén had told him was about as convincing as the story of the Easter Bunny. The two of them knew very well who those men out there were. And, most of all, what they wanted.

Norten poured a decanter of whisky into two glasses, and a varnished jug of milk into a third. “I watched your landing, Dr. Jones,” he said as he put the glasses on a tablet and returned to the table with them. “That was damn risky. But also damn accomplished. Congratulations.”

“That wasn’t me,” said Indy.

Norten set the tablet down on the table and looked up at him, irritated. “Who then?” he asked as he sat down and took one of the half-filled glasses of whisky. Joana leaned over quickly and reached for the second.

“Me.” Malicious pleasure glinted in her eyes as she noticed the reproachful look Indy threw over the tablet on which only the milk glass now stood. Then she took such a massive gulp of whisky that probably even Indy would have had a coughing fit. Her face suddenly lost all color and her eyes widened in shock. But she didn’t make a single sound.

Indy reached towards the glass of milk, sipped at it, and made an acknowledging head movement while Joana smiled gloatingly. “She’s telling the truth,” he said. “She was flying that thing. I don’t even know how to start the motor.”

Norten’s amazement was clear. But Indy wasn’t quite certain whether this was about her achievement or the speed at which Joana had emptied the glass of whisky.

“That was an amazing performance,” he said finally. “But all the same, you’re both damn lucky that you’re still alive.”

“I’ve often gotten that feeling in the last few days,” said Indy. “I hope that it remains that way for a while.” He tapped Joana lightly on the finger as she leaned forward and reached for the decanter of whiskey, placed his own partially emptied milk glass in front of himself on the table, and poured himself a drink, but it seemed barely half the size of the one that Joana had guzzled.

“So you really claim that you don’t know who those men are or why they’re besieging your hacienda?”

“I don’t claim that, Dr. Jones,” answered Nortén consistently. “It’s the truth.” He shifted uncomfortably in the hard, carved chair, and for a fraction of a second, Indy saw something small, gold glittering around his neck. The necklace with the Quetzalcoatl pendant that Joana had mentioned. But before he could study it more closely, Nortén leaned forward, and the pendant vanished back into the collar of his shirt. “I understand your confusion, Dr. Jones,” he continued. “But believe me- it’s no different for all of us. Three of my men were killed before we even realized what was going on. And I still don’t really understand. No one understands it. I have neither enemies nor anyone jealous of me; not any that are strong enough to do something like this.”

“Something like what?” asked Indy quickly.

His trick nearly worked. Norten prepared to answer, then stopped, leaned forward, and reached for Indy's hat. "This," he said as he pulled his hand back.

In his fingers lay a barely ten-centimeter-long dart with three red, green, and yellow striped feathers on the end. Indy only now remembered the projectile that had gone through the brim of his hat.

"Be careful with that," he said.

Norten looked at him, brow creased. "You know what this is?"

"A dart," answered Indy unnecessarily. "Probably poisoned with curare."

"Not probably," Norten corrected him. "On the other side of the house are three of my men who were hit by those devilish things. One just got scratched. He died not thirty seconds later." His gaze was questioning, almost leering. "You seem to know a lot about these things, Dr. Jones."

"I've... had some time recently to closely study their techniques," answered Indy evasively. "Curare is a South American dart poison," he continued, "that normally isn't used on Cuba."

"Normally there aren't trigger-happy fools running around Cuba, killing harmless laborers," Norten replied in the same tone.

The tension that suddenly appeared between them was nearly tangible. Norten's gaze became icy, and Indy could nearly see the gears turning in his head. He could sense that Indy knew more than he was admitting and was obviously struggling to think up some way he could get him to tell him what he knew. And Indy also sensed more clearly that Norten was lying. Or at least concealing something important from him.

"Have you tried calling for help?" asked Joana, slurring. Her eyes looked slightly glassy, and her face had turned red. Obviously the whisky she had guzzled down had already started to work.

Norten nodded with trouble. "Yes. I sent two men out. One yesterday and one this morning."

"But they didn't make it through," guessed Indy.

Norten paused for a second. "I don't know," he admitted. "It's a long way on foot to the next hacienda. But I fear they didn't. And I won't waste a third man's life."

"How many men do you have here?"

"Not nearly enough, unfortunately," said Nortén. "Normally there are nearly a hundred. It's a very big estate, you must know."

"Normally?"

"I had to let some of my workers go," said Nortén. "The estate was only ever a sort of hobby of mine. A very time-consuming hobby, I must admit, but in the last two, three years, the business has gotten worse and worse. Last winter there was an intestinal epidemic that killed nearly two-thirds of the herd. I sent most of the rest to the nearest train station to be sold in Havana three days ago."

"And then men who went with the herd never came back," added Indy.

"No," said Nortén. "At the moment, there are only eighteen people here- twenty, counting you and Joana."

"It doesn't sound as if you can survive a siege for long," said Indy. But Nortén shook his head.

"We don't need to," he said. "Tomorrow at the latest, the men who took the herd will return. And then the situation will become completely different."

"They'll attack them out in the forest and kill them."

"Nonsense!" said Nortén forcefully. "Don't overestimate those fools, Dr. Jones. We aren't in a war or in a Wild West novel here. It's really just a few highwaymen who probably heard that most of the men had left the property. I think they thought they would be able to easily deal with us. As soon as they see sixty men coming back, they'll vanish faster than they appeared."

"Highwaymen with blow dart guns?" asked Indy doubtfully.

Nortén smiled humorlessly. "Would you prefer submachine guns, Dr. Jones?"

A sound from the door kept Indy from answering. He turned around, expecting to see José, finally having stopped his bleeding nose and returning. But it wasn't José. It was Anita, his wife. Indy flinched back as he saw her face. Her left cheek was swollen and her eye bruised shut. She tried to smile as she recognized him,

but what had happened to her face turned it into a grimace. The left corner of her mouth had split open and had a thick scab.

“For God’s sake!” said Indy. “What happened to you?”

“Nothing,” answered Anita, much too hastily for it to sound convincing. “An accident. Nothing that you need to worry about. It looks worse than it is.”

Indy moved to stand up, but Anita waved him back hastily and walked past him to the bar to find something to drink. “It’s really nothing, Dr. Jones,” she said. “Accidents happen.”

“Does that accident happen to be named José?” inquired Indy grudgingly.

Anita acted as if she hadn’t even heard that question, poured herself a glass of wine, and came back over to the table, staying a respectful distance away from the closed window.

“Why did he hit you?” Indy continued to press.

“I don’t think that concerns you, my friend,” a voice interrupted from the door.

Indy turned around in annoyance. José had changed his shirt and jacket, but still held the bloody handkerchief under his nose. “But you’ve always seemed to want to get mixed up in things that you shouldn’t.”

“It was because of the necklace,” guessed Indy. “You weren’t the one who sent her back with it.”

José shrugged his shoulders, formed something like a completely failed caricature of a smile, and dropped onto the couch between Anita and Joana. “Possibly,” he said.

“If that is so,” said Indy, “then it certainly does involve me. After all, I’ve nearly been killed because of this necklace a few times, and Joana here...” He pointed with a head movement at the girl, who studied José with clouded eyes for a moment, then tried clumsily to reach for the decanter of whiskey: “...has been too. So I think that you owe us a few explanations.”

“That’s a matter of perspective,” answered José. “As I said—you always seem to want to get mixed up with things that don’t involve you. This morbid curiosity will eventually cost you your neck.”

"Maybe you'll even be there when it happens," countered Indy, making a gesture towards the window. "I'll bet the same amount that you took from me in that poker game..."

"...and that you still owe me," said José, but Indy ignored him.

"...that this siege has something to do with the pendant. Or, should I say, with *these* pendants." He measured Nortén with a long, penetrating glance. "You have another one, I hear?"

Nortén nodded. With only glances, he carried on a silent conversation with José, and the two of them didn't even take the trouble to hide that from Indy. "Yes," he said finally. "Just like Señor Perez and Miss Swanson. And you, Dr. Jones."

"I fear that I must disappoint you there," said Indy, a slight feeling of malicious pleasure awakening within him, which he could neither rid himself of or try to hide.

Nortén suddenly looked very alarmed. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean," answered Indy, "that Joana no longer has her pendant."

"Where is it?!" asked José and Nortén as if from one mouth. And even Anita looked at Indy with dismay.

Indy pointed back at the window. "I think they have it- whoever they may be."

"That's complete nonsense," protested Nortén. "We're on Cuba, and they..."

"Of course not the men out there," Indy interrupted him. "But someone sent them. And that same someone sent a man to New Orleans who nearly killed me and attacked Joana."

"Does that mean they took the pendant from you?" asked José as he turned to Joana.

Joana swayed slightly on the couch and stared at José out of glassy eyes. She seemed not to even understand what he was saying.

"Don't even go to the trouble," said Indy. "You won't learn anything. Unless you answer a few of my questions first."

"Enough," Joana babbled, trying to grip the decanter of whiskey and knocking over the milk glass, the contents of which spilled out over José's pant legs.

José leapt halfway up, sunk back down, and threw Joana and Indy murderous looks. Joana giggled, moved as if to pick up the overturned glass again, and then grabbed quickly for the professor's whisky glass, draining the contents before Indy could stop her.

Indy shook his head with a silent sigh, but said no more, instead turned back to José. "Now listen to me for once, my friend," he said in a way that made the word friend sound almost like a threat. "It seems to me that we're all in the same boat at the moment. And if you want my opinion, then this boat already has a damn big leak. I think we need every bit of luck we can get if we want to get out of this alive. So why don't you tell me what's happening with these pendants and I can tell you what I know? Maybe we can find a solution together."

"I don't think you know anything of importance, Dr. Jones," said Norten calmly. "Were it so, then you probably wouldn't be here. I should even say that I hope you know nothing. For your sake. These pendants are dangerous." He laughed quietly and completely humorlessly. "People who own them for a long time develop a fatal tendency to lose their lives in very slow ways."

"I had also noticed that already," said Indy angrily. "I'm just wondering why."

"Don't ask about that," said Norten. "This whole thing really doesn't involve you."

"Are you sure?" asked Indy. "Don't forget: I was there when Greg died."

"What did he tell you?" snapped José.

"A lot," answered Indy. Which was a lie. But José couldn't know that, and judging by the glow in his eyes, he did really fall for Indy's bluff.

Norten didn't.

"Not another word, José," he said sharply. "He's bluffing. If he knew anything, he wouldn't be here, he would be on the ship."

"Exactly," Joana babbled, falling off of the couch.

Indy rolled his eyes, stood up hastily to help her back up, and carefully put her back down on the couch next to José. Joana giggled again, leaned against José, and the back of her head

collided with his nose, which immediately started to bleed again. Indy didn't even try to suppress a grin.

"So Joana's pendant is gone," Norten said, taking up the interrupted conversation. He looked at Indy sharply. "But do you still have yours?"

Indy didn't answer.

"I assume you have it with you," guessed Norten.

"Do I really look that dumb?"

Norten just creased his brow angrily, while José's eyes sent a short, angry glance in Indy's direction.

"Where is it?" asked Norten.

"In a safe place. And it will stay there- until I know what it really is."

"I don't think that you really want to know, Dr. Jones," said Norten.

"And if I do?"

Norten sighed. "Please, Dr. Jones, try to understand me. I've heard a lot about you- not just from Greg. I know that you have a certain reputation; not just as a scientist. They say that you never give up if you're determined to do something. But they also say that you're a very sensible man, Dr. Jones. I would like to appeal to that side. You'll be putting yourself in danger if you try to learn the secret of the pendant."

Indy shrugged. "Why don't you leave that decision to me?"

"Why don't you leave him to me?" asked José with a threatening look in Indy's direction. "Five minutes, and he'll willingly tell me everything I want to know."

Indy sent him a smile. "I take back what I said about you out in the hall, José," he said in a friendly tone.

José creased his brow and Indy added in explanation: "The thing about your nose, old friend. I lied. I'm not sorry."

Joana giggled, lifted her hand to her mouth, and suddenly turned deathly pale. For two, three seconds, she swayed back and forth so wildly that Indy feared she would fall back off of the couch. Then José quickly reached towards her, gripped her shoulder, and held her tight. "Now pull yourself together, child," he said angrily. "You're completely drunk!"

“Exactly,” babbled Joana for the third time, and collapsed, vomiting, into José’s lap.

The rest of the day passed in complete peace. But it was a peace that was worse in its own way than if something was happening. Outside the hacienda, nothing moved, and as if to add the finishing touch to the uncanny scene, even the wind was still, so that an eerie, almost completely unnatural silence fell over the massive complex. And even if the uncanny shadowy figures out in the forest didn’t, the silence crept in through the walls and doors of the house and spread through the rooms. Barely anyone dared to speak, and, if they did, it was only a whisper. Everyone seemed to be trying to avoid any unnecessary noise, as if they feared that something lurked in the silence. Something like an invisible, incorporeal predator that was just waiting for any unnecessary noise to spring out of hiding and attack its prey.

At first, Indy had tried to ignore the feeling. He had chalked it up to his own fear and the mixture of nervousness and fury that this situation filled him with. He had tried to find a logical reason for this: The danger that hung over everyone, the seemingly hopeless situation, the fact that José had lied to him. But all of that just wasn’t it. Not just that.

He could feel it. Something... was happening outside. It wasn’t just the men in the brush who lurked around the hacienda. There was something else. Something powerful, monstrous, strong, and ancient that slowly, but mercilessly crept towards the hacienda.

And he wasn’t the only one who sensed it. None of the others mentioned it or even hinted towards it. But Indy saw it on the faces of the men, saw it in their small, nervous movements and the brief glances. And he heard it most of all their silence. Whatever lurked outside, it was real. Something terrible would happen. Soon.

Together with Anita, he had taken Greg’s daughter up to one of the guest rooms, and he left it to José’s wife to undress the girl and place her in bed. He had come back once to convince himself that Joana was really doing fine and that she could expect nothing worse than a massive hangover. But Anita had calmed him. With

the exception of the cut on her wrist- Indy had simply ignored Anita's question about its origin- the girl was unharmed.

The rest of the day slipped by painfully slowly. Indy decided after an hour that it was pointless to continue to act offended and retreat into his brooding, and returned to the first floor so that he could talk to Nortén- and, if he had to, José as well. But this conversation went about as well as he had expected: Without any result. José had bored through him with glances and seemed to have forgotten for the time being that he could understand the English language, while Nortén insisted that it was better for him to know nothing.

The only glimmer of hope that remained to him was Anita. José followed him around distrustfully the whole day so that Indy was never alone with her for a minute. But his chance came as night approached.

José's room and the one that Nortén had given him were both along the same hallway on the second floor. Indy excused himself when it started to get dark, saying that he was tired and wanted to get a bit of sleep. And although he wasn't really planning on doing so, his eyes closed as soon as he was stretched out on the bed.

When he awoke, nearly complete darkness filled the room. Through the door that he had left open a crack flowed flickering orange-colored light and dulled, murmuring voices, and in the sky above the hacienda stood a pale full moon, the light of which filled the window with an uncanny silver glow. The silence seemed to have grown even more intense. And the feeling that something strange and powerful was near had become so strong that he could almost physically feel it.

With a pounding heart, he sat up, looked around the room for a moment, and then slipped towards the door. He listened attentively before he dared to carefully open the door and step into the corridor. He could now identify the voices from the ground floor- it was Nortén and José, who quietly conversed; in Spanish, so that Indy couldn't understand what they were talking about. But this didn't interest him that much at the moment. What interested him was the fact that José was somewhere down there-

and Anita probably wasn't. Somehow, he felt that José's wife was the key to this whole mystery.

He threw a last, securing glance to the right and left, crossed the hallway on tiptoes, and placed his ear against the door to José's room to listen. He heard nothing. Carefully, he turned the door handle, opened the door a crack, and slipped carefully through. Quickly, but without making the slightest sound, he closed it again behind him and remained standing there for a moment, eyes closed. The heavy, measured breathing of a sleeping person reached his ear, nothing else.

Indy remained standing in the doorway for a moment and waited in vain for his eyes to grow accustomed to the weak light; all that he could make out were pale outlines and shadows that took on an oddly threatening appearance in the silvery-gray light of the moon. Yet he still recognized that the room was arranged in the same way as his own- the massive shape to the right of the door was the bed, and from there came the breathing.

The rhythm changed as he took a step. There was a rustling, then a blurred female outline rose up in the darkness before him. "Who's there?" asked a shocked, breathless voice.

"It's me," answered Indy in a whisper. "Jones."

"Dr. Jones?" Anita's voice didn't sound a bit sleepy, but extremely alarmed.

Indy nodded and simultaneously placed a warning finger on his lips, but then realized in the same moment that neither could be seen in the weak light. "Yes," he added in a rushed whisper. "I need to talk to you. Alone."

Again there was a rustling and shuffling, then a burning match glowed near the bed.

Indy closed his eyes, blinded, and simultaneously waved his hands in front of his face in shock. "No light!" he said hastily. "I don't want José to notice anything."

The match died out, and he heard and sensed more than he really saw Anita sit up completely in bed and pull the blanket over her knees.

"That's... I think that makes sense, too," she said, pausing. Even more than the complete stop in her voice, the careful choice

of words betrayed to him how uncomfortable she felt about his visit.

Indy remained standing near the door for a heartbeat and listened out into the hallway. As he heard nothing, he moved on tiptoe closer to the bed and sat down carefully on the edge, while Anita slid a little bit to the side. Although he was now barely a meter away from her, he still couldn't see her face very clearly. For some reason, the light from the full moon didn't illuminate the room. It banished the darkness, but what it brought instead wasn't light, but... something else, he thought, irritated. Something that made it nearly harder to see than on a moonless night.

He banished those ridiculous thoughts and forced a smile, although she could probably see as little of his face as he could hers. "I just wanted to talk to you," he said.

"I hadn't expected you to be here for any other reason, Dr. Jones," answered Anita. Indy could pick out the tiny bit of derision in her words, but he wasn't in the mood to dwell on it.

"I... am really sorry about what happened to you," he began.

Anita interrupted him with a movement that he only heard. "You don't need to be, Dr. Jones," she answered.

"Indy," Indy corrected her. "Call me Indy. All of my friends do."

"You don't need to be, Indy," said Anita again. "I knew that José wouldn't be very happy about what I did. And it wasn't as bad as it looks. He was very furious. And from his viewpoint, it was probably right. After all, I stole from him."

"You didn't," Indy pointed out. "One can't steal something that never belonged to that person in the first place."

"It took him a long time to find that pendant," continued Anita in the darkness. "And it took him even longer to get it."

"Yes," said Indy. "And I foolishly helped him do it."

"You had no other choice," claimed Anita.

"How do you mean that?"

"He had the poker game fixed, can't you see?"

Indy looked surprised. "Just a moment!" he said. "You mean to say that he..."

“Deceived you. Yes,” Anita said, finishing his sentence. She laughed quietly. “You know, Indy, I’ve known José for a long time. Even if it doesn’t seem so at first, he has a lot of talents. But card games are not one of those. He’s a miserable poker player.”

“And you have to be a damn good player to cheat at poker,” replied Indy doubtfully.

“Or have a very good partner.” Anita laughed again, which told Indy that she obviously could see better than he could, because the stunned expression on his face hadn’t escaped her. “The man who sat next him and was the last to fold,” she continued after a couple of seconds. “I don’t know if you paid any attention to him. He’s one of the most notorious card sharks in New Orleans. Believe me, Dr. Jones, you never had a chance from the start. The two of them made sure you won the whole night.”

“I understand,” said Indy darkly. “So I would grow careless and bet it all on one hand.”

“Exactly. And that’s exactly what you did- didn’t you?”

“Yes,” said Indy remorsefully. “I’m an idiot.”

“You should be glad you did,” said Anita seriously. “José was wildly determined to hunt down that necklace. No matter what it took.”

Indy considered for a moment. “After I left the Palladium, I had an unfortunate meeting with two men,” he said. “Was José also behind that?”

“No,” replied Anita, convinced. “Why would he? He had what he wanted.”

“Since we’re on the subject,” said Indy. “What’s so important about these three pendants?”

“I don’t know,” Anita answered, and although Indy still couldn’t see her face through the darkness, he sensed that she was lying. Obviously, over the last three days, it had become an especially popular hobby for everyone to lie to him, to deceive, him and to go behind his back. But he said nothing about that, instead stood there and waited for her to continue on her own.

“I don’t know what’s so important about those pendants, Dr. Jones,” she said again. “But I know that José and Norten can’t have them.”

“Why?”

“Because they don’t belong to them,” answered Anita. Under almost any other imaginable circumstance, this answer would have been ridiculous; but not now. Without even a single word of clarification, Indy knew what Anita meant. These small pieces of jewelry belonged to José and Norten just as little as they did to him or Joana- or had belonged to Greg. They were old things, holy things, things that had once held massive power and meaning for humanity, things upon which they had focused their beliefs, that they worshipped and that they possibly even protected with their lives. Maybe people had been killed for these small pieces of jewelry- five hundred or a thousand or even two thousand years ago. And perhaps the hope of a whole people had hung on what they symbolized. Whatever Norten and José were planning with them- it was wrong.

“If these pendants really are so valuable to your husband and Norten,” he said, “then it was very brave of you to do what you did.”

“Perhaps,” said Anita. “But perhaps not. Maybe I just didn’t want José to have the necklace. Maybe I was just afraid that something like this would happen.”

Indy didn’t believe a word. Anita was also concealing something from him. But he had the certain feeling that she was doing it for a different reason than her husband or Norten.

“Do you know who these men outside are?” he asked. “The Maya warriors?”

He could sense Anita’s surprise. “Maya warriors?” she repeated. “Why do you think that?”

“Just a guess,” said Indy. “The men who were after me in New Orleans were Maya.”

“But I... I always thought that the Maya had died out,” said Anita uncertainly, and he heard that for what it was- another, not especially convincing lie.

Still, he answered: “Most people think that. But it’s wrong. There are still a couple of tribes. Not very many; maybe five or

six thousand people total. Very few for a people who once ruled a large part of the South American continent. But they still exist.”

“That’s... interesting,” said Anita, who was now audibly regaining control. She added with a derisively raised voice: “And now you think that they left their reservation and grabbed their war axes to come to Cuba?”

“I know how crazy that sounds,” answered Indy seriously. “But this whole thing sounds really crazy, doesn’t it?”

“It does,” answered Anita. “And I...”

She stopped in the middle of a word, listened tensely for a moment, and then flinched, shocked.

“What’s wrong?” asked Indy in alarm.

“Someone’s coming!” answered Anita.

“José?”

“I don’t know,” said Anita. “But if so, then... then he can’t see you here, Indy.”

In this point, Indy definitely agreed with her. He prepared to spring up and run to the door, but he didn’t even need Anita’s shocked movement to tell him that this was the worst of all the possible directions- he also heard the steps now, and he realized that it was much too late to leave the room and seriously imagine that he wouldn’t be seen. He needed a hiding place.

“The bed!” said Anita. “Crawl under it! Quickly!”

For a second, Indy was so confused that he did nothing at all. The suggestion seemed so ridiculous to him that he nearly laughed aloud. But he had no more time to think about it. He rushed over, heard the steps stop right in front of the door, and threw himself forward with a long leap. As the door handle turned, he slid on his belly across the polished wooden floor, head pulled in. His feet vanished beneath the edge of the bed as the door opened and a small stream of light fell into the room from the hallway, and a second later his head collided rather hard with the wall against which the bed stood.

For a moment, he saw only colorful stars. With clenched teeth and as quietly as he could, Indy turned himself around and looked to the door.

In the next moment, he began to feel just as ridiculous as he had feared. The door remained open, but the feet and the part of

the legs that he could see definitely didn't belong to José. They were very small, dainty girl feet and ankles.

"Joana!" he heard Anita's voice say. His face was pressed roughly against the ground as Anita sat up in bed, surprised, and the worn steel springs beneath the bed's mattress groaned and bent down.

"What are you doing here?"

Indy heard the sound of the door being closed again, and then the gentle tap of Joana's feet as she approached the bed.

"I... want to speak with you," said Joana. Her voice sounded tired and somehow exhausted. But no longer drunk.

"Now?" asked Anita. "I... I was going to bed and..."

"I hope that I haven't woken you," Joana interrupted her. "And I won't stay for long. But... I heard the voice of your husband in the room below. And I wanted to talk to you alone."

"Couldn't it wait until morning?"

"I just wanted to apologize," said Joana remorsefully. "I think that I... acted terribly. I am very sorry about what happened to your husband."

"He'll survive it," said Anita. "And he won't rip your head off over it, child."

"It's terribly embarrassing for me," said Joana. "Maybe... you can talk to him. I mean, before morning..." She stopped again and started to nervously shift from one foot to the other.

"I will do that, Joana," said Anita. "I'll talk to him. I will talk with him today, as soon as he comes to bed. You'll find tomorrow morning that everything's fine. But now be a dear and let me sleep: I'm very tired- and none of us know how much sleep we will get tonight."

"Of course," said Joana hastily. "I'm sorry if I disturbed you. I... will go now."

Indy let out a silent sigh of relief as Joana turned and went to the door. She cautiously opened it and took a step- and stopped again. For a second, she stood completely motionless in the doorway. Then she quickly retreated into the room and pulled the door shut.

"What is it?" asked Anita.

“Your husband!” answered Joana, shocked. “He’s coming up the stairs!”

“Then you should go.”

“Too late!” answered Joana. In her voice was a clear undertone of panic. “He’ll see me.”

“That wouldn’t really be so bad,” began Anita, but Joana didn’t listen to her, instead continued on in a nearly hysterical tone.

“I have to hide! Get him to leave for some reason- just for a minute.”

Indy heard the hasty slap of bare feet on the wood floor, then Anita’s shocked gasp.

“Not there! In the closet!”

But it was too late. Joana threw herself onto the floor with a quick movement, crawled skillfully under the bed- and flinched back in shock as her groping hands slid over Indy’s face.

“Who...?”

“Shh!” Indy managed. “Not a sound!”

Joana did fall silent, but her fingers felt curiously over his face for a second time. It was so dark here under the bed that she couldn’t even see him as a shadow- and he hoped that she at least couldn’t recognize him just by touch.

In almost the same moment, the door opened and José stepped in. He automatically pulled it closed again, but only to open it again in nearly the same moment to use the light that streamed in from the hall to orient himself. Indy hear heavy boot steps crash across the ground, then the whole bed shook above them and the old, weakened steel springs bent down farther as José sat down on the edge. Indy could barely breathe.

“José?” asked Anita. The sleepy tone in her voice was really convincing, Indy noted. Anita was a very good actress. He just didn’t know whether he should be happy about this or not.

“You’re still awake?” mumbled José.

“I was waiting for you,” answered Anita.

“In the dark?” The mattress rose again a little as José stood up and crashed towards the table.

“No,” said Anita.

José’s steps stopped. “No what?”

“The light,” answered Anita. “Please don’t turn it on.”

“But why not?”

“It... could be seen from outside,” answered Anita haltingly.

José laughed roughly. “Nonsense! The shutters are closed, right?” Indy heard a match being struck, glass clinking quietly, and then the room was filled with the pale, almost white light of a petroleum lamp.

Of course its light didn’t reach under the bed, but all the same, it caused the darkness to lighten enough that he could see Joana’s shocked, pale face and her disbelievingly wide eyes only a few centimeters from him.

Just as clearly as she could see him.

For a moment, she just stared at him, then he saw a dark glint in her eyes that burned brighter and brighter. Her face simultaneously began to darken.

Indy grabbed at her at the last moment and pressed his hand over her mouth as she prepared to scream. Joana tried instinctively to knock his hand aside, but in the space beneath the bed, she was just as constricted as he was.

“What was that?” asked José in alarm, and Joana froze, shocked, in the middle of her movement.

“What?” asked Anita innocently.

“I... I thought I heard something,” said José. “You didn’t?”

Indy’s heart made a terrified leap as Anita laughed quietly and answered: “Maybe I hid my lover under the bed. Why don’t you go ahead and check?”

“I really heard something,” insisted José.

The bed groaned audibly and pressed Indy and Joana even closer against the ground as Anita shook her head forcefully. “No,” she said. “You must have imagined it.”

José remained standing there uncertainly for a moment and listened, but then went back over to the bed and sunk down hard on the mattress. “You’re probably right,” he said. “Come- let’s turn to more pleasant things.”

Indy widened his eyes in disbelief, and Joana also looked irritated. The mattress bent down even more and pressed them both so tightly against the ground that they could barely breathe as José turned to his wife above them.

“Not now,” Anita said almost roughly.

“Why not?” asked José. His voice sounded sharp.

“I’m... not in the mood,” answered Anita. “And I’m thirsty.”

“Then drink something,” answered José. “There’s a whole decanter of water on the night table.”

“I don’t want water,” explained Anita. “You can get me a glass of wine.”

“Later,” said José. “Afterwards.”

The mattress squeaked and moved again, and Indy had the feeling that he was being slowly, but mercilessly, trampled into the ground. Then he heard José make a strange sound and sit up. “Damn it, what’s wrong with you?” he asked curtly. “Don’t try to be so coy!”

“I have a headache,” answered Anita in the same stubborn tone.

“A headache, oh?” snapped José wickedly. “Be careful, dear. You’ll have much more pain than that if you don’t stop these stupid tricks.”

“I didn’t say that I don’t want to,” answered Anita. “But I want a glass of wine. Be a dear and get me one. And bring yourself something to drink too.”

For several seconds, José didn’t answer. Then they heard him stand up with an angry growl, leaning so heavily on the mattress that the springs pricked through Indy’s jacket and bored deep into his bellybutton. “Women!” growled José. But he went obediently to the door, tore it open, and slammed it again behind him.

Indy crawled hastily out from under the bed and stood up, while Joana got up again on the other side and looked between him and Anita motionlessly, glaring.

“So that’s it!” began Joana. “I should have known that...”

“Not now!” Indy interrupted her. With two steps, he was at the door, pressed his ear against the wood, and listened for a second. When he heard nothing, he opened it, carefully peered through the crack out into the hall, and finally slipped out. He quickly crossed the corridor, opened the door to his own room, and stepped inside.

With a relieved sigh, he turned around to pull it closed again, but he wasn’t able to finish this movement even halfway. The

door was opened so forcefully that he stumbled two steps forwards and half tripped over his bed as Joana stormed in.

“So that’s it!” she said again. “That’s why she was in such a hurry to get rid of me. And I even wondered where you were! I looked everywhere because I wanted to apologize to you! I must be crazy!”

Indy straightened up uncertainly on the bed and started to answer, but Joana didn’t let him say a word.

“And as the idiot I am, I really thought that it was just your good manners! It was really because you had something better, right? We probably aren’t even here about the pendant, but that dumb cow over there!”

“She isn’t a dumb cow,” Indy interrupted, but Joana wasn’t listening.

“The man apparently only likes older women!” she continued brokenly. She came a step closer and placed her hands on her hips, trying to seem threatening. “And I travelled around half the world with you, stole an airplane, nearly got eaten by a snake, barely escaped kidnap by a horde of wild men, and was nearly shot- and all of that was just so that Dr. Indiana Jones could more quickly reach the bed of that black-haired slut!”

“I wasn’t in her bed,” said Indy.

Joana pushed his answer aside with an angry hand movement. “But that was what you wanted, wasn’t it? I’m almost sorry that I didn’t come in five minutes later. Or not at all- then José would have shown up and caught you with his wife.”

“That’s enough!” Indy interrupted. With an angry movement, he stood up, grabbed her by the shoulder, and shook her. “Just stop this nonsense! It’s completely different than what you think.”

Joana knocked his hand away. “Of course!” she said derisively. “It’s always completely different than it looks, isn’t it?” She laughed disparagingly. “I know that I’m just a dumb child who doesn’t understand a thing.”

“At least that’s the way you’re acting at the moment,” said Indy.

Joana's eyes glimmered even more angrily. "And I was going to apologize to you!" she said. "Did you know that I nearly believed you?"

"Just stop it already," said Indy. "Your screams will wake up the whole house."

"And?" Joana snapped back. "Would it be so embarrassing for you to be found in a room alone with me?" Her eyes hurled small, burning flashes in his direction. "Finding you in bed with that Anita clearly wasn't quite so embarrassing."

"Please, just listen to me for one minute," said Indy, nearly pleading. "I'll explain everything to you, but..."

"Thank you, Dr. Jones," Joana interrupted him. "I'll do without your explanations."

"Then at least be quiet," Indy pleaded. "What will Professor Norten think if he hears you- and sees you in this condition?"

"In this condition?" Joana looked down at herself. She was wearing only a white men's shirt that was at least five sizes too big for her, but still barely reached down to her thighs. For a moment, she stared at him, then creased her brow and nodded. "Oh, I understand. You mean that I'm inappropriately dressed. That's probably true. The shirt was meant for you anyway, I think. Here- you can have it!"

And before Indy could stop her, she pulled the shirt over her head with a quick movement, rolled it up into a ball, and threw it at his face. In the fraction of a second before it hit him, he could see that she was wearing absolutely nothing underneath.

"Good night, Dr. Jones," said Joana, turned on the spot and strutted, head raised high, out of the room.

"Joana!" called Indy in despair, while he rushed after her. "You can't..."

But she could. Completely naked, but with her head held high and as proud as a queen at a party, Joana marched out of his room and across the hall.

That José and Professor Norten came up the stairs one after another at that exact moment and also saw Indy standing in the doorway, looking helplessly at Joana's back and holding the balled-up shirt that she had been wearing in his hand, wasn't really something he had expected.

But it also didn't particularly surprise him.

He could no longer think of sleep that night. Norten had- almost to Indy's surprise- not tried to kill him on the spot, or at least throw him out of the house, but his eyes and the frigid expression on his face as he listened to Indy's stuttered attempts at an explanation very clearly said that they would have another, much more thorough discussion of this subject later.

Nevertheless- when Indy stopped spouting nonsense after several minutes, he said simply: "I expect you down in the drawing room in a couple of minutes, Dr. Jones. I was just on the way to see you and Joana. There are a few things we must discuss." He lifted his hand and made a dismissive movement. "Don't take the trouble. I'll go and tell Joana myself."

Indy watched him go, dismayed, mentally wished a case of strep throat on Joana, and thought seriously for a moment about returning José's nose to the same state it had been in that morning when he noticed his gloating grin. Then he decided that this idiot wasn't worth the trouble, turned on the spot, and crashed down the stairs to the drawing room.

This room was the only room in the whole house that was brightly lit. In the fireplace burned a massive fire and on a number of small tables spread seemingly at random around the room flickered over a dozen candles. None of the petroleum lamps, of which there were more than enough, burned. And Indy realized why that was. If the house was attacked and it came to a fight, one single knocked-over petroleum lamp could set fire to the whole hacienda. And the fire's duty wasn't to produce heat- the night was so warm that one could have slept outside- but to stop any natives who were crazy enough to get into the house by going up on the roof and through the fireplace; it was large enough for that, at any rate. Indy's great respect for Norten's preparedness mixed with a hint of renewed distrust. Either Professor Norten had good experience with being besieged- or he wasn't the person who he and Joana and probably even Greg thought he was.

Like during the day, heavily armed men now stood near two of the big windows. Indy nodded hurriedly at them, but reaped

only an icy glance, and hurried to sit down at the farthest place from the fireplace. Nevertheless, an unpleasant warmth remained. That and... something else.

At first, Indy tried to ignore the feeling, but it was too strong. Almost against his will, he turned his head and looked into the glowing flames. It was fire, burning wood, no more, and yet... something about the dance of the flames was wrong. It jerked and hopped, bobbed and twisted like...

Nonsense!

With a jerk, he turned his head away again and began to nervously drum on the arm of the chair with his fingertips until Norton and, with him, Joana and José, returned. Joana studied him with an icy look, but in José's eyes still glinted malicious pleasure.

Norton studied Indy and Joana in turn for a moment after he had sat down. But he said nothing about what Indy had feared, instead got to business immediately. "I was thinking about our conversation today, Dr. Jones," he said.

Indy looked at him questioningly.

"I think you were right in one point," continued Norton. "I know as well as you do that those men outside are more than a handful of bush thieves. And they obviously don't care about a few human lives lost."

"I noticed that as well," said Indy.

Norton ignored him. "Anyway, the situation has changed with Joana's arrival," he continued without stopping. "Since Greg is dead, I feel responsible for the girl now. I can't risk something happening to her. So I have come to the conclusion that we should try to get out of here."

"You aren't going to wait for your men?"

"I'm really not sure that they'll actually be back here tomorrow morning," explained Norton. "The cattle were loaded, they got their payment- it's very possible that they'll stay in the city for a day or two. Normally I don't mind if they amuse themselves for a few days. After all, they do work hard enough throughout the rest of the year. And even if they do- you might be right and those fools are waiting for them. Not that I think they

could really take on sixty armed men, but it could cause a lot of death and even more injuries, and I want to stop that.”

“And how?”

Norten paused for a moment. Then he turned to Joana: “Do you think that you can take off in the plane at night?”

Joana looked at him for a moment, confused, before she nodded. “That I can,” she answered. “But not in this stream. That would be suicide.”

“The river gets considerably wider,” said Norten. “Not even two miles away. And deeper as well.”

Joana considered this for a second. “I can start up the machine,” she said. “But there’s still another problem.”

“Yes?”

“We have barely any fuel.”

“What exactly does barely mean?”

Joana shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know. Enough for five minutes, maybe ten- but no more than that.”

“That’s enough,” said Norten. “There’s a refueling station about ten miles from here. It’s directly on the river.”

“Ten miles?” Joana thought hard for a moment. “We’ll make it.”

“There’s still a small problem,” Indy shot back.

All gazes turned to him.

“We were nearly killed today,” Indy reminded them, “when we landed. You don’t honestly think that they’ll calmly watch us get into the plane and fly off?”

“We’ll be safe in an airplane,” claimed Joana. “If they really are just armed with blow dart guns...”

“They are,” assured Norten. “Were it anything else, we would no longer be alive.”

“Then they can do nothing to us in the machine,” continued Joana. “Anyway, even in this stream, I can go faster than a person can run.”

“You won’t even get there,” Indy corrected.

“Maybe so,” said Norten. “The sky is clouding up. It wouldn’t surprise me if we have rain in half an hour. In any case, it will be much darker.”

“How comforting,” said Indy with corrosive derision. “The stream was hard enough to find by day.”

“What’s wrong with you, Indy?” asked Joana sharply. “Are you afraid?”

“Yes,” said Indy frankly. “And you aren’t?”

“We all are,” Norten ended the discussion angrily. “But we can’t just stay here and hope that a miracle will happen.”

“A few hours ago, you had a completely different opinion,” said Indy.

Norten considered for a moment. “That’s true,” he admitted. “But I’ve... changed my mind.”

“To be honest,” Indy corrected him, “you can sense something coming, can’t you?”

Norten looked at him penetratingly and was silent.

“You felt it just the same as me,” continued Indy. He pointed at José. “And you as well. Everyone here feels it. Those people outside aren’t highwaymen or bush thieves. There’s something going on out there. I don’t know what it is, but it scares me. And you too, Professor Norten.”

“And if so?” asked Norten, face motionless.

“If so,” said Indy, “then perhaps this is the right time to finally tell me the truth.” He pointed at the thin gold chain around Norten’s neck. “It has something to do with those pendants. What are they? Are they really just jewelry? Or are they magical objects?”

“What nonsense!” said José. But both Indy and Norten simply ignored his interjection. For nearly a minute, the two men looked at each other, and their eyes said more than words ever could.

Nevertheless, Norten finally said: “You’re a scientist like me, Dr. Jones. You should know that there’s no such thing as magic.”

“Of course,” replied Indy, just as seriously as Norten. “But there are a lot of things that we can’t explain with pure logic and science, true? So we might as well use the word magic- until we find a better one.”

Norten laughed humorlessly. “If you want.”

“But that still isn’t an answer to my question,” insisted Indy. “What secrets do these pendants hold? What’s so important about them that people have to die for them?”

“Believe me, Dr. Jones,” said Norten seriously. “I don’t know.”

“And if you knew, then you wouldn’t tell me,” guessed Indy. “Right,” said Norten.

Indy sighed deeply. “We won’t get anywhere like this,” he said.

“Then wise up and just give up,” called José derisively.

Indy prepared to answer, but in that moment, there was a bright flash from outside and the whole room was dipped for a hundredth of a second in blue-white, shadowless light. Indy blinked, and Norten and Joana both put their hands over their eyes. In the fireplace, a wooden log burst with a crack, and a shower of tiny sparks rained onto the floor.

Indy stood up and reached the window with a few steps. The sky to the west had filled with thick, low-hanging clouds, and in the distance, he could hear a deep peal of thunder. The forest’s edge lay like a thick, black blanket on the horizon. Nothing moved between there and the hacienda- but what did that really mean? In the dark shadows outside, a whole army could be hiding without any of them noticing its presence. And that was probably exactly what waited for them out there, thought Indy. A small army, but an army.

He banished those thoughts. “You’re right, Professor Norten,” he said. “There really is a thunderstorm.”

Norten stood up and stepped closer to the window. And, after a second, Joana joined them as well. Only José remained in his chair before the fireplace.

“It’s approaching quickly,” said Norten. A dark shadow fell across his face. “That doesn’t look good.”

“Weren’t you just wishing for this weather?”

Norten nodded and shook his head in nearly the same movement. “The clouds, yes, but not the thunder. And definitely not a storm.” He looked at Joana with clear worry. “Do you think that you can take off in this weather?”

“I don’t know,” admitted Joana. “I’ve never taken off in bad weather. But worst case,” she continued as she saw the expression of worry on Norten’s face turn to disappointment, “we

can always use the plane as a boat. Even if I can't take off, we'll make it ten miles in ten minutes."

"No," said Norten darkly. "We can't do that."

"Why?" asked Joana.

"Because the river..."

In that moment, another white-hot lightning bolt tore through the sky, and this time it was so close and so bright that not only Indy closed his eyes with a pained groan.

It didn't help much. He still saw the lightning; not really it, but a bright, twitching afterimage on his retinas that twisted and shook and...

Surprised, he widened his eyes, started out the window for a second, and then closed his eyelids again.

The uncannily green glowing afterimage on his retinas was still there. But what had been burned into his retinas and only gradually faded, that wasn't the shape of the lightning he had seen.

It was an image of a giant, twisting serpent with a massive mane of feathers around its neck.

"But that's... impossible!" Joana forced out.

Indy widened his eyes and looked at her. "What's impossible?" he asked.

"The lightning," stammered Joana. "I mean the... the..." She broke off and looked helplessly at him and Norten, then again at him.

And as Indy turned his head and looked at Norten, he could see the same stunned expression on his face as on Joana's and probably his own. It hadn't been his imagination. The two of them had also seen it.

A second, even brighter bolt of lightning turned the night outside to day for a fraction of a second, and this time the afterimage was so bright that Indy could see it without even having to close his eyes.

"Quetzalcoatl," whispered Norten. His voice shook with horror. "That... that's..."

"Why are you speaking such nonsense?" asked José roughly. He stood up and approached, obviously the only one in the room who hadn't noticed the eerie occurrence.

Even the two Mexicans were pale. They must have also seen the image of the feathered serpent. And even if they didn't know what it meant, they had been nearly scared to death. One of them simply dropped his gun and ran from the room, while the other pulled back slowly from the window until he ran into the wall near the fireplace.

"What does this mean?" asked Joana, terrified. "Uncle Norton! Indy! What's going on here?"

"It would be better if you asked the professor that," answered Indy angrily. "I'm sure he knows the answer."

"This isn't possible!" whispered Norton. The words weren't directed at Indy. He didn't look at him, instead stared out the window, eyes wide and dark with fear. "Not yet! They haven't even..."

"They haven't even what?" said Indy.

Norton flinched visibly and became even paler. But even now, he didn't fall for Indy's rapid-fire questions, instead easily changed the subject.

"José!" he said curtly. "Go get your wife! We have to get out of here! Now!"

"I demand an explanation now!" said Indy so loudly that he was only a tiny bit away from actually yelling.

But once again, Norton just shook his head. "Now isn't the time," he said. "We need to go!"

As if to underline his words, a third bolt of lightning flashed across the sky in that moment- and this one caused more damage than simply leaving shimmering afterimages in the form of a feathered serpent on their retinas. Indy heard an uncanny, bursting crash, and then the whole house seemed to shake on its foundations. Clinking, glass broke everywhere, people screamed, and he heard the terrifying sound of wood catching fire. The air stank of ozone and burning wood, and barely a second later, flickering flames appeared at the top of the staircase.

"Get out of here!" roared Norton in a commanding tone.

And this time, Indy reacted immediately. Lightning-fast, he turned around, grabbed Joana, and rushed to the exit.

As they ran through the hall, a second bolt of lightning hit the house.

The tremor was so strong that they were all knocked from their feet and fell one on top of the other. A monstrous ringing and crashing assaulted Indy's eardrums, and for a fraction of a second, the whole building was filled with an unbearably bright, blue-white light. The air crackled electrically, and for a moment he had the feeling that he was breathing liquid fire. The whole house shook. Plaster rained down from the ceiling, and more windowpanes broke. Somewhere, pieces of furniture fell down with a crash, and from the floor above them came noises as if the whole ceiling was about to collapse. Indy had never been in a building that had been hit by lightning. But he also had never heard of lightning exploding like a grenade. This did. It didn't just set the house on fire, it caused it to *explode*.

"Go!" yelled Norten. "Run! To the airplane! Don't wait for me!"

As far as Indy was concerned, he was only too ready to listen to Norten's wish. But Joana pulled free lightning-fast, leapt to her feet, and rushed back to Norten. Without listening to his protests, she pulled him up and towards the door.

As they rushed through the hall, the floor broke up. A small, jagged tear split the black and white checkerboard pattern of the tiles, reached the wall next to the door, and destroyed it as well. Indy flinched back in mid-run and pulled Joana with him as the small crack quickly grew to a half meter wide, bottomless shaft, from which rose dust and an eerie thundering and roaring.

And, a moment later, flames.

The man running next to them was less fortunate. He also tried to turn around in mid-run, but his reaction came too late. For a second he stood there, leaned forward and waving his arms wildly, his eyes widened in horror and a scream on his lips that was drowned out by the crashing and roaring of thunder and the collapsing house. Then a brilliant, flaming tongue shot up from the abyss, surrounded him, and dragged him into the depths.

And something about those flames was... uncanny. Indy only saw it out of the corner of his eye, because everything happened in a fraction of a second while he fell and pressed himself protectively against Joana, but the flames weren't actually flames, but a snake; a writhing, roaring, glowing snake of pure

embers that coiled around the man's body and singed him before it pulled him forward with a hard jerk, dragging him into the maw of the earth.

He flinched back, rolled over, and tried instinctively to throw his body protectively between Joana and the wall of fire, but she slipped out of his grip and leapt back up onto her feet. Indy tried to pull her back, but the flames produced such a monstrous brightness that he was blinded and couldn't see anything. He missed her.

"Uncle Norten!" Joana yelled. "Where are you?"

Indy thought he could hear an answer, but he wasn't sure; within seconds, the uncanny silence that had reigned the whole day had been broken by a hellish commotion: The roaring of flames, the uncanny hiss of the continuing lightning, and the monstrous ringing and crashing of thunder, the breaking up of collapsing buildings, the screams of people, and the crackling of flames. He saw a figure in the glow of the lightning, saw Joana running towards it, and pulled her back by her arm at the last moment as the ceiling started to collapse above their heads and a thick, burning beam fell down. Joana tried to knock his hand aside, but he held onto her with unrelenting strength, pulled himself onto his feet, and pointed with wild gesticulations to the door.

"We need to get out of here!" he yelled. The commotion had grown so much that he wasn't sure if Joana could even understand his words. But she seemed to have at least grasped the meaning of his gestures, because she shook her head wildly and tried to pull herself away again. Indy pulled her over to him with a hard jerk and roared again: "We need to go! The whole house is collapsing!"

"Uncle Norten!" Joana screamed back. "We have to find him!"

For a moment, Indy was tempted to just throw her over his shoulder and take her out; but in that moment, a figure in a torn-up linen suit appeared in the drawing room door and gesticulated wildly. Norten.

"Get to the airplane!" he yelled. "I'll get José and his wife! Go!"

For a moment, Joana paused. But then she turned around, looked for a moment out of terrified, wide eyes at the now good meter-wide split in the ground, and then to the door, and as Indy tried to look into her eyes, he saw fear there, but also determination.

He himself felt barely less uncertain than the girl did. The crack wasn't so wide that it would really be dangerous for him to leap across- but he thought in horror of the glowing fire serpent that had swallowed up the unfortunate man. The crack was no longer spewing flames, but Indy hadn't forgotten how terribly *fast* the flames had shot into the air.

But they had no other choice. The whole house now shook and bobbed constantly, and the fire closed in very quickly around them. From the top of the stairs came an eerie, almost white glow, and the heat had become nearly unbearable. Determined, he grabbed Joana's left hand, summoned all of his strength- and pushed off.

A gust of hellish embers hit them as they leapt over the crack. And as Indy looked down, he saw it: A nest of twisting, lunging, whipping snake bodies made of nothing but embers and fire, from which a nearly man-thick arm suddenly moved, reaching towards them with dreadful speed. It went incredibly fast, and yet Indy saw everything that happened with almost unnatural clarity, as if time had divided and suddenly ran on two different, completely separate planes: The snake reached up to him, a glowing, white-hot thing with scales of fire and small flaming eyes that stared at Indy with unquenchable hatred, and a wide-open mouth like the entrance to hell.

The fire snake touched his legs, twisted around them, singed his pants and the skin beneath- and loosened again in the same moment that Indy already thought he could feel the horrific power that filled its body. He felt as something massively *powerful*, massively *old*, *dark*, reached for his soul and froze it to ice, just as the fire snake burned his body- and then suddenly vanished.

With a cry of pain, he hit the floor on the other side of the crevasse, stumbled, and fell towards the door across the tiles. He tried to let go of Joana, but he still pulled her down with him, and

watched as she took a clumsy, halting step towards the door and collided hard with the frame. Half-dazed, she stumbled back and sank to her knees. From a small surface wound on her head, blood seeped in a thin, but continuous stream.

Yet she got to her feet before him, since Indy's legs burned like fire and collapsed beneath the weight of his body as he tried to stand up. A throbbing pain brought tears to his eyes, and the fabric of his pants collapsed to ashes as he touched it with his fingers. The skin above his ankles was red and already began to form big, nasty burn blisters.

With clenched teeth, he tried to stand up, fell to his knees for a third time, and finally pulled himself up with help from the doorway to stumble out of the house after Joana.

The storm now raged directly over the house. The oddly sick light of the full moon had been replaced by the strobe-like flicker of lightning, which now struck nearly constantly- and almost always hit the house! It was as if it was attracted there by magic. And Indy now no longer needed to close his eyes to see flickering snakes in this lightning, powerful, glowing monsters of pure energy that unleashed the anger of the ancient gods on this estate.

Indy banished these thoughts and looked ahead to the river. In the quick flashes of lightning, the airplane appeared eerie and massive; like a bizarre metal bird slowly beating its wings. But to Indy's surprise, it seemed completely untouched- their opponents either hadn't wasted the time to disable it or they just wanted to have it back. It did belong to them, after all.

"Do you think you can take off?" he yelled as they ran in a zigzag across the large lawn to the Cessna.

"No!" Joana yelled back. "Impossible. But we can still get away."

She made no attempt to explain her assertion- but it would have made little sense anyway.

The next minutes became a run through an obstacle course. The thunder and the uncanny firestorm had made them nearly forget the attackers out in the bushes- but they hadn't forgotten them. They didn't try to shoot at Indy and the girl with their blow dart guns- which would have been nearly impossible with the

changing light and, most of all, the wind- but it was clear that they still weren't willing to let them escape.

Indy was suddenly facing a massive, brightly painted figure, clothed only in a loincloth, a massive feather headdress on his head, and a nearly as massive axe in his right hand. He ducked instinctively beneath the axe, lost his balance on the rain-dampened grass, slid along on his back, and knocked the Indian down, mostly by accident. The Maya fell, and as he tried to get himself back up, Joana placed a well-aimed kick under his chin and he fell to the ground for a second time, unconscious.

But it wasn't over. A second giant appeared out of the darkness and threw himself at Indy and the girl with outstretched arms, fifteen or twenty steps before they reached the pontoon plane. The collision knocked them both from their feet. Indy tried to use the momentum of his fall to fling his aggressor away, but the Indian seemed to have expected that maneuver. Instead of doing him a favor and flying high over his head, he grabbed Indy's foot and twisted it so hard that he roared in pain and collapsed.

Again it was Joana who saved him. She aimed a kick at the Maya's kneecap. This obviously wasn't hard enough to really cause the man to fall; it probably didn't even hurt him. But it was enough to distract him for a moment. And this moment was enough for Indy.

While the Maya turned around with a furious growl and prepared to slap the girl, Indy pulled the whip from his belt and attacked.

It was a chance hit, but it was effective. The end of the whip wound around the Maya's face, hit his eyes, and blinded him. The Indian roared, pulled his hands up to his head, and stumbled forward as Indy pulled on the handle of the whip with all his might. He simultaneously leapt up into the air and pulled his right knee up. It landed squarely on the Maya's chin as he fell forward.

"Go now!" yelled Joana, while Indy stood there with a pained expression, massaging his bruised knee. "There are more coming!"

Indy spared himself the trouble of turning around. Instead, he limped forward as quickly as he could.

This time it seemed that the ancient Maya gods (or maybe pure luck) were finally on their side, because they reached the Cessna without another skirmish with an Indian or being struck by a dart. Indy hastily climbed into the cabin behind Joana and turned on the inside lights while the girl turned to the instrument panel and tried to start the motor.

“This is madness!” Indy whispered. The airplane shook and bobbed in the lashing wind, and the unstoppable lightning turned the world outside into a bizarre image of absolute darkness and bright white, blinding light, in which he could more sense his surroundings than really see them. “You have no chance of taking off!”

“That’s not what I’m planning on,” answered Joana, pushing the ignition again. The motor sputtered, turned over hard a couple of times, went out again- and awoke to life with a dull roar. The large propeller before the front window transformed into a whirling wheel of shadows.

Indy looked outside, heart pounding. The hacienda blazed fiercely, and amid the leaping flames were the shadows of numerous people, who were involved in wild hand to hand combat. The muzzle fire of pistols and guns constantly blinked, but the howling of the storm and the unabating roars of thunder stifled every other sound. Perhaps it was this that made the sight of the struggle seem so ghostly.

“What are you really planning?” he yelled.

Joana didn’t answer, instead busied herself with the controls, expression unreadable. The airplane shook and started to groan as Joana slowly started to rev up the engine.

Almost unwillingly, the Cessna started to move. Indy’s heart made a shocked leap and seemed to be hammering somewhere directly beneath his throat as something scraped along the underside of the pontoon with a terrible scratching sound. Then the machine came free and moved faster towards the hacienda.

“There come Uncle Norten and your friends,” screamed Joana, making a hand movement towards the burning building. “Help them in.”

Three shadows had in fact loosened themselves from the tumultuous struggle and ran in a zigzag and with wide leaps

towards the water plane. Half a dozen other shadows followed them, and Indy saw Norten turn around several times in mid-leap and send off a shot that didn't seem to hit anything. Yet the fight at the hacienda was now quickly losing intensity. The natives obviously weren't after Norten's men, just him and him alone. Or something he wore.

Shuddering, Indy thought back to that terrifying fraction of a second in which he and Joana had leapt across the pit. The pounding pain in his legs reminded him relentlessly that the fire snake hadn't been an illusion. But why hadn't it dragged him down like the man who had been killed before his eyes? It had caught him. He had felt the touch of its burning body just like the icy grip of the ancient powers that had created it. One more tiny jerk, and he and Joana...

And then he knew the answer.

The explanation was so simple that he wondered for a moment, confused, why he hadn't realized it long before. He...

The thought slipped away from him like a slippery snake that slithered between his fingers and crawled away before he could stop it, and all he was left with was a feeling of deep disappointment.

A hand movement from Joana brought him back to reality.

Norten, Anita, and José had reached the stream and now ran along next to the Cessna, gesticulating forcefully, as it constantly gained speed. Indy opened the door, stretched out his arm, and shook his head as José was the first to reach for his hand. Instead he grabbed Anita's outstretched arm and pulled her in with a heavy jerk. Then he helped first Norten and finally José climb into the cabin. They squeezed in on the small backseat.

"Hold on tight!" cried Joana once Indy had pulled the door closed, and sped up recklessly. The Cessna leapt forward, and the two brightly colored, painted figures who had leapt towards the wings with outstretched arms missed them and landed in the water.

"For God's sake- slow down!" screamed Indy in complete panic as Joana accelerated more and more. The Cessna bucked and hopped like a rollercoaster car that threatened to jump the tracks at any moment. And in the flickering light of the lightning

he could see that the stream twisted tightly in front of them; and if that wasn't enough, it also appeared to be considerably smaller.

"Try to hold this speed!" yelled Norten. "The stream feeds into the river two kilometers from here. We can take off there!"

"Impossible!" repeated Joana. "We don't have enough fuel!"

Norten bit back the curse on his lips and turned around to watch for the Indians. The Maya had fallen back a good deal, but they ran on towards them with unabating speed. And they had every reason to do so, thought Indy. Just a tiny bit of bad luck, if fuel ran out, if one of the pontoons got stuck on a rock on the stream bed, or if Joana noticed one of the small river's wild twists and turns too late and the machine got stuck on the shore, or...

Indy could immediately think of a hundred and fifty reasons that their crazy escape couldn't succeed.

But it did.

Although all rules of probability and common sense went against it, Joana somehow managed to steer the Cessna through the shallow stream the two kilometers to the river, and she also succeeded in keeping just enough speed that the Indians fell farther back and were no longer in sight.

"On the other side," said Norten hastily. "Try to keep to the other bank. The current is very strong. By the time they've swum here, we'll be safe."

"Maybe a few of them will drown," said José hopefully.

Joana threw a nervous glance at the fuel gauge- the needle was already beneath zero- bit her lower lip, and nodded, while Indy seriously considered grabbing José by the collar and throwing him out of the machine. At a sharp angle, the pontoon plane glided out into the river and started towards the opposite shore.

As they reached the middle of the river, the motor died.

Joana cursed and busied herself with the controls while Indy sighed, nearly relieved, and Norten turned white as a corpse.

"Don't worry," said Joana. "We'll make it. If we need to, we can just float. Our momentum will be enough to take us to the shore."

"No," said Norten quietly, "it won't."

Indy looked into Norten's face, confused, and then out the window- and his face lost all color.

Although the motor no longer ran, the airplane continued to move- yes, it grew even faster!

"What's going on?" he whispered.

"Don't you hear it?" Norten replied.

Indy listened for a moment. And suddenly, beneath the roar of thunder and the incessant hissing and crackling of lightning, he heard another, darker sound: A deep, vibrating thunder like a rockslide or a million horse's hooves- or water falling from a great height...

"A waterfall," he murmured.

Norten nodded. "Three kilometers from here. Maybe only two now."

"A waterfall?" gasped José. He straightened up in his seat, shocked. "We... we need to get out of here!" he screamed suddenly. He tried to push Anita aside to get to the door, but Norten pulled him back roughly.

"That would be suicide," he said. "The current is much too strong. It would carry you away."

"And we'll all die in this thing anyway!" wailed José.

"Can't you start it back up?" asked Indy. "Please, Joana- at least try!"

Joana nodded nervously. "I'll try again," she said.

"Don't try," said Indy imploringly. "Do it! You have to get it to work. We have to reach the shore!"

"I'm trying it!" answered Joana, licking her lips nervously. Her face was soaked with sweat. "There must be a little bit left in the tank. Pray that it's enough!"

Indy didn't just pray, he offered up his soul in that moment to whatever god or demon or anyone to have if they could just cause a miracle to happen and let the motor spring back to life.

But his prayer wasn't heard. The Cessna, the nose of which was now pointed directly towards the middle of the river, grew constantly faster and now shot across the waves at the speed of a motorboat. And if Indy was seeing right, then he thought that before them- not even half as far from them as he had hoped- he

saw a thin, blurred line of water, a line on which the waves broke, foaming- and beyond it was nothing more.

The Cessna grew faster and faster, the line of dust, foam, and black emptiness approaching with dreadful speed, Joana busied herself over the controls more and more and pressed her thumbs down so hard on the starter button that they went completely white, the thunder of the waterfall grew constantly louder- and then they had reached the waterfall and there was no longer anything beneath the Cessna!

They all screamed loudly as the pontoon plane, carried along by its own momentum, shot a good bit over the edge of the waterfall, and then its nose began to sink very slowly. Far below them- horrifically far below them- Indy could make out the witches' cauldron of roiling foam where the water landed at the foot of the rock wall, and he felt the invisible hand grab the airplane that would, within a few moments, turn its glide into an uncontrollable fall.

And then the motor sprang to life.

Joana pushed the gas lever completely forward with a relieved cry, the propeller turned faster and faster, and the fall of the Cessna again became a fast, but a controlled glide. At a sharp angle and still much too quickly, the pontoon plane approached the river, caught its fall at the last moment, and even gained height for a brief second.

Indy was just about to breathe a sigh of relief as the motor died again. And the sound that it made this time told him that it wouldn't start again. The tanks were finally empty.

But the last leap of the propellers had been enough. Very hard, the Cessna hit the water's surface, the hull almost reached the water, and then it leapt like a skipped stone two, three times in succession into the air. But Joana succeeded in keeping the machine under control.

With an exhausted sigh, the girl sunk down over the steering wheel.

"Oh my God," groaned José from the backseat and collapsed, whimpering, while Anita stared off into space, expression frozen. Norton sighed audibly, and Indy inconspicuously wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand.

“That was a masterful job,” he said in acknowledgement. “Fantastic work, Joana.”

The girl raised her head, shaking, and looked at him out of eyes dark with fear. “That was pure luck,” she murmured, “Nothing else.”

“We’re still alive, at any rate,” said Norten. “Without you, we would have never made it.”

“Without her,” said José wickedly, “we wouldn’t even be here!”

Joana shrugged her shoulders, visibly prepared a defensive answer, and then left it at another shrug.

“Stop arguing,” said Norten. “Let’s try to get out of here instead.”

“This plane won’t take us anywhere now,” said Joana. “The tanks are completely empty.”

Norten made a negative gesture. “There’s a store a few kilometers downriver,” he said. “They have fuel. We can fill up there.”

Joana prepared to answer, but Norten continued in a slightly raised, but piercing voice. “They won’t give up, Joana. It will take them a while, but they will follow us, believe me.”

And this was the last word that they got out of him until the airplane was driven along by the current and they reached the store he had mentioned.

As it turned out, they had particular luck in this case: The owner of the small store, where it seemed one could buy everything with the exception of a completely outfitted submarine, was not only present, but also ready to sell them enough fuel to fill the Cessna’s tanks at a very reasonable price. And Joana, who used the time that Indy and Norten needed to fill the seemingly bottomless tanks of the airplane with twenty-liter canisters to examine the airplane by the beam of a flashlight, explained happily that the machine obviously hadn’t sustained any serious damage; aside from the nearly two dozen small blow darts sticking in the wings and rear.

“I think that now is the time for the truth,” said Indy as they all climbed back into the airplane and Joana started the engine.

He turned with a questioning gaze towards Norten, but the professor just shook his head.

“First we should discuss our destination,” he said. “We need to find a place where they can’t track us down.”

“How about the moon?” asked Indy derisively.

But Norten remained serious. “What has to happen for you to see that these men are dangerous, Dr. Jones?”

“Oh, I think I already knew that,” answered Indy in the same tone, as he alternated between gazing at Norten and José. “I’m just not quite sure who’s more dangerous- those wild men, or you and your nice friend there.”

José looked at him, filled with hatred, but said nothing, and Norten answered: “If you have the feeling that we pose a threat to you, Dr. Jones, then that’s just because you’re constantly getting yourself mixed up in things that don’t concern you. Had you just given José the amulet in New Orleans and then gone on your way, none of this would have happened.”

“Not to me,” said Indy wickedly. “But to Joana, right?”

“We would have protected her,” replied Norten angrily.

“I’ve noticed,” said Indy angrily. “One of those men nearly killed her.”

Joana sped up and directed the Cessna towards the middle of the river again. “It would be best,” she said, “if we flew to the coast. I don’t have great experience with night flying. But I think that if I fly along the coast, I will soon find Havana again.”

“Good idea,” said José. “Only we won’t be flying to Havana.”

Indy looked over at him, creasing his brow. José smiled, reached into his jacket pocket, and pulled out a crumpled note that he held out towards Joana.

The girl took it from him, glanced over the scribbled numbers, brow creased, and threw José a questioning glance. “What is this?”

“That is a longitude and latitude, my child,” said José.

“I see that,” replied Joana angrily. “But what do I do with it?”

“Fly there, kid,” said José cheerfully. “A boat is waiting for us at that position, and we will be safe from those trigger-happy Stone Age men there.”

“I’m not planning on flying there,” said Joana seriously. “But if you want, I can let you out here and you can swim there.”

“I don’t think so,” replied José, reaching into his pocket again.

“Really?” asked Indy. “And why not?”

“Because I have an argument that will certainly change your mind,” said José, pulled a large caliber revolver out of his pocket, and pressed the barrel hard against Indy’s right nostril.



CHAPTER 6

USS Saratoga 10 Nautical Miles East of Cuba

The flight lasted until long after midnight. And that Joana finally found what José had described as a *boat* had less to do with her nautical capabilities and was more due to the fact that the ship was a good ten miles away from the coast of Cuba on the high sea and had all of its position lights on. The airplane landed half a mile away from the ship and floated the rest of the way on its pontoons. Even before they were anywhere near the ship, a strong floodlight flared up on the deck, the beam of which surrounded the Cessna and wouldn't move off of it.

Indy blinked, blinded, and thought for a fraction of a second that this was probably his last chance to turn around and give José the hook to the chin that he wanted to; and not only since the moment he had drawn his pistol and aimed it at him.

But he didn't do it. José no longer had the gun pointed at his face, but had rested the hand with the pistol in his lap in a way that he only had to fire to shoot a bullet into his back through the seat. Indy was almost tempted to take that risk- but the danger that he would shoot and hit Joana in the tight cabin was simply too great. He awarded José another negative in his mind- that he planned to express physically when the chance arose- and determined to wait for a better opportunity.

And besides, in that moment, they approached the ship, and what Indy saw in the pale moonlight confused him far too much to waste another through on José.

Already from the air, the ship had appeared massive. But that wasn't it.

It wasn't massive. It was *gigantic*.

He had expected a yacht or, at the most, something like an old banana steamer, some dump that Captain José had bought for a small sum. But what lay before them in the water was giant and dark and as massive as a floating city, this was no simple dinghy- it was a warship of the US Navy! In massive letters, glowing almost eerily in the darkness, the name USS Saratoga appeared on the bow. Judging by its size, it must at least be a cruiser, if not a battleship. What on earth was going on here?

Joana switched off the motor when they were twenty meters away from the ship. It was a very big ship- a massive ship, the kind that one normally saw in Hollywood films or as a blurred mirage on the horizon. The deck was filled with men, a small army, of which none among them were unarmed, as Indy noticed in discomfort.

One wing of the Cessna hit the massive flank of the cruiser with a dull thump. In almost the same moment, a rope ladder was lowered to them, and seconds later, crashing steps sounded on the wing of the small pontoon plane. A man in the dark blue uniform of the US Navy tied a rope around one of the struts, a second climbed down onto a pontoon and opened the door.

“Don't celebrate too soon, old friend,” said José, grinning, as Indy sighed in relief.

And a second later, Indy understood what those words meant. The giant gray monster of a ship and, most of all, the Navy uniforms of its crew, had instinctively caused him to expect help- but at the moment, this help was in the form of the muzzle of a gun in the hands of the Navy soldier, pointed at a spot between his eyes.

Indy sent José a last evil glance, climbed awkwardly out of the cabin first, and received a sharp jab with the muzzle of the gun in the back as he paused for a second to grab the rope ladder and climb up it.

Strong arms reached for him and pulled him completely onto the deck of the warship, while the others behind him began to climb the rope ladder. Above him waited a half dozen more muzzles that were all aimed threateningly at him. A soldier commanded him with a rough gesture to step aside, and two unarmed, but muscular sailors went to stand on either side of him. One of them quickly and roughly searched him for weapons, obviously not considering the rolled-up whip at his side to be a considerable threat, because he just threw a confused glance at it and left it where it was.

One by one, all of the others climbed up the rope ladder onto the deck of the warship. First Joana, closely followed by Anita and José. Norten formed the rear. Indy noticed that he was treated far less roughly than the others. Much less so than José.

And he was also the only one who wasn't searched for weapons. To Indy's surprise, even José's pistol was taken away. And even the two women were- discreetly and by two soldiers whose ears turned dark red during the procedure, but thoroughly-felt for weapons.

"They're clean, Lieutenant," one of the sailors finally said.

The Lieutenant he had spoken to nodded and pointed at the structure on the deck that, in the darkness, looked like a massive steel mountain with angular ridges, rising up behind them. "Good," he said. "Then follow me, please."

Indy didn't move from the spot. "What the hell is going on here?" he asked angrily. "Who are you, and why are you treating us like prisoners?"

"Our captain will explain all of that," said the Lieutenant. With a thin smile, he added: "And the sooner you follow us, the sooner you get answers to your questions."

Indy threw him a wicked glance, but said no more, instead stepped quickly over to Joana and sent her a glance that told her to do what the man had said.

"Don't worry," he said. "Everything will be alright." He smiled encouragingly, reached into his jacket pocket, and took out a clean handkerchief with which he dabbed at the small cut on Joana's forehead.

Joana looked at him in confusion.

“She’s bleeding again,” he said. “She needs a bandage.” Simultaneously, he dragged the handkerchief a bit more roughly across Joana’s forehead so that the tiny cut broke open again and began to bleed. Joana’s face contorted in pain, but she said nothing. Either she understood or was much too confused to make a sound.

“Is it bad?” inquired the Lieutenant, stepping closer, worried.

Indy shook his head. “Not bad,” he said. “But probably rather painful.”

The officer examined the scrape. “Our ship’s doctor will take care of it,” he said.

“Take my handkerchief,” said Indy, smiling encouragingly and pushing the rolled-up handkerchief into Joana’s hand. For a fraction of a second, there was a treacherous flash between the folds of the white fabric, then Joana closed her hand tighter around the handkerchief. Indy threw a hurried glance around and recognized with satisfaction that none of the others had noticed anything.

He wasn’t even sure if Joana really understood what he had done. She looked completely puzzled. Obviously she understood just as little as he did what was actually going on here- and she didn’t seem to be alone in that respect. Anita also looked shocked, and across José’s face had spread a deeply confused, half angry, half dismayed expression. Only Norten looked completely calm, yes, almost content.

Flanked by a dozen armed men, they entered the interior of the ship. Indy had expected to be led to the bridge, but instead they took several staircases down, finally reaching a long, bare corridor of steel, at the end of which they found an armored hatch that two men guarded with shouldered weapons. Their leader gestured commandingly for them to stop, knocked, and stepped inside. He stayed there for a good while, and when he came back, he just pointed at Norten and Indy. “Follow me, Sirs,” he said.

“Hey!” protested José. “What about us?”

“We have already prepared quarters for you,” answered the Lieutenant. You will find all of the things necessary for your comfort. And the two women as well.”

“I won’t stay alone,” protested Joana.

The Lieutenant smiled mildly. "You really have nothing to fear, Miss," he said. "I can vouch for every one of my men."

Joana shook her head defiantly. "I want to stay with Indy," she said.

"You're on a US Naval warship," said the officer with mild rebuke. "Not a pirate ship."

"Please do what he says," said Indy quietly. Joana's eyes glinted defiantly again. And he added: "I'll make it quick. I'll find you in a few minutes."

Judging by the Lieutenant's expression, he doubted that. But he didn't comment, opened the armored hatch a little wider, and repeated his commanding hand movement. "Please step inside, Dr. Jones," he said. "Commander Bentley is waiting for you."

Indy stepped haltingly through the door and suddenly found himself in a surprisingly comfortable room that reminded him less of a cabin on a warship and more of a luxuriously appointed hotel room: On the floor lay a soft carpet, and the bare gray of the steel walls was mostly hidden behind tasteful pictures and prints with which the owner of the cabin had tried to diminish their cold functionality. On a small shelf near the door stood an artfully done model of the Mayflower, next to it, a small cabinet filled with books. The room created a through and through homey impression. Only the circular portholes in the wall disturbed this impression slightly.

While Norton stepped in behind him and the Lieutenant closed the hatch from the outside, Indy turned his attention to the gray-haired, powerfully-built man who sat behind the massive desk and studied him with unconcealed curiosity. He wore a dark blue captain's uniform with small golden stripes on his shoulders and sleeves and had the same gray hair and the same angular face as Norton. But despite the hardness of his features and the energetic expression in his eyes, he still looked kind.

"Commander Bentley, I take it?"

Norton nodded. With a clarifying gesture, he pointed at the man behind the desk and said: "Allow me to introduce you: Commander Bentley Norton. An... old friend of mine."

Indy prepared to ask a question, but Bentley stood up from behind his desk with a fluid movement and demonstrated that he

was in fact as tall as Indy had expected; he towered over him and Norten by several inches.

“But please, Dr. Jones, take a seat,” he said. “I can imagine that you have many burning questions to ask. We can speak more comfortably sitting down.” He pointed at a small group of chairs near the door, waited until Indy and Norten had taken their seats, and then went to a cabinet from which he took a flask of whiskey and three glasses. “Will you have a drink with me?”

Indy didn’t feel like having a drink. But he nodded anyway and allowed Bentley to pour three glasses and push him one over the table, but didn’t drink it, instead just turned it uncertainly in his fingers.

“So you are Indiana Jones,” began Bentley. “Greg told me a lot about you- but I must confess that I had imagined you differently.”

“How?” asked Indy, while he very carefully sipped at the contents of his glass.

Bentley shrugged his shoulders and took a large gulp of whiskey. “Just different,” he said. “But I can’t say that I’m disappointed.” He interrupted himself for a moment and turned to Norten. “How are things at the hacienda?”

“Not good at all,” said Norten. “We had a lot of trouble.”

Bentley pointed with a head movement at Indy. “With him?”

“No. Just the opposite,” said Norten. “Without Dr. Jones- and, most of all, Joana- I probably wouldn’t be here now. The Indians tracked us down.”

Bentley looked a little shocked. “So soon?”

“So soon,” confirmed Norten. “I was also surprised. I’m guessing that they followed José and Anita. It wouldn’t surprise me if they showed up here sooner or later too.”

“Even if they do,” said Bentley dismissively, “we’re safe here.”

He turned back to Indy. “But I think we owe you an explanation now, Dr. Jones.”

“I think so as well.” Indy’s tone was icy. His eyes wandered between both of their faces, back and forth. He was confused, to put it lightly. After the mental overload that this day had brought, he just no longer knew what to think of Norten and Bentley.

“Before we answer your questions, Dr. Jones,” began Bentley, “I would like you to give me your pendant.”

“What pendant?” inquired Indy harmlessly.

Bentley made a face as if he had bitten down on a rock. “Please, Dr. Jones,” he said. “Spare yourself and us the embarrassment of calling for one of the sailors to search you. I know that you’re wearing the pendant that Greg gave you.”

“Even if that were so,” answered Indy coldly, “then he gave it to me so I could give it to his daughter- not you.”

Bentley smiled thinly. “Of course you can give it to Joana first, and then she can give it to us,” he said. “If you don’t mind wasting your time with such ridiculous games...” He shrugged his shoulders and looked at Indy questioningly.

“I don’t have it,” said Indy stubbornly.

Anger glimmered in Bentley’s eyes, and Indy added calmly: “If you don’t believe me, just call one of your men and let him search me.”

“Where is it?” asked Norten sharply. “You didn’t give it to Joana. At least she claims you didn’t.”

“You can let them search her too,” said Indy quickly. “If you don’t believe her. The pendant is in a safe place.”

Bentley sighed deeply. “You’re just making this unnecessarily hard, Dr. Jones,” he said. “We’re on your side.”

“Oh?” asked Indy derisively.

“Haven’t you told him anything?” asked Bentley Norten.

Norten shook his head. “No. I thought that it was... too dangerous.”

Bentley studied Indy for a moment out of his dark, penetrating eyes, then he said: “I think that we can take the risk. Dr. Jones is a man with a flawless reputation.”

Silently and very quickly, Bentley stood up and went to an armored safe that was near his desk in the wall. His fingers turned the combination, he opened the door, took something out, and came back to the table. Before Indy’s surprised eyes, he laid nine completely identical golden Quetzalcoatl pendants on the table.

“That would be eleven- with the one that Dr. Jones has,” he said, after he had laid them out with nearly mathematical

precision and even pulled the chains straight. “Does José have the other two?”

Norten shook his head and took another sip of whiskey. “I fear not,” he said. “He has one of them.”

“And the twelfth?”

“I fear that the Indians have it,” answered Norten.

On Bentley’s face appeared an expression that was both frightened and angry, and Norten pointed at Indy and said: “At least he claims they do.”

“Is that true?” asked Bentley. His voice sounded a little bit colder and less friendly than before.

“Yes,” said Indy. “It was Joana’s pendant. They attacked us when I met her at a law firm in New Orleans.”

“And you couldn’t stop them?”

Indy suppressed a shrill laugh at the last moment. “I could barely stop them from killing us both,” he said. “And had I known how things would turn out, I would have given them the second one as well.”

Norten’s face darkened, but Bentley lifted his hand quickly and soothingly and poured himself another glass of whiskey. Indy shook his head as he raised the flask with a questioning gesture.

“I can understand your anger, Dr. Jones,” he said. “But this is unjustifiable, believe me. If you knew the truth, then you would understand why Professor Norten had to behave as he did.”

“So you mean lied to us, put us in mortal danger, and kidnapped us?”

“I had no other choice,” Norten defended himself. “José is uncontrollable. He isn’t just crazy, he has no conscience.”

“Is that why you were working with him?”

“We were working with him, Dr. Jones,” answered Bentley, “because, after Greg’s death, we needed someone who knew the area.”

“Knew the area?”

“José Pérez was born and raised in a small town near Piedras Negras,” said Norten. “Didn’t you know that?”

Indy shook his head in confusion. Even more than this revelation, he was confused by the place name. Piedras Negras-

that was the city in the Yucatan where he and Greg had gone on their last, fateful expedition. Nevertheless, he said: "I thought that you were a specialist on South American cultures?"

"That I am," answered Norten with pride in his voice. "I've been in the Yucatan myself many times, but in this case, it unfortunately isn't enough to speak a couple of old Maya dialects and be familiar with their culture, Dr. Jones. You were there with Greg. You know how difficult and confusing the land is. And what we're searching for is carefully hidden. Without a man who knows the area, we would have no chance."

He smiled quickly and traded a meaningful glance with Bentley. "Of course, we would have rather turned to you than a creature like Pérez," he continued. "But after Greg's death, things... became a bit more complicated. You know Greg- he wasn't a man who would have left precise records." He tapped his forehead. "Most of what he knew, he had written down there. And unfortunately, we spent a large part of the last three years trying to piece together the rest of the story from what little he told us before."

Indy pointed with a head movement at the nine golden pendants on the table. "And stealing these nine pendants, I'm guessing."

Bentley's smile grew a bit colder. "I would have used a different word, Dr. Jones," he said. "Technically, these pendants are our property. Better said- ours and Greg's."

"And so you consider this to be your inheritance..." said Indy cynically.

Bentley smiled. "I see that you understand what we mean."

"Part of it," replied Indy. "What I don't understand is what's so special about these pendants."

"About these pendants," answered Bentley, "nothing." He brushed his palm across the table and destroyed his carefully arranged order. "They're completely worthless- aside from the small value in the gold. All but one, that is."

"And which one is it?"

Bentley shrugged his shoulders. "I know that as little as you do, Dr. Jones," he said frankly. "And we will only find out when we arrive in Piedras Negras with all twelve."

“A place near the town, to be exact,” added Norten.

Indy’s eyes wandered, irritated, between both of their faces and the small, golden pendants, to and fro. “I really don’t understand,” he admitted.

Bentley laughed quietly. “Neither did we for a long time, Dr. Jones,” he said. “But the explanation is very simple. Only one of these pendants is real. The twelve others are copies that Greg made shortly before his death and handed out seemingly at random. We had to go to a lot of trouble to track them down.”

“But why?”

“Because this one real pendant is something particularly special,” answered Norten. Something... changed in his voice as he spoke: It suddenly had an almost respectful, quiet tone that Indy recognized all too well. He had heard it countless times in Greg’s voice, and it had been in his own voice countless times when he spoke of the great secrets and mysteries of ancient cultures.

“You’re an archaeologist like me, Dr. Jones,” continued Norten. “And I know from Greg that you know nearly as much about the vanished South American cultures as he did- and he understood them nearly better than I do. You know who this amulet symbolizes.”

Indy nodded automatically. “Quetzalcoatl,” he answered. “The feathered serpent god of the Maya. Their highest deity.”

Yes,” answered Norten. “But it isn’t just an image of Quetzalcoatl. It also isn’t just some cult object. It’s...” He paused, was silent for several seconds, and then looked at Indy in a very strange way.

“Do you believe in magic, Dr. Jones?” he asked.

“That... depends on how one defines the word,” replied Indy haltingly.

“I’m guessing,” said Norten, “that you define it the same way I do. We have already spoken about this subject. But I admit that I didn’t tell you the whole truth at the hacienda. This one pendant that we are after was made shortly before the decline of the Maya empire by one of their most powerful shamans. You see, Dr. Jones, most people today think the Maya barbarians; wild men who made human sacrifices and never really rose out of the Stone

Age, despite their impressive structures. But that isn't true. They had an incredible culture, and in many things they were just as sophisticated as us, in some, better. Their astrology, for example..."

"I know all of this, Dr. Norten," Indy interrupted him.

Norten smiled, embarrassed. "Of course- you're also an expert. Forgive me, Dr. Jones, I think it's the scientist in me coming through."

"It doesn't matter," replied Indy impatiently. "I sometimes get the same way."

"So this one pendant," said Norten, returning to the topic, "was created by one of the most powerful sorcerers in the Maya empire. The Maya didn't fall in one day. To the simple folk, it may have seemed like a catastrophe, but the wise men among them saw the decline coming from far off. And they also suspected that they wouldn't be able to stop it. So they decided to change the future. Their knowledge of astronomy was astonishing. They could predict the course of a star a hundred, if not a thousand years in advance, reaching a precision that even we cannot. So they compared the constellations of the stars at the time of their height and in the future, and came to the conclusion that the next few centuries would be unfavorable for the Maya; to put it lightly. So unfavorable that not even the power of the gods would be able to stop the decline of their people. So they created this piece of jewelry. Their most gifted artisans worked for a year to create it, and the gold was hardened in the blood of men. And they placed all of their beliefs and all of their magic into this tiny piece of metal."

His voice quieted, sinking to a whisper filled with reverence. "What you and everyone else may think is a worthless piece of jewelry, Dr. Jones, is more, so much more. It is the magic of an entire people. It is the key to reawaken Quetzalcoatl."

Indy stared at the gray-haired man across from him for several seconds, completely stunned. He had grasped what Norten meant, but everything within him simply refused to believe it. And he simultaneously felt that it was the truth. Somehow, he had known this the whole time.

"You mean that... that..."

“Quetzalcoatl will awaken again if we return this pendent on a certain day to a certain room in a mysterious Maya temple at the foot of a volcano,” said Norten. “And that day is soon, Dr. Jones. Very soon!”

“But that... that’s ridiculous,” protested Indy. His words sounded unconvinced even to his own ears. And Norten didn’t take the trouble to answer him.

“The Maya people can now reach new size and might, Dr. Jones,” he said. “Or collapse again, maybe forever this time.”

“Or,” added Bentley, “And this is the third, and, at the moment most realistic possibility, the powers that this pendent holds could fall into the wrong hands.”

Indy looked at him penetratingly. “Yours, for example?”

Bentley remained calm. “I expected this answer, Dr. Jones,” he said. “But believe me- Professor Norten and I are not concerned with finding some personal advantage in this.”

“What do you want, then?” asked Indy. “And don’t say that you just want to understand the mysteries of a vanished civilization. I wouldn’t believe that of you.”

Bentley’s lips pulled into a thin, amused smile. “I wouldn’t expect you to,” he said. “No- my motives are of a different sort. I admit that it took a long time for Norten to convince me when he came to me after Greg’s death and told me the whole story. But in the meantime, I have experienced so many astonishing things that I believe him. As far as the professor goes- he is a scientist through and through- like you, Dr. Jones. He only wants knowledge. I don’t think I need to explain that to you. He wants nothing more than to solve this mystery.”

“And you?”

“I want to stop this power from falling into the wrong hands,” answered Bentley. “You know José better than I do. You know that he would be foolish enough to name himself the new ruler or a Maya god. Can you even imagine what would happen then?”

Indy tried to laugh, but the sound that he really created was more of a ridiculous squeak. “Don’t take me for a fool, Bentley,” he said weakly. “You seriously want me to believe that you’re afraid of a few Maya with stone swords and magic spells.”

"Of course not," answered Bentley calmly. "Neither the United States nor any other country needs to be afraid of them. But still, they could cause great damage. There could be death. Hundreds, if not thousands, could die."

"Just think about what happened at the hacienda," added Norten.

Indy didn't believe anything either of them said. Their explanations sounded plausible, but maybe a little too plausible for his taste.

"That's why we tried to get these pendants back, Dr. Jones," Bentley continued after a long pause. "And that's why you're here. With the pendent that José has, we have eleven of the original thirteen pieces. So the probability that we have the correct one isn't bad."

"José won't give you his willingly," Indy guessed.

"No," confirmed Bentley. He smiled.

"And you also don't have a way of taking it from him by force," continued Indy. "You said it before- you need him."

"Perhaps," said Norten. "But perhaps not. That all depends on you."

"Me?"

Bentley nodded. "Maybe we don't need Peréz at all. We just need someone who can find the entrance to the temple."

"And you think that I'm that someone?"

"You were there once," Norten reminded him. "With Greg."

"I was near the volcano," confirmed Indy. "But we didn't get very far." He looked at him penetratingly. "Maybe Greg really wanted to show me the way to this temple. But if so, he didn't make it."

"I'm certain that you could find it if you wanted to," replied Norten calmly. "And as far as Commander Bentley and I are concerned, it would be a much safer feeling to have you with us than that unpredictable fool."

Indy was silent for a long time. His eyes wandered over the nine tiny, golden pendants that resembled each other perfectly, then again the faces of the two men on the other side of the table, then back to the amulets. Something about their story disturbed

him, but he didn't know what. And at least they were right in one point: José was crazy. Crazy and unpredictable.

Still, he was irritated by the thought of José in the feathered headdress of a Maya priest, celebrating with human sacrifices and sending armies of Maya warriors wielding swords and axes into a fight against the rest of the world.

It was almost laughable.

"Can I think about it?" he asked.

Bentley nodded. "Of course. I have already set our course, but it will be a good day and a half before we reach the Yucatan. That is when you need to have decided by."

"And if I won't do it?" inquired Indy.

"Then nothing will happen to you," Bentley stated. "You aren't a prisoner, Dr. Jones. If you insist on that, we will let you and Joana off at the first harbor we come to, and you can go on your way."

"That easy?" Indy asked doubtfully.

"That easy," confirmed Norten. "That is- if you can. If the fate of the surviving Maya means nothing to you." He smiled arrogantly. "But you wouldn't be the man I thought you were and who Greg always described you as if you could."

And with that, he was incredibly right. And, to be honest, Indy had already decided- even if it was probably differently than Norten and Bentley suspected.

"I'll think about it," he said.

"Your father never told me about this Professor Norten," said Indy later, when he was alone with Joana in the spacious cabin that had been prepared for them.

Joana shrugged her shoulders almost dismissively and stared past him into space. Beneath the fresh white bandage on her forehead, her face looked very pale. She seemed very tired; and not just in the physical sense. She had remained silent and listened with wide eyes while Indy filled her in on what he had talked to Norten and Bentley about, but he still saw something in her gaze break as he spoke. He had almost immediately realized what it was: Although she had only been at Norten's hacienda for a few hours, and although Joana had traded no more than a few

sentences with him, he had still sensed how much the girl trusted this man. That he went behind her back, yes, even used her, that must have shaken her trust not only in him, but in the whole world.

Maybe this was the first time, thought Indy, that she had this painful experience: To find out that a man she absolutely, blindly trusted had deceived her.

“Father never really talked about Uncle Norten,” she answered his question after a delay.

Indy suppressed a smile. Even now, Joana had called Norten her uncle.

“I think that he was... something of a teacher for him,” Indy stated. “But now I’m not so sure who was learning from who.” He sighed deeply. “You have the pendant, right?”

Joana nodded and prepared to get up, but Indy quickly waved her back. “Keep it,” he said quickly. “For some reason, they seem to trust you. If I had it, something could... happen to me.”

“Now... you’re just exaggerating,” protested Joana weakly. “Uncle Norten isn’t a murderer.”

Then we can just have different opinions, thought Indy. But for the moment, it might be smarter not to say that.

“You knew that this pendent was something else entirely,” said Indy after a while.

Joana nodded without looking at him.

“And you also know why there was more than one.”

“That’s true,” said Joana after another long pause. “But I never found out what it really is. You have to believe me, Indy.”

Indy had to control himself so as not to suddenly fling a torrent of reproaches at Joana. In fact, he knew that Joana bore much less guilt for this situation than he did. She was a girl who had no experience with such things. But he was no longer a child. He should have realized before that the small pendant was more than a mere piece of gold jewelry, and that he had stumbled into a series of events where things were no longer as they first appeared. No, he thought, if there was anyone here who he should be mad at, then it was probably himself.

“Sorry,” he murmured. “That was unfair. I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine.” Joana’s hand slid down his arm and brushed his hand, and for a moment their fingers were linked, and this time Indy allowed the touch, because it was simply the touch of a shaking, terrified child searching for protection against an adult’s shoulder.

“Don’t worry,” he murmured. “It will all turn out okay.”

Joana didn’t answer, and for a while they sat there in familiar silence. But it was a very uncomfortable, dejected silence, and as little as Indy was convinced of the truth of his words, she must feel that he had only said them to calm her and himself.

Yet there was really no reason to fear anything. They were no longer in a besieged hacienda, but aboard an American battle cruiser, the cannons and mechanized weapons of which could have taken on every army of Indians in the world, they weren’t the prisoners of killer Indians, but under the protection of the US Navy, and they no longer even had to deal with a foolish half-breed who thought he could bring an ancient Maya god back to life, but two sensible men with very different motives, but who were handling things very carefully.

If the two of them had told the truth. And for a reason that Indy wasn’t quite clear on himself, he still didn’t quite believe that. Perhaps the whole story just sounded a little too smooth. There was nothing there that really stuck out to him, nothing he could put a finger on- but maybe it was just that: the story had too few snags. It didn’t sound true, but- admittedly perfectly-constructed.

After a while, Indy carefully took his fingers away from Joana’s hand and stood up.

“Where are you going?” she inquired. Her voice sounded nearly shocked.

Indy pointed up to the ceiling with a head movement. “Up,” he said. “I want to get a bit of fresh air. Take a few steps and think some things over.”

To his surprise, Joana didn’t want to come along. Indy was tempted for a second to invite her along. He didn’t feel good at all about the idea of leaving her back here alone- even though it was absurd. She wasn’t alone, but in probably one of the safest places on earth; at least in an area of a thousand miles. With the

renewed promise to return soon, he turned around, left the cabin, and stepped into the corridor illuminated by weak electric lights. Beneath his feet he could feel the slight vibration of the planks, and, deep beneath him, in the hull of the ship, he heard the calming hum of the powerful diesel engine. Far away, at the end of the hallway and barely more than a shadow in the weak light, he saw a soldier leaned against the wall, trying to act as if he wasn't there. All of this- the nearly unmarred, steel walls surrounding them, the calming sound of the powerful engine, the guard that Bentley had sent to protect them- should have calmed him. But the exact opposite was the case. For some reason, he grew more nervous with every second.

As he approached the guard and was about to go past him, the man lifted his hand, almost embarrassed, and stepped in his way. "Sir?"

"Yes?" Indy looked at the soldier questioningly.

"May I ask where you..." He broke off. His embarrassment was clear to see.

Indy smiled. "Up," he said with a corresponding gesture. "I want to go up on deck. I need a bit of fresh air."

Again, the soldier paused for a moment before he shook his head with a regretful sigh. "You can't do that, Sir. I'm sorry."

"Why not?" inquired Indy.

"Captain's orders," answered the man. "No one can be on deck after dark."

Indy wanted to keep going, but he simultaneously felt much too tired. And after all, this soldier couldn't do anything about it- he was just following orders. Nevertheless, he said: "Do these orders apply to any civilians on board, or just to Navy soldiers?" he inquired.

The expression on the soldier's face was visibly tormented. "I'm... not sure, Sir," he answered.

"But I am," said Indy. "I came directly from a conversation with your captain. I am certain he would have told me if I couldn't leave my cabin."

The sentry was visibly torn back and forth between sense of duty and fear of making a mistake.

Indy studied him somewhat more carefully. He wasn't completely certain- but he thought he had seen another man standing in his place before him.

"How long have you been on duty here?" he asked.

"Not very long, Sir. A few minutes."

"Then just claim that you didn't see me," Indy advised him. He smiled, but there was something else in his eyes: Or maybe I can go back down to Commander Bentley and complain about you, my friend.

For a moment, the man paused, then he nodded, undetermined, and stepped out of the way; anything but convinced that he was doing the right thing, but he was certainly relieved that Indy had given him this way out.

Indy continued on quickly and reached the door to the deck in a few minutes. On the way down, he had paid close attention; worried that he would get lost inside of this massive ship. The cruiser was a floating labyrinth of rooms, halls, stairs, and gangways, but their quarters lay only a floor beneath the bridge.

It was almost eerily still as he stepped out onto the deck. The wind blew and carried with it cold and the scent of salt water, from the hull of the ship came the constant buzz of the diesel motor that was louder out here than it was on the inside, and he heard the sound of the massive ship carving its way through the waves. And yet the silence was still there. It overcame him like a hurricane, hit him with so much force that he froze in mid-step, and for a moment nearly panicked, because it was the same unholy silence that he had also felt at Norten's hacienda. The same dark silence in which something unseeable, powerful seemed to crouch outside of his normal senses, something ancient that slumbered deep inside him cried out.

Nonsense! he thought. You're jumping at shadows, old boy.

But he remained nervous. Heart pounding, Indy stepped out of the shadow of the steel door onto the deck and looked around. The bow of the ship lay like a steel football field in front of him, and nothing moved there. Nevertheless, his strained nerves conjured up movement before him for a moment: A gliding and darting in the shadows, a jerking twisting and creeping that sent an icy shudder down his back. And the light was also wrong. The

moon was still completely round in the sky although the night was approaching its end, but it still seemed not to cast any light; the dull, gray steel of the ship sucked in the bit of light like a sponge did a drop of water and so, just as something consumed all noises and didn't destroy them, but took away their reality, something else destroyed the light. For a moment, this feeling became overpowering: The feeling that he was near something monstrously old, monstrously powerful, and monstrously merciless.

A barely audible sound made Indy flinch and turn around.

At first, he saw nothing but oddly rectangular shadows and varying degrees of absolute and not so complete darkness. But the sound had been there. Very quiet, but taking on a nearly aggressive reality in this uncanny silence. Indy's nerves were stretched to the breaking point as he moved in the direction that he thought he had heard the noise from. Even though he made an effort not to make the slightest bit of sound and nearly tiptoed over, he had the feeling that every step was like the clattering of horse hooves over the steel deck. Yes, even his breathing and the pounding of his heart suddenly seemed loud and traitorous. Whoever was waiting for him over there in the darkness- they just had to hear him.

He crept on, heard the sound a second time- again without being able to identify it- and reached one of the massive steel structures. With a pounding heart and sweat-dampened hands, he pressed himself against the cold metal and carefully peered around the corner.

On nearly the other side of the ship at the railing, only their outline visible against the bright, glittering background of the ocean, but still clear, stood a figure. And something about it was wrong.

Indy wasn't able to immediately put the feeling into words- and once he managed it, he wasn't certain if he should be glad about this. The man was too big. His shoulders were too broad, and on his head was something that didn't belong there.

It was hard to guess his true size at night and over the great distance, but Indy didn't think that he was shorter than two meters tall; even without the barbarian headdress. But the oddly

angular appearance of his shoulders was due to a floor-length cloak of feathers in which he was wrapped, and a massive headpiece of the same meter-long feathers perched on his head.

So much for Bentley's assertion, thought Indy darkly, they were safe aboard this ship.

The Maya priest seemed not to have noticed his presence so far. Standing tall and completely motionless, he stayed there and stared across the sea as if waiting for something- or invoking it. The wind played with the feathers on his cloak and the powerful headdress, and then he moved, and through the eerie silence on the deck of the ship, the quiet jingle of metal reached Indy's ear. Slowly, in a ceremonial, summoning gesture, the Maya priest raised his arms and spread all ten fingers.

And from immediately behind Indy came a threatening rattle.

Indy's heart seemed to stop. His stomach knotted into an ice-cold clump of glass that seemed to cut painfully into his gut, and he felt a tingling like a thousand tiny spider legs going up his back. He knew this sound!

Quickly, he forgot the Maya priest, the shadows, and the eerie light. He didn't really know where he was, let alone why he had come here. All that mattered was this rustling rattle and the sound of small, hard scales gliding over the steel deck.

Slowly, endlessly slowly, with movements that were so quiet and careful that an observer would have barely noticed them, Indy turned around and looked at the creature that had snuck up behind him.

It was the biggest rattlesnake he had ever seen.

His fear was only made worse by the fact that it must have been the grandfather of all rattlesnakes; alone the rattles on its tail were nearly as long as Indy's lower arm, and the triangular head that was raised in anticipation of an attack and in which two tiny, wickedly glimmering eyes sparkled was nearly the size of his palm.

Indy stared at the snake as if hypnotized, and the snake stared at him in return, as if it wanted to assert that the widely rejected belief that snakes could hypnotize people with their eyes was actually true. Its forked tongue waved back and forth with quick jerks and took in Indy's scent. It sensed his fear and the cold

sweat that covered his entire body, and its lipless mouth opened a little bit so that he could see the bent, needle-sharp, poisonous teeth. The rattle on its tail clicked like the instruments of a hellish bassinet player, and its head swung slowly from left to right and back again as it searched for a good place to lunge and sink its teeth into its prey.

Indy felt as the paralysis slowly left him and was replaced a trembling he was powerless against. Snakes! He hated snakes! Even the attack by the tiny creature in Norton's museum in Havana had cost him all of the control and effort he could manage. And this monster here was a good ten times the size. And no less poisonous.

Indy's hands moved millimeter by millimeter down to his belt and felt for a gun before he remembered that they had all been thoroughly searched when they boarded the ship. He was still carrying his whip, but the snake was much too close for him to use that. And even if he could- despite all objections that the logical part of his thoughts had against this feeling, he just knew that this wasn't a normal snake. Normal rattlesnakes weren't that big. They didn't stare at their victims in this very particular way, and they normally didn't find their way aboard American battleships on the high seas.

The snake lowered its head a little without letting Indy out of its sight, and slithered slowly towards him. It was now two meters away from him at the most; at the speeds these reptiles were capable of, it wouldn't even need a tenth of a second to reach him and dig its poisonous teeth deep into his flesh. And anyway, he would lose his mind if this monster touched him, he just knew it. This was no normal snake. This was the essence of all his fears, Indy's own, completely personal nightmare now coming true.

Shaking, he took a step back and froze in mid-movement as the snake lifted its head and shook its rattle threateningly. He knew that it was certain death if he made an unexpected movement now; or any movement. And yet he would have turned around and rushed off despite the certainty that this would just provoke the snake to bite. His fear was just stronger than logical thought. Just a couple of seconds, and...

“Don’t move!”

Indy couldn’t have moved even if he wanted to. His heart hammered like an out-of-control machine in his chest, and the only movement that he could even manage was the constant shaking of his hands and knees.

A shadow rose next to him on the deck of the ship, and he heard the sound of very slow, cautious steps. “Don’t move, Dr. Jones,” repeated the voice. “No matter what happens.”

Time seemed to stand still. Indy heard the figure behind him move, and the snake’s cold eyes simultaneously turned from him to a point somewhere behind him. The snake’s giant head rose, shook- and then the whip-like crack of a gunshot tore the silence, and the animal’s head exploded, not even a meter away from Indy.

With an exhausted gasp, Indy staggered backwards and closed his eyes. And suddenly, from one moment to the next, his fear struck with all its might. Hot and cold shudders suddenly raced down his back, and his hands and knees started to shake so much that he had to search for a handhold on one of the deck’s structures. For a moment, the ship and the sky started to spin around him, and it wouldn’t have taken much for Indy to simply faint.

“Are you okay, Dr. Jones?”

Indy nodded with trouble and murmured an answer that even he couldn’t understand before turning to face his savior.

It was Norten. He stood two steps behind him, the gun still aimed at the dead snake, and with an expression on his face that lay between horror and fury. His fingers clung to the weapon so tightly that all of the blood had drained from them. And his hands shook so heavily that Indy wondered for a moment how he had even hit the creature.

But he had killed it, that was enough.

“Thank you very much,” murmured Indy. “That was damn close.”

Norten studied him, concerned. “Did it bite you?” he asked.

Indy shook his head.

“Are you hurt?”

“No,” answered Indy. “I’m... nothing happened.” He tried to laugh, but it failed. “I was just terrified, as you can imagine.”

Norten’s gaze grew a bit more serious. “But a very strong terror, I see,” he said.

Indy made an embarrassed gesture. “Yes,” he admitted. “I... I have to explain. I have...”

“...a phobia of snakes, I know,” Norten interrupted him with a hurried smile. “Greg told me. But I didn’t know it was so bad.”

“I didn’t either,” said Indy quietly. Shuddering, he turned around and looked back at the dead snake’s body. Even now, the animal really looked as terrifying and powerful as he had feared, and even now, its effect on Indy was a hundred times stronger than any other snake he had ever met.

Not far away from them, a door flew open and two soldiers rushed out, their weapons at the ready in their hands. Nearly simultaneously, a powerful spotlight flamed up on the bridge, wandering aimlessly over the deck for a moment before it found Indy and Norten and held on them. They had obviously heard Norten’s shot. Indy realized that only five or six seconds could have passed since then. It had felt like an eternity.

Norten turned to the two soldiers and made a pacifying gesture. “Everything’s fine,” he said. “It was my fault. I accidentally fired.” He smiled in perfectly acted embarrassment. “Could you be so kind as to tell your colleagues over on the bridge to turn off the light- before they put the whole ship on alert.”

The two soldiers paused. Even in the weak illumination and blinded by the bright light of the spotlight, Indy could see the confused expressions on their faces. But then they turned around obediently and went back. And a few moments later, the spotlight went out.

Yet they remained standing there alone for only a few seconds, then the door opened a second time and Bentley stormed out. “What happened?” he asked as he saw Norten with the gun in his hand standing next to Indy.

Norten pointed at the cadaver of the giant rattlesnake near Indy. “We nearly lost our future guide,” he said.

Bentley looked at him in irritation, came a step closer- and stopped with an astonished sound in mid-step as his eyes fell on the massive body of the snake, coiled up in death.

“What...?”

“I think I should use this opportunity to complain to the captain of this ship,” said Indy in a just as weak as futile attempt to make a joke. “This place is teeming with vermin. I just hope that the cockroaches in your kitchen aren’t as big.”

Bentley remained serious. “That’s completely impossible!” he said, convinced.

“What happened here, Dr. Jones?” Norten asked suddenly. “What were you even doing up here?”

“I left orders that no one was to be on deck after dark,” added Bentley.

Indy ignored that remark and pointed in the direction in which he had seen the Maya priest. “I came up here to get a bit of fresh air,” he said. “I wanted to think about our conversation. There was a figure standing over there.”

“Probably one of the deck guards,” said Bentley.

Indy shook his head, convinced. “It wasn’t one of your men, Commander,” he said. “It was a Maya.”

Bentley’s eyes grew large. “A Maya? You’re crazy!”

“Sure,” replied Indy drily, pointing at the dead snake. “And I’m just imagining that.”

“How did you know that they were Maya?” inquired Norten.

“They were dressed like a Maya priest, at least,” Indy answered. “I couldn’t see his face. He was too far away, and it was dark. But he wore a ceremonial outfit and a headdress made of bird feathers.”

“José!” murmured Norten quietly.

Indy looked at him distrustfully. “Why do you think that?”

“Who else could it have been? The selection isn’t that great.”

“And the snake?”

Norten didn’t answer at all, and his brother Bentley answered after several seconds’ consideration and in a tone that clearly betrayed that he didn’t really believe this explanation. “Maybe it slithered aboard at the last harbor. The ship is gigantic. Even a big animal can hide for weeks without being noticed.”

Indy didn't bother answering him.

"It must have been José," said Norten. "We should have immediately locked him up."

"Or maybe thrown him overboard," murmured Indy with a renewed glance at the dead snake. The words weren't serious, and he regretted them in nearly the same moment he said it. Because the expression in Bentley's eyes made it clear to him that he had taken this suggestion seriously for a moment.

"Could you make out what he was doing?" inquired Norten.

Indy shook his head automatically, but then he paused for a moment and in the end pointed at the sea; in the same direction that the man in the priest's clothing had been looking. "I'm not sure," he said. "But I had the feeling he was signaling to someone."

"Signaling? Who on earth would he be signaling?" asked Bentley in confusion.

"Maybe the Indians," said Norten thoughtfully.

Bentley looked at him questioningly, and Norten added in clarification: "The men who attacked my hacienda."

"We're on the high seas," Bentley reminded him. "And this isn't a war canoe, Norten, it's a battle cruiser."

"I know," answered Norten. "But we should still be careful. Double the watch."

"That's ridiculous!" protested Bentley.

"I hope that you'll be able to keep your sense of humor if one of them shows up and slits your throat, Commander," said Indy seriously.

Bentley studied him with unconcealed derision. Then he smiled thinly, turned around, and pointed at one of the ship's massive turrets. "Do you see that, Dr. Jones?"

Indy nodded

"That's a thirty-centimeter canon," continued Bentley with audible pride in his voice. "We have six of those aboard. We also have twenty-six other canons, forty machine guns, and five hundred trained Navy officers, every one of whom is an excellent shot. Just one attack by this ship could blow the whole Maya empire back across the ocean."

"I wouldn't be so certain of that," murmured Indy quietly.

Bentley prepared to answer, but Norten stopped him with a soothing gesture. "I don't think that this quarrel will lead anywhere," he said. "Let's figure out what to do with José now."

"If it was José," said Indy.

Norten overlooked the remark. "Have you decided, Dr. Jones?"

"Not yet," answered Indy. "Why?"

"Because everything would be so much easier then," Norten answered. "We could put José in a detention cell and discuss what we should do with him."

"What are you planning?" inquired Indy.

"Nothing," answered Norten; a bit too hastily for Indy to really believe him. "As soon as we've found the temple and eliminated the danger, we will do the same for him as we will do for you: He will be a free man and can go wherever he wants."

"I'll have him put under arrest and placed in a cell," said Bentley.

This time it was Indy who held him back. "I think that would be a mistake," he said. "At least for the moment. Give me until tomorrow evening to think about your story."

"And let that fool run free around my ship in the meantime?" asked Bentley, outraged. "Never!"

"Maybe he's right," his brother added in. "Of course we'll keep an eye on him. But a danger one knows really isn't one. Maybe we'll still find out from him the whereabouts of the last pendent."

"He doesn't have it," said Bentley.

"How do you know?" Indy inquired.

"I had his cabin searched," answered Bentley frankly. "Yours as well, Dr. Jones, as well as Joana's, and... my brother's, if that reassures you."

That didn't reassure Indy a bit. But he decided to just remain silent, and without another word he turned and went back below deck. He felt very confused. At once, he was terribly afraid. And he didn't even know why.

Of course his body finally demanded its rest. Despite everything, Indy fell into a deep, dreamless sleep as soon as he

reached his cabin and stretched out on the bed, only to awake in late morning.

He remained lying on the bed for a long while, staring at the bare, iron ceiling high over his head and trying to review the events of the past few days. Not for the first time, he had the feeling that he had overlooked something; something judged not important enough, some detail he hadn't noticed. Perhaps it was just a small thing, something that at first glance seemed completely unimportant, minor- but Indy knew that all of those seemingly unrelated pieces would form into an image if he just found the right key. But no matter how long he worked at it, he got no closer.

In the end, he resigned himself to this and stood up. Someone must have been in his cabin as he slept, because on the stool near his bed he found a clean pair of Navy pants and a matching shirt from which the symbols of rank had been removed. In light of the terrible condition of his clothing- his pants and shirt still showed traces of his desperate escape through the elevator shaft, the involuntary swim through the harbor at New Orleans, and the firestorm at Norten's hacienda- the temptation at first to rid himself of them and pull on these new things was great. But Indy didn't do it. Instead, he remained completely motionless on the edge of the bed for almost a minute, looking down at the right leg of his pants. The fabric wasn't just torn up and completely filthy, it also showed clear burns from when the glowing fire snake had grabbed at him from the foundation beneath Norten's house and wrapped around his legs. And suddenly he again had the feeling that the solution was very close. The thought was there- so obvious that he would only need to reach out and touch it. But before he found it, it slipped away again, and behind his forehead was nothing but the normal confusion.

Indy wasn't even especially disappointed. It would have been almost too easy. But at least he knew that he was on the right track. And he knew well enough that it wouldn't take all that long before he reached the solution himself. And then someone here on board would suffer an unpleasant surprise-either Greg's supposed friends or his own so-called friend José. Maybe all three.

He washed himself, cleaned his clothes the best he could, and left his cabin.

As he had stepped halfway out into the hall, he heard a door slam near him. He automatically turned his head and saw José, who had just stepped out into the corridor, moving away with quick steps. He obviously hadn't noticed Indy.

At first- almost without knowing why- Indy ducked back into his cabin with a silent movement and pulled the door nearly shut so that only a tiny crack remained. He attentively watched José go down the corridor and vanish from sight. Then he stepped into the hallway for a second time, looked searchingly to the right and left- and darted to the door that José had come out of. He paused for a second, then stretched out his hand to the doorknob- and the door wasn't locked.

The cabin had no windows, just like his own. Indy groped for the light switch in the dark for a moment, found it, and blinked for a moment in the sudden bright yellow light. Then he hastily closed the door behind him and looked around.

For a moment, he considered what on earth he would tell José if he came back unexpectedly and found him searching his cabin. Then he dismissed those thoughts. After everything that had happened in the last seventy-two hours, there was really nothing he should worry about regarding their already loose friendship.

Quickly, but very thoroughly, he searched José's cabin- which was incredibly easy, because it was basically empty. In the drawers and on the shelves of the closet, he found nothing; of course not, after all, José had packed just as lightly as Joana and himself and the two others. What had he hoped to find?

Indy started to give up, but then he turned around again, sunk to his knees, and looked under the bed.

It was one of the oldest and most ridiculous hiding places one could think of- and it's exactly where he found it.

Under the bed was a large bundle wrapped in gray sailcloth. Indy pulled it out- despite its enormous girth, it was surprisingly light- placed it on the bed, and threw a last, securing glance at the door before he loosened the knotted rope that held it together, fingers shaking with excitement.

What appeared from beneath the cloth didn't surprise him in the slightest. Yet he flinched back as if he had touched a poisonous spider and looked at the massive green cloak of feathers for several seconds out of eyes wide with shock. And it cost him an enormous amount of control to finally stretch out a hand again and spread the cloak across the bed.

It was a very impressive piece. It wasn't the first feather cloak Indy had seen, but it was certainly the best example. The green feathers created a thick, fluffy cover that weighed almost nothing, but could completely cover the body of its wearer. Matching it, crafted in the same careful manner and made from the same material, but with yellow and red and blue tail feathers from birds of paradise, the bundle contained a massive headdress that was fastened onto the wearer's head with a band of fine leather. A leather loincloth, a nearly delicate knife with a golden grip and a blade that was made not of metal, but of razor-sharp obsidian, and a colorful bundle with countless knots rounded out the equipment.

Indy laid everything out on the bed aside from the small, brightly colored bundle. He knew what he was holding. The seemingly senseless knots and bindings on the good five dozen finger-length ropes made perfect sense- but only to those who could read them. What he saw here was the Aztec equivalent of written words. When combining the number and location of each knot with the color of the string, it told him a story.

Deeply confused, Indy placed the knotted ropes back on the bed. It wasn't just that this script had nothing to do with the Maya, but their successors, the Aztec- Indy was certain (like the rest of the scientific world) that the script, along with the people who had used it, had died out and were no longer on this planet, and no one could read it now. Well- there seemed to be at least one. He didn't think that José was dragging around the bundle out of pure boredom.

Behind him, the door opened, and Indy turned around, shocked, and looked into Norten's face.

"Dr. Jones!" said Norten, surprised. Then his gaze fell on the bed and what Indy had spread out there, and his expression darkened.

“What are you doing here?” he asked in a tone that sounded almost threatening.

Indy pointed at the bed. “You were right, Norten,” he said. “It’s Peréz. These are the clothes that the man last night was wearing.”

Norten looked very confused. For a few seconds, his eyes wandered between Indy and the feather cloak on the bed, back and forth, and the expression on his face changed from surprise to astonishment and fury, followed by pure rage.

“I’m sorry that I didn’t believe you,” said Indy hastily. “But I thought I knew José. I just had to see this with my own eyes.”

Norten still said nothing, instead closed the door, stepped past Indy to the bed with two quick steps, and looked at the objects spread out there.

“This is the clothing of a Maya priest,” he said thoughtfully. “A very high Maya priest.”

“You recognize it?” inquired Indy.

“The Pre-Columbian cultures of Central America are my area of specialty,” answered Norten in a slightly indignant tone. He pointed at the tiny dagger and the bundle of knotted strings. “Only the high priests of Quetzalcoatl could wear those. Anyone else would have been killed if they so much as touched them.”

Indy shuddered. “Then José is even crazier than we thought,” he said.

“I fear so,” replied Norten. “Apparently he really thinks that he’s the reincarnation of Mossadera.”

Indy looked at him questioningly, and Norten continued with a clarifying gesture at the dagger: “Mossadera was their most famous priest. He allegedly lived for over a hundred years, and even the three kings who ruled the Maya empire during that time feared his power. They say that he was a powerful sorcerer.”

Suddenly, Indy felt as if he were hit by an icy gust. He was reminded of the eerie silence the night before on the deck and the massive snake that had literally appeared out of nowhere right after José lifted his hands and murmured something.

“I know what you’re thinking now,” said Norten seriously. “But believe me, he’s nothing but a madman.”

Indy made a hand movement towards the feather cloak. “And

these things? How did he bring them aboard? He had just as little time to pack up as you or I did. Not to mention the snake.”

Norten shrugged his shoulders. “I know just as little as you do, Dr. Jones,” he answered. “But I know that you’ll find an explanation sooner or later.”

“I would prefer it to be sooner,” murmured Indy. He continued a bit louder: “Why don’t we just ask him?”

Norten thought for a moment, but then shook his head. “That wouldn’t be smart,” he said. “At least not yet.”

“Why?” inquired Indy. “How much more proof do you need?”

“None,” replied Norten. “But as long as he doesn’t know that we suspect him, we have the advantage. He still has one of those pendants, Dr. Jones. And without it, the others will be completely worthless.”

Indy didn’t like that. The idea that he was travelling with a madman who thought he was the reincarnation of a Maya sorcerer from the peak of the empire, possibly trying to enter a forbidden magical place filled with unknown danger, made all of his hair stand on end.

“Let’s put these things away, Dr. Jones,” said Norten. “And go- before José comes back.”

The sun shone and the sea lay calmly like a massive mirror of hammered silver before them as Indy and Joana stepped out onto the deck side by side an hour later. As Indy stepped through the doorway behind the girl, he was unable to suppress a brief shudder, and he also couldn’t stop the quick, nervous glance he threw at the place where the snake had lay the night before. Of course, Joana noticed this and began to ask about it.

“Nothing,” said Indy evasively. “I’m a bit nervous, that’s all.”

Between her brows formed a vertical crease. “Nothing?” she repeated derisively. “Stop it. I know you well enough now to know that you don’t turn white as a sheet and look around as if there are ghosts hiding behind every corner for nothing. What is it?”

Indy paused for a moment, but then he told Joana what had happened the night before. The girl listened in silence, but the dismay in her eyes grew with every word.

“José?” she finally asked doubtfully. “Are you sure?”

“Who else could it be. Anyway, the cloak and the headdress were in his cabin.”

“But he didn’t have a chance to bring them,” protested Joana.

“I know,” said Indy. “That’s exactly what scares me so much.”

It was a few moments before Joana understood. Then, her eyes widened in terror again. “You mean that he... that he really is a sorcerer?”

Indy shrugged his shoulders and looked out across the sea. Not far from the bow of the ship, a light mist had formed over the water, quickly approaching. “We should be careful with such words,” he said evasively. “But I’ve experienced things that one could call sorcery, or at least powers that we don’t understand.”

He looked again, somewhat more carefully, at the light layer of mist over the water. Something within it irritated him, but he couldn’t put what it was into words.

“Still,” Joana persisted, shaking her head once more. “This just doesn’t fit José. Although I obviously don’t really like him, as you know.”

Indy permitted himself a brief smile. “At the hacienda, I got the feeling that he made you sick.”

Joana turned red with embarrassment and glared at him, but doggedly returned to the topic. “Still, I can believe that he’s a murderer.”

“Who has he killed, then?” inquired Indy.

“No one,” admitted Joana. “But he has tried. Anyway, you seem to have forgotten Norten’s men. And if he really is who you think he is- why the attack at the hacienda?”

Indy studied at the sea in front of the bow of the ship as he answered. The mist had thickened into a fog that approached them with almost eerie speed; as if it were swelling up from the water itself. He started to wonder if something like this was normal at these latitudes. “For the same reason that they attacked us in Marten’s office,” he answered. “And later, in the hotel. The

same reason that they kidnapped you. He wanted the pendants. Mine, Norten's- and maybe yours as well, because he assumes that your father must have told you about them.

The fog continued to rise. The bank of fog over the water had become a gray wall that seemed to stretch from one horizon to the other, and the ship wasn't just headed towards it, but it also seemed to move towards the ship, silently and with a nearly uncanny speed. For a moment, Indy had the feeling that he could see movement in this fog.

"What is it?" asked Joana suddenly. Then she turned around, looked at the fog- and flinched, terrified.

And they weren't the only ones who noticed the uncanny fog. All over the deck, men suddenly appeared and looked forward, and as Indy watched, he could see a distorted shadow behind the large window on the bridge: Bentley, who had stepped over to the pane and looked to the west.

"That's... strange," said Joana. Her voice shook a little and betrayed more of her true feelings than her words did.

"Yes," murmured Indy. "I don't like this fog." He paused for a moment. "Let's go."

Joana didn't argue, instead turned on the spot and returned to the door through which they had reached the deck a short time before. Indy felt a growing worry. This fog wasn't just unnatural and eerie- it was dangerous. He didn't know where this knowledge came from, but he was absolutely certain.

Therefore, he was relieved a little later as Joana agreed to stay in her cabin while he looked for Bentley.

He asked the first sailor who crossed his path about the way to the bridge. Only a few minutes later, he stepped into the command station of the cruiser; to Indy's surprise, without even being stopped once. Bentley had obviously given orders to let him through.

He didn't need to explain why he had come- in the few minutes that it had taken him, the fog had nearly reached the ship. Between it and the bow of the cruiser was at the most only thirty or forty meters. And it continued to approach as the ship's engines fell silent and it stopped moving.

"What is it?" asked Indy suddenly.

Bentley, who still stood in front of the window, looking out to the west with a concerned expression on his face, shrugged his shoulders, not even turning around. "I don't know," he answered.

"You've never seen anything like this?" Indy inquired.

"Of course I've seen fog before," replied Bentley without looking away from the uncanny sight. "But never fog like this. And definitely not in this type of weather. Just look at how fast it's moving."

Indy really did look- and he saw even more. He saw another movement beyond the gray wall, and this time he was certain it was no illusion. Something hid in this fog.

"You should turn around, Commander," he said.

Bentley now turned his face from the window and looked at him. "Turn around? Because of a bit of fog?"

Indy laughed humorlessly. The man behind the wheel looked briefly and nervously up and threw him a terrified glance, but he hastily lowered his head again as Bentley looked angrily in his direction.

"That isn't just a bit of fog," said Indy. "And you know that just as well as I do, Commander Bentley."

Bentley rolled his eyes, but like his smile before, it didn't look convincing. "You're speaking nonsense, Dr. Jones," he said. "You sound just like Norten."

"And you know that we're both right," continued Indy, unimpressed. "Turn around or go backwards or whatever this ship can do. I fear that this fog is something that your beloved canons can do nothing against."

"Nonsense!" Bentley insisted. "Next you'll tell me that a sea monster is waiting for us outside, right?"

And maybe I'm even right, thought Indy, even if it was a monster of a completely different kind than he was thinking of. He didn't say those thoughts aloud, because he knew those words would have as little effect as anything else he had said so far. But he stepped closer to Bentley at the window and looked to the west with anxious expectation.

The bank of fog reached the ship in that moment and started to cover the bow. No, thought Indy- not cover. It was as if... it dissolved it. The contours of the ship grew dull, seemed to melt

into the gray fog for a moment, and then just vanished within. And in its place appeared something else, something winding, twisting, that he couldn't completely recognize. Maybe he just refused to recognize it, because what he saw was too bizarre for human words.

Next to him, Bentley breathed in sharply and turned with a sudden jerk to the man behind the wheel.

"Full speed reverse!" he bellowed. He turned to a second man, who stood next to the main steering wheel, staring into the fog with a face as white as a sheet, and said: "Sound the alarm. We might be attacked."

But it was too late. The fog had covered the first fifth of the ship and crawled ceaselessly on. One of the massive guns of which Bentley was so proud vanished into the gray wall and was lost.

And then it happened. Something hit the ship.

It wasn't very hard. Indy didn't even feel a shudder, but he heard it: An uncanny dull sound that seemed to ring for an unnaturally long amount of time in the endless gray of the fog, then a second, third, and fourth, and then a figure climbed over the railing.

The man could only be seen as a shadow through the fog. Nevertheless, Indy flinched at how tall and broad-shouldered he was. He was naked except for a loincloth and a feathered headdress that reminded him of José's, but was a bit smaller. In his left hand he held a knife, and in the right, something else that Indy would have identified as a spear had he not known better. With a flowing, incredibly powerful movement, he swung over the steel railing of the ship and vanished, hunched, into the fog.

The first Maya warrior was followed by a second, a third, and a fourth, and then the whole fog to the right and left of the ship seemed to come to life as dozens, if not hundreds of gigantic, half-naked figures streamed onto the deck and started to spread out.

Bentley's face lost all color. "What in God's name is going on there?" he whispered.

In the fog that had meanwhile swallowed nearly half of the ship, there was suddenly a glimmer, and a fraction of a second

later, Indy heard the strangely dampened sound of a shot fired from a gun. In nearly the same moment, the alarm siren began to sound all over the ship. But this sound was also dampened and too quiet, as if some of its strength was taken away; or as if they just didn't belong in the part of the world that the ship had entered.

On the foredeck of the ship, a massive fight raged between their attackers and the sailors, who now rushed out onto the deck in even greater numbers. It was an uncanny, nearly bizarre sight- the fog that spread like a gray shroud over the whole ship turned not only the figures of attackers and defenders into identical, darting shadows that seemed almost to be dancing, it swallowed every sound; now and then, Indy saw the bright glimmer of muzzle fire, but he heard nothing.

“We have to get out of here,” screamed Bentley suddenly. His voice was shrill and nearly breaking; there was no more trace of the disciplined, always calm and controlled commander Indy had met. What he saw must have shaken his confidence in everything. He had probably been right with what he had proudly declared to Indy the night before: Namely that the fighting strength of this ship alone was enough to take on the whole Maya empire. And yet now he had to watch as this massive machine of destruction was overrun by a handful of half-naked wild men armed with only blow darts and axes.

“Get out!” he said again. He turned around, crossed the bridge with two, three long strides, and just dragged Indy with him. Only after they had left the bridge and stumbled down a small metal hallway did he finally allow Indy to free himself from his grip and release his hand.

The fog was so thick that he couldn't see the proverbial hand in front of his face. Everything that was over five or six steps away seemed to be lost in the gray unreality. There was fighting all around them, but Indy saw nothing but silent shadows that appeared occasionally through the fog, then vanished again. Once, a shot cracked somewhere near them; the bright orange muzzle fire was at the most five meters from Indy and Bentley. But still, he heard only a dull, almost muffled sound. Even the

crashing of steps on the metal stairs going down to the deck were swallowed by fog.

Indy stopped, helpless, as they reached the deck. He looked around almost desperately. He knew that the door he was searching for had to be nearby- but the fog was so thick down here that he could have stumbled within half a meter of it without seeing anything.

Something hit the metal wall next to him with a muffled clink and broke. Indy suddenly noticed a shadow somewhere in the wall of gray cotton before him, instinctively leapt aside, and sensed as a second blow dart passed so close to him that he could feel the rush of air. Through the sudden movement, he lost his grip on the damp metal floor. He fell, rolled over his shoulder, and got back to his feet with a skillful movement; he simultaneously took the whip from his belt.

As the Maya rushed over, swinging his blow dart gun like a club, the braided end of the whip hit him with all its might. The Indian cried out in pain, crumpled, and fell to his knees, and Indy reached him with a lightning-fast movement and punched him in the chin. Unconscious, the Maya sagged backwards.

Indy stood there for a second, massaging his pained right fist, and looked down at the giant Maya warrior. The man was very big and muscular; but he wasn't a giant like the one who had tried to kill him in New Orleans. If it had been one of them, then it would probably now be Indy lying there, unconscious or dead.

He banished those thoughts, turned around, and tried to look through the fog. All around him, the struggle raged on with ghostly silence, but he barely paid any attention to that. He had to get to Joana. If she left her cabin and came up here to see what the commotion was all about, the Maya would probably kill her.

At first, he couldn't even find the bridge structure again, let alone the door. Bentley had vanished somewhere into the fog. Indy took an uncertain step and stopped again in terror as the fog spit out another giant shadow. But this time he wasn't attacked- the Indian vanished just as silently as he had appeared.

Like a blind man, both arms outstretched, Indy felt his way through the thickening fog. Nevertheless, he painfully hit metal twice, and once his hands gripped something like fabric; he heard

a sharp cry, then his arm was knocked aside, and he staggered back, nearly losing his balance.

Finally, his outstretched fingers met resistance. But this wasn't the metal of the door he was searching for, instead damp, oily wood. Indy took another step and stared in confusion for a second at the misshapen shadow that had appeared out of the fog near him before he realized that he had lost his orientation and had gone the opposite direction from the bridge. Before him lay one of the two large lifeboats he had seen from the bow of the ship.

Disappointed, he turned back around, felt blindly through the fog for a few more seconds, and finally found something to grab onto that he could identify as the railing of the ship. If he just felt along it to the left, he would find the way back to the bridge. Indy was painfully conscious of the fact that he was wasting precious time by doing this, but the danger of getting lost in this fog again and wasting even more time- or even his life- was simply too great.

And with all of this, he had nearly forgotten the greatest danger that hung over this ship.

But it hadn't forgotten him.

He hadn't even felt five steps along the railing when the giant figure of another Indian appeared out of the fog. And this time, his reaction came too late.

The Maya wasn't armed with a blow dart gun, instead swung a short steel axe with an edge of black stone. Indy ducked beneath the axe at the last moment, but the razor-sharp obsidian left a long, bloody cut on his chest, and the momentum from Indy's desperate movement was enough to send him flying backwards against the railing, losing his balance. For half a second he stood there in a nearly grotesque position, waving his arms wildly and trying to find his balance again, then the Maya shoved him in the chest, and Indy flew back in a half somersault and fell overboard; for a brief, but endless second, the sky was beneath him and the sea was above him, then Indy flipped back around with desperate strength, stopped his spinning, and simultaneously stretched out both hands. As if by a miracle, he gripped the railing.

The jerk was so hard that his left hand immediately slid off, and for a moment he hung helplessly by only one hand over nothingness. Indy clenched his teeth together, ignored the horrible pain in his right wrist and shoulder, and hastily reached up with his left hand for a second time. He managed to grab the railing and clung tight to it.

For a second.

Then the Maya appeared over him again, stared at him for a moment without a trace of anger or even hatred- but also without a trace of pity- and swung his axe down for a second time. Indy found just enough time to pull his hand back hastily as the blade sparked against the railing. Again he gasped in pain and effort, hanging with only one hand, and his eyes widened in horror as he saw the Indian preparing to strike at his other hand. The blade hissed down, Indy let go with his left hand, reaching back up in the same moment with the other one. His fingers were spared again, but he had the feeling that his arm was being torn out of its socket. And the Maya was raising the axe again, aiming at his hand.

Indy decided to risk it all. Only hanging on with one hand, he took the whip from his belt with the other and struck. In his unfortunate position, he couldn't really draw back, let alone aim. Yet the whip wrapped around the Maya's wrist so that he let go of the axe with a pained cry, and it sailed high over Indy's head, vanishing into the sea. But he simultaneously reached out with his other hand, grabbed the whip, and pulled at it with all his might.

Indy was suddenly pulled up faster than he was comfortable with. His face, chest, and then his knees scraped hard over the railing, then he fell onto the deck and finally got the idea to let go of the whip.

The Maya stepped over to him. Indy crumpled, lightning-fast, and escaped the worst of the kick; nevertheless, it was enough to knock the air from his lungs and, for several seconds, colorful stars danced before his eyes. Gasping for breath, he rolled over, pulled himself up onto his hands and knees, and suddenly felt a powerful hand grab his neck and pull him up. A second, just as strong hand dug into the waistband of his pants and pulled him

completely off of the deck. With apparent ease, the massive Maya raised him into the air, twisted him around, and carried him high above his head back to the railing to throw him into the sea.

“Stop!”

The voice came from the fog, and although it wasn't terribly loud, the sound was so sharp and commanding that the Maya warrior froze in mid-movement. First one, then two, and finally three shadows stepped out of the cottony fog. Two of them were Maya warriors who could have been the twin brothers of the giant who still held Indy in the air high over his head; the third was José.

“José!” Indy roared, kicking forcefully. “Tell this giant baby to put me down!”

José said nothing, instead studied Indy for just a second, coldly, but then he made a brief hand movement, and the Indian very roughly put Indy back down on his feet. He pulled free, stumbled a step to the side, and stared in turn at the half-naked giants and José.

“That was close, wasn't it?” asked José. He smiled, but it looked as cold as the seeming grin of a snake eyeing its prey.

“Maybe not close enough,” said Indy wickedly. “If I survive this, I'll personally break your neck, my friend. But I'm guessing,” he continued with a brief pause and a glance at the brightly painted native next to him, “that I won't survive this. Do you want to have the pleasure of killing me, or why else did you stop him?”

José held his gaze calmly. “I don't want to kill you, Indiana,” he said. He stretched his hand out. “Give me the necklace and nothing will happen.”

“What necklace?” Indy inquired.

José's expression darkened. “Don't play the fool, Indiana! You know exactly what I'm talking about. The pendant! It's mine!”

“That would be an interesting question for a lawyer,” replied Indy. “Strictly speaking, it belongs to Joana. I got it from her father...”

“After he stole it from our people!” José interrupted him angrily, stretching out his hands again in a commanding gesture.

The two Maya warriors behind him also took a threatening step closer.

“Your people?” Indy tried to laugh, but it didn’t come out right. “You really are as crazy as Bentley thinks. Do you really think you’re the reincarnation of a Maya priest- or do you just have delusions of grandeur?”

“Whoever or whatever I am isn’t up for debate here,” answered José, enraged. “Give me the pendant or I’ll have him finish what he started.” He pointed at the warrior next to Indy.

“And throw me overboard?” Indy laughed, and this time it sounded truly mocking. “Aside from the fact that I no longer have the pendant, it would be rather dumb to do something like that. Then you wouldn’t be able to find it, my friend.”

José’s eyes flashed in anger. He balled his hands into fists, and for a second, Indy nearly expected that he was going to kill him or give one of his companions a command to do so, but he did neither of those things, instead suddenly took a step back and measured Indy with a long, contemptuous look. “You think you’re so cunning, don’t you?” he asked.

“Yes,” answered Indy.

“Maybe you are,” said José. “But I swear that I will get that necklace. You will even bring it to me willingly.”

“Why would I do that?” inquired Indy.

José laughed wickedly. “You’ll soon see,” he said. “Just wait.” He took another step back so that he nearly vanished into the fog. “You know where to find me,” he said. “Me- and your little friend.” And with that, he took another step back into the fog and seemed to dissipate like a ghost, vanishing as silently as he had appeared.

It was a fraction of a second before Indy understood what José had meant. Then he flinched as if shocked, cried out with all his might: “Joana!” and raced after José and the three Maya.

The last thing he remembered for the next two or three hours was the dull end of an axe suddenly appearing from the fog before colliding with his forehead.

He awoke with the worst headache of his life and lying on his back on the bed in his cabin.

The ship's engines ran again- that was the first thing he consciously registered. The light burned, and someone sat on the edge of his bed and pressed a damp, ice-cold towel over his forehead and eyes.

As he opened his eyelids, water got into his eyes. Indy blinked, raised his arm, and tried to push the towel away, along with the hand that held it. He felt small, cool fingers with astonishing strength, and as the hand pulled back on its own a moment later, he blinked away the veil of tears and water and saw a small face framed by dark hair that he originally thought was Joana's.

He realized his mistake in nearly the same moment. It wasn't Joana who sat next to him, taking care of him, but José's wife.

"Just lie down, Dr. Jones," said Anita as he automatically tried to sit up. The worry in her voice sounded genuine; just like the concern in her eyes wasn't acted. With gentle force, she tried to push him back onto the bed, but this time Indy was stronger and pushed her hand aside. He sat up with a jerk and nearly fell back down because in his head awakened a terrible pounding pain that was so heavy that it threatened to overcome him for a moment.

"What's happening?" he groaned while pressing the thumb and index finger of his right hand against his nose, as if he could stop the pain by doing that.

"I had hoped that *you* could answer that question for me, Dr. Jones," answered Anita. "Two of Bentley's men found you out on the deck- unconscious and in a giant pool of blood. When they brought you in, I thought you were dead at first."

In Indy's mind, pictures and torn-up memories whirled around, one after another, without making any sense at first. "The Maya..." He murmured. "José..."

And then he remembered. Suddenly and with such clarity that he ignored the violent pain that flared up between his brows for a second time. "*Joana!*"

He sat up again and moved to swing his legs off of the bed, but Anita held him back with a commanding gesture. Indy moved to push aside her hand, but this time she wouldn't let him, instead grabbed him by the shoulder and held tight with incredible strength.

“Let me go!” Indy ordered. “I have to...”

“You don’t have to do anything, Dr. Jones,” Anita interrupted him forcefully. “You’re badly injured. The least you’ve suffered is a bad concussion; probably worse.”

As if to underline her words, the buzzing in his head grew into an agonizing hammering, and for a moment the whole cabin seemed to spin around him. He sensed he was threatening to lose consciousness again, reached out blindly, and felt Anita’s helpfully outstretched hand.

“I have to... find Joana,” he murmured.

“She isn’t here.”

Another memory forced itself out of the tormenting images in his mind: *You know where to find me. And your little friend.*

“José...” he murmured. “He... he took her along.” With a jerk, he looked up and started at Anita. It was hard to read anything on her still blurred face- but the dismay and sorrow in her eyes was real.

“I know,” she whispered.

“Where did he take her?” asked Indy.

“I don’t know,” answered Anita. “And I also don’t know why he did it, Dr. Jones.”

“And I’m supposed to believe you?” asked Indy. He saw that Anita flinched slightly at his words, and he felt unjust and cruel. But he no longer who knew he could believe and who he couldn’t.

“No,” said Anita after a couple of seconds. “Of course you don’t believe me- and I even understand why. But it’s the truth: I don’t know why he did it.”

“But you know why he was after the pendants,” Indy guessed.

Anita made a movement that was a mixture of a nod, a shake of her head, and a shrug. “I know no more than you do, Dr. Jones,” she said. “At least not much more. José never talked to me about those things.”

“Last night at the hacienda, things sounded different,” said Indy.

“I told you everything I know,” Anita insisted. She looked away with those words, but Indy wasn’t sure if she did that

because she was lying or just because she was ashamed about what her husband had done.

“I picked up a few things, and put together a few things for myself,” she continued after a long, heavy pause. “I know what José did isn’t right, Dr. Jones. He didn’t just lie to you, but also to me and my friends. But he isn’t bad, believe me. Norten and Bentley think he’s insane, but he isn’t. He may be possessed; fanatical, possessed by the idea that he is returning his people to the way they once were. But not insane.”

And suddenly, Indy just felt sorry for her. Despite everything, she truly loved José, and that made what he had done at least partially her fault. He carefully took her hand and squeezed it gently.

“You don’t have to hold this against yourself, Anita,” he said. “I haven’t forgotten that you helped us. And I promise you that I’ll do what I can for José. After all, we were friends once.”

He hadn’t chosen his words well, he realized that in the same moment he said them, because the expression of pain in Anita’s eyes deepened. Her fingers seemed to grow noticeably colder in his hand.

“Are you not anymore?” she whispered.

Indy shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know,” he admitted. “A few hours ago, his men nearly killed me. He attacked Norten’s hacienda and the ship, and he kidnapped Joana. And I don’t even know why.”

“He wanted the pendant,” answered Anita. “He’s possessed by the thought of taking them to where they belong. He thinks he has to do it.”

“And you?” asked Indy quietly. “Do you think that too?”

Endless seconds passed before Anita answered: “I don’t know,” she murmured helplessly. “I... think that what José is planning is wrong. But he thinks this is the right way. He isn’t bad.” The last words sounded nearly desperate; like something she repeated over and over again, as if that would make her believe it.

“But he could cause horrible damage,” said Indy seriously.

“If that is so,” whispered Anita, “then help me stop him. He’s obsessed with reawakening the ancient Maya gods. He thinks that

everything can return to how it was. But he isn't doing it for his sake. It isn't power or riches that he wants, you have to believe me."

And as absurd as it seemed to Indy after everything that had happened- he believed her. And maybe that was the worst thing.

He carefully took his hand off of hers, stood up, and stood motionless next to the bed for several seconds until the cabin around him stopped spinning. "I have to go see Norten and Bentley," he said. "Do you want to come with me?"

Anita considered for a moment, then shook her head. "I don't think that would be smart," she said.

Indy didn't argue. It would probably be better if she stayed here. Neither Norten nor Commander Bentley would probably be happy to see her now. Indy was a little surprised that Anita was even in his cabin. After what her husband had done, it wouldn't have amazed him had Bentley just had her arrested.

In a certain sense, he had done so. As Indy left his cabin, two armed and extremely nervous-looking sailors stepped in his way, who only let him pass after they had made sure that he was unarmed and that José's wife was still safely in his cabin.

As one of the two guarded the door, weapon at the ready, the second accompanied him to Bentley's cabin.

Down below the deck, the struggle had left no visible marks; or if it had, then someone had already removed them. But the movements and the gazes of the men they met on the way were nervous, and every one of them was armed.

At the door to the captain's quarters also stood two armed men. Indy's companion spoke quietly with one of them, after which he turned around, knocked, and vanished through the doorway for endless seconds before he came back and signaled quickly for Indy to go on.

In the cabin, Commander Bentley was joined by Professor Norten. While Bentley just sat behind his desk with a stony expression, as during their first meeting, Norten paced restlessly back and forth in the small cabin. He was white as a sheet, and the not especially carefully wrapped bandages on his right wrist indicated that he hadn't come through completely unscathed. As

Indy stepped into the cabin, he stopped his incessant pacing and measured him with a wild look.

“What happened?” began Indy, getting to the point.

“He has them,” said Norten.

“I know,” replied Indy dejectedly. “He told me.”

Despite everything, he was disappointed. José had only told him that he had kidnapped Joana, and there had been a tiny, dubious shimmer of hope that maybe he hadn’t found her or that Bentley’s men had succeeded in protecting her.

“He told you?” repeated Norten, surprised, but also a bit distrustful.

“He said I would know where to find him,” stated Indy. “And Joana too.”

Norten creased his brow. “Joana? I didn’t say anything about the girl.”

“What then?”

“The pendants!” said Norten. With an angry gesture, he pointed at Bentley. “This fool gave them to him!”

“I had no other choice!” defended Bentley. His voice was quiet, just a shaky whisper, and his face had also lost all color. But unlike Norten, it wasn’t rage that had gripped him. He was still shaken; perhaps more now than during the attack.

“What happened?” Indy asked again, stepping over to the desk.

Bentley prepared to answer, but Norten beat him to it. “One of those wild men put a knife to his throat, and José threatened to kill him if he didn’t open the safe!” he said, outraged. “And this coward just obeyed!”

Indy measured him with a half-angry, half contemptuous look. “What would you have done in his place? Let them kill you?”

Rage flashed in Norten’s eyes. “Not just stepped aside and begged for my life, at any rate!” he answered. “Do you even know what this pathetic coward has caused?”

He made a commanding hand movement as Bentley prepared to say something, and continued in a raised voice: “The power of the ancient Maya gods in the hands of that fool- it’s

inconceivable! He could... he could change the fate of the world!"

That at least, Indy thought, was an exaggeration. But he understood Norten's agitation- even if his attempts to place all blame on the commander were enraging.

"At least he didn't get all of the pendants," he said.

Norten snorted derisively. "Are you sure?"

"Completely," replied Indy. "There were only ten necklaces in your safe, right?"

"Plus the one his men took from Joana in New Orleans."

Indy didn't answer immediately. He was now less certain than before that the two Maya in New Orleans had really been working for José. It made little sense to do something like that- the attack on him was just inexplicable, because after all, José had what he wanted, and the one on Joana was unnecessary- in the end, José had just needed to wait for Greg's daughter and Indy to come to him willingly.

But he didn't say that, instead said after a while: "Even if that's the case, he's still missing one."

"Maybe he does have it," said Norten. "Maybe he looked for it on his own without telling us, and even if not- he has twelve of the thirteen amulets. Maybe not enough to do the ceremony correctly. But certainly enough to cause damage."

"One more reason to stop him," said Indy.

Norten snorted. "How?"

"I don't know," answered Indy. "But I know how we'll certainly never do it- if we continue to just stand here and blame each other. We need to find José and stop him from holding the ceremony." He reached for Norten's arm, raised it up, and looked at the expensive watch on his wrist.

"How much time do we have left?"

"Not even a whole two days," answered Norten.

"Two days!" Indy said, startled. "So little?"

While Norten just nodded with a concerned expression on his face, Bentley awoke from his lethargy for the first time and looked up. "That's more than enough," he said. "We can reach the coast of the Yucatan tomorrow morning."

“Piedras Negras isn’t on the coast,” Indy reminded him. “And the closest harbor...”

“We aren’t going to a harbor,” Norten interrupted.

Indy looked at the Commander for a second, not understanding. “No?” he inquired.

Norten smiled without the slightest trace of humor. “I know that you aren’t interested in all of the politics, Dr. Jones,” he said snidely. “But it should be clear even to you what will happen if an American battleship shows up in a Mexican harbor without permission.”

“Without...?” And in that moment, Indy understood. With a jerk, he turned around and stared at Bentley.

“Your superiors don’t know about this voyage?” he asked. He made a hand movement that encompassed the whole ship. “This is a private thing, isn’t it?”

Bentley remained silent.

“You’re doing all of this without anyone in Washington knowing about it,” continued Indy. A feeling of disbelieving terror had gripped him. In one point, Norten was right: He knew that relations between Mexico and the United States were anything but good. “You must be completely mad!” he said again. “Do you even realize what you’ve done?”

“Less than you seem to assume, Dr. Jones,” Norten interrupted him. “We don’t plan on crossing the three-mile zone, if that’s what you’re afraid of.”

Indy turned to him with a jerk. “I understand,” he said mockingly. “You plan on swimming to shore.”

“We planned,” Norten corrected him coldly, “on going ashore in one of the lifeboats at night, and José would get a truck to take us to Piedras Negras. That’s what he said, at least.”

“I really doubt at the moment that he’ll still do it,” said Indy derisively.

“It also isn’t necessary,” replied Norten with a trace of impatience in his voice. “You and Joana were kind enough to give us a much better mode of transportation.”

“The airplane?” Indy guessed, surprised.

“Why not?” Norten shrugged his shoulders and exchanged a questioning glance with Bentley. “There’s enough fuel aboard this ship to fill the tanks.”

“And who will fly it?”

Norten paused for a moment. “I thought maybe Joana,” he finally admitted. “But as things are...”

“One of my officers is a hobby pilot,” said Bentley. “He’ll do it.”

“Can he also fly pontoon planes?” asked Indy.

Bentley just shrugged his shoulders. “I’ll ask him,” he answered. “But even if not, the difference can’t be that much.”

“This is all completely crazy!” said Indy, shaking his head.

“You’ll still come with us, Dr. Jones,” replied Norten. Indy looked at him angrily, but Norten just smiled thinly. “And I’m certain that you will find the entrance to this hidden temple.”

“Oh?” asked Indy.

Norten’s smile became a bit colder. “If not because of the pendants, then to save Joana from those madmen. Or am I wrong?”

Indy stared at him for a second, filled with barely hidden hatred. But he said none of this, instead forced a jerky nod and just asked: “When do we leave?”

Although time was what they currently had the least of, they had to be patient for an hour; the ship’s officer who Bentley had mentioned did think that he would be able to fly the small Cessna, but he requested a bit of time to familiarize himself with the airplane’s controls.

Indy used the wait to go back down and talk to Anita- better said, he tried to.

Neither Bentley nor Norten had made any corresponding remark, but at the door to the cabin stood an armed guard who blocked the entrance, and even after energetic prodding he just said that he had orders to let no one into the cabin with the exception of the Commander and Professor Norten- and certainly not let anyone out.

Disappointed and angry, Indy turned around to go back to Bentley, but then he reconsidered. As long as José’s wife was

locked in her cabin, he could at least be certain that nothing would happen to her.

Instead of wasting his time with an argument that probably wouldn't lead to anything, he went to the cabin that Joana had occupied and started to search it thoroughly. He knew that he didn't have a great chance of finding the pendant. And he didn't find it.

But at least he found the chain it had hung on.

Indy was a little disappointed, but he simultaneously felt new hope. José's words had shown that he had no idea that the last remaining pendant was in Joana's (and therefore already in his) possession, and the fact that Joana had taken the piece of jewelry off of its chain at least made it seem likely to Indy that she had carefully hidden the small golden pendant.

He held the thin chain in his hand for a moment, uncertain, then moved to put it back in the drawer where he had found it, and then looked a bit closer.

For the first time, he noticed how fancy the small chain was. What at first glance looked like any old thing, maybe a sixty-centimeter-long, undecorated chain, turned out on closer inspection- much closer inspection- to be meticulously made, a true masterwork. Every single link wasn't just a formless disk, instead formed the shape of a small serpent biting its own tail. Even the individual scales on the tiny serpent bodies were visible.

Indy studied the small chain for a long time, very confused. He had worn it around his neck for over three years without even noticing what this chain really looked like. He wondered whether all of the other chains were so decorative. And if so, why Greg had gone to all this trouble.

But of course he found just as little of an answer to that question as all of the others that ran through his head at the moment. After a while, he placed the small chain in his jacket pocket, left the cabin again, and went up onto the deck to see how the pilot was coming with his preparations.



CHAPTER 7

Piedras Negras: Yucatan

Although over three years had passed, nothing had changed in the town. Time here seemed to have stood still. The houses to the right and left of the midday streets were just as small and dirty, the elegantly white-clothed people with dark faces and wide-brimmed sombreros looked at the light-skinned gringos with distrust and fear, and even the dust on the glasses that the owner of the cantina put on the bar before them seemed to be the same as three years ago.

It was an odd feeling to return- and not just because this was the place he and Greg had left from on their last expedition. Like before, he didn't have a good feeling about this. They were outsiders here, and they were outsiders who weren't wanted. No one said it, no one let them feel it, and yet Indy still felt it clearly. They shouldn't be here. Even he and Greg shouldn't have come, and he and Norton and Bentley certainly shouldn't.

Norton's return tore him out of his dark thoughts and back to reality. They had been here for two hours- himself, Professor Norton and Bentley, the officer he had been talking to, as well as two broad-shouldered Navy soldiers, whose loyalty Bentley didn't doubt for a moment.

Although Indy had raised objections, first Bentley and then Norten had insisted that Anita remain aboard the Saratoga; locked in her cabin and guarded by two armed sailors.

And Bentley had also probably given orders as to what was to happen with her should he and the others not return.

Norten had left them in this grubby bar in the center of Piedras Negras to go make a few inquiries, as he had claimed. He hadn't said what kind of inquiries these were- but judging by the expression on his face, they had started anything but well.

Norten came to their table, signaled to the man behind the counter, and dropped down heavily into one of the wobbly chairs, which protested, groaning, at the rough treatment. His face shimmered with sweat. On the back and beneath the shoulders of his white linen suit, dark stains had formed, and in his eyes was an expression of deep exhaustion. Not that this surprised Indy. Even in here, it was so warm that everyone was bathed in sweat; outside, it was simply unbearable.

"Well?" Indy turned questioningly to Norten.

Norten sighed deeply and prepared to answer, but then waited, because the proprietor came over in that moment and served him his requested drink. As soon as the man was out of earshot, he sighed again and shook his head. "It seems as if José was never here," he said. "We were apparently faster than him."

"Or he and his companions went straight to the temple," murmured Indy.

Norten shrugged his shoulders and knocked back the contents of his glass in one gulp. "That's possible," he said. "But I don't think so. His canoes wouldn't have been faster than our airplane."

"And then where does the dejection come from?" inquired Bentley.

Norten measured him with an almost furious look. "I was trying to get a truck," he answered.

"Trying?"

"No chance," said Norten. "There are only two trucks in this whole town. In the end, I offered enough to buy the two junk heaps. It was useless."

"Then we'll confiscate them," Bentley suggested.

Norten didn't answer, while Indy just laughed quietly and humorlessly. "We're in Mexico, Commander," he said quietly. "You can't confiscate things here."

"If you prefer the word steal- go ahead," replied Bentley, shrugging his shoulders. He threw the two Navy soldiers a questioning glance. "Do you see any problems?"

The two shook their heads in a nearly united movement. "No problem, Sir."

"See, Dr. Jones," grinned Bentley. "The question of transportation has been taken care of. But I suggest that we wait for darkness before we acquire the trucks."

"And this is something an American officer should say?" asked Indy mockingly.

Bentley's face darkened. "I think that this is about more than two old, rotting trucks, Dr. Jones."

Indy prepared to answer, but in that moment he sensed a movement out on the street and he stopped.

In the open door of the cantina stood an old man. In the bright light of the sun, he was nearly just a shadow, flat and black and with a face that one could more guess at than truly see. And nevertheless, Indy had the feeling that he knew him. Yet...

The man turned around and shuffled away with small, troubled steps and very hunched shoulders, and in the same moment, Indy's thoughts slipped away; as abruptly as if something was stopping him from finishing them.

"What's wrong?" asked Nortén, alarmed. He also looked at the street, but the old man had already vanished, so he saw nothing but the dusty main street of Piedras Negras, sweltering under the midday heat.

"Nothing," answered Indy, confused. "I thought I saw... something."

"Saw what?" Bentley prodded. One of the two soldiers stood up and threw him a questioning glance, but Bentley lifted his hand calmly as Indy shook his head again.

"Nothing," said Indy once more. "I already said I was mistaken."

Norten studied him very distrustfully for a second, then shrugged his shoulders and turned back to Bentley. "We should

find some rooms,” he said. “We can’t do anything until tonight. A few hours of sleep would do us all some good- who knows if we’ll get any tonight.”

“That’s already taken care of,” answered Bentley with a head movement towards the man behind the counter. “He has a couple of rooms available right here.”

Norten sighed, wiped both hands across his face, and stood up with a tired movement. Bentley, the officer, and the two soldiers got up as well. Only Indy remained seated.

“What are you waiting for, Dr. Jones?” asked Norten.

“I’m... not tired,” answered Indy haltingly. “But I would like to sit out here and have something to drink- if you don’t mind.”

A nearly compassionate smile passed over Norten’s face. “I certainly do mind, Dr. Jones,” he answered.

“Oh?”

“Yes,” confirmed Norten. “I want to be certain that all of us leave the city together tonight to find the temple.”

Indy spared himself the trouble of protesting. Norten smiled again, and Bentley’s face remained unmoved, but one of the two soldiers stepped behind his chair. And he didn’t just look as if he were strong enough to grab Indy with one hand and drag him up the stairs, but also completely willing to do so at a command from Bentley or the professor

“It was worth a try, right?” asked Indy, sighing, as he pushed his chair back and stood up.

“Of course,” Norten stated. “And just so you don’t get the idea to try something of this nature again, one of these men will guard your door until we leave.”

Without another word, Indy turned around and went up the stairs to the next floor.

The three rooms that Bentley had rented lay next to each other and were very tiny. Indy’s room had just enough space for the wobbly bed and the no less wobbly chair that stood next to it. There was no trace of a luxury like a bedside table or even a closet.

Norten stepped in behind him, took a step past him to the window, and opened it. A wall of sticky, warm air came in from outside and made breathing even more difficult. Norten blinked

for a second in the bright sunlight, then pointed down at the street below. "A nice view, isn't it?"

Indy paused for a moment, but then he did him the favor of stepping over and looking out the window.

The street lay there in the midday heat as if it were dead. The air shimmered with heat, and the sunlight was so intense that it brought tears to his eyes. Nevertheless, he could clearly see the figure leaning against a wall on the other side of the street, smoking. He was very large, dark-haired, wore a white linen suit with dark flecks of sweat, and had been sitting at the table next to him two minutes ago. So much for the idea of just waiting until Norten and the others were asleep and then slipping out the window.

With a jerk, he turned away from the window, dropped onto the bed, and crossed his arms behind his head. Norten looked at him for a moment as if he expected him to say something, but then he just shrugged and went over to the door.

As he stretched his hand out to the doorknob, Indy called him back again. "Norten?"

"Yes?"

"Just one question," said Indy without looking at the professor. "And I would like an honest answer."

Norten was silent.

"Were you really friends with Greg?" asked Indy, still without looking at the gray-haired archaeologist. "Or were you just using him because you needed him- like me?"

"Friends..." Norten repeated the word as if he had to consider its real meaning. Then he shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know," he admitted. "That's a big word, Dr. Jones. Swanson was my pupil, if that's what you mean, and my best pupil, I would like to add. I... liked him."

He paused for a moment. "I think so, yes. It must have been something like friendship, what I felt for him. Why do you ask?"

"If that really is the truth," answered Indy, "then the girl must also mean something to you."

"Joana?" Norten nodded. "Sure. I like her. And she..."

"She really likes you, Norten," Indy interrupted him, propping himself up with his elbow so he could look Norten in

the eye. "You know that. You're something like a second father to the girl. Did you know that?"

Norten looked a bit dismayed. But he didn't answer, instead just looked at Indy questioningly.

"If she really means something to you," continued Indy, "then I don't understand why you won't help her. She's in danger as long as that madman has her. Mortal danger."

"He won't do anything to her," answered Nortén. But he didn't sound very convinced. "Not as long as he thinks he can use her to influence you, Dr. Jones."

"Just like you?" Indy said.

This time, the dismayed expression on Nortén's face grew much stronger. For three, four seconds he looked at Indy with a mixture of dismay and anger, his lips became a thin, bloodless strip, and he moved his hands as if preparing to ball them into fists. But then he turned around wordlessly, stormed out of the tiny room, and slammed the door behind himself.

Indy sunk back, disappointed. He should have realized how little sense it would make for him to talk to Nortén like that. The professor was possessed; so set in his ideas that he would listen to neither him nor anyone else. But Indy had by no means forgotten the warm, almost friendly gaze with which Nortén had embraced Joana at the hacienda in Cuba. He had to at least try.

For a good half hour, he lay on the bed, eyes open, and started at the dirty ceiling above him. He looked at the clock five or six times during this time, and each time it seemed to him as if the hands hadn't even moved. And there were at least seven or eight hours until sundown- Nortén had left no doubts, after all, that they would leave after dark at the latest to search for the Maya temple, whether José and Joana arrived before then or not.

Finally, he couldn't stand this inactivity any more, stood up, and went to the door. He carefully turned the doorknob, opened the door a crack, and peered through.

The only thing he saw was the sweaty back of a khaki shirt stretched across a pair of muscular shoulders. Indy debated for a moment taking a risk and punching the man; he certainly thought he could deal with Nortén and Bentley. And before the other man

could cross the street, he could have probably left the building already.

But as if he had just read his mind, the soldier in front of the door turned around and looked at him. “Do you need something, Dr. Jones?” he asked.

“No,” answered Indy. “I just wanted to see if...”

“If?”

“Nothing,” said Indy. “Everything’s fine.” He closed the door again, went to the window, and looked down at the street.

The image hadn’t changed, as if time really had stood still. The town continued to lie beneath him as if it were dead, and the only trace of humanity he saw was the man who still leaned against a wall on the other side of the street, keeping an eye on his room. As he noticed Indy at the window, he lifted his hand and waved at him mockingly.

Indy threw him a dark glance and prepared to turn around again as he noticed a movement: At the northern end of the street, almost at the edge of his field of view, a door had opened and a white-clothed woman with dark hair stepped out of the building.

And it wasn’t just any woman- it was Anita.

Indy’s eyes widened, surprised. What he saw was completely impossible! He had seen Bentley lock José’s wife in her cabin with his own eyes. And even if she had somehow managed to escape- it was just impossible for her to be here! The ship was a good thirty nautical miles from the coast of the Yucatan, and the way from there to here was another good two hundred miles! Even with the airplane, it had taken them nearly four hours to get here.

But impossible or not- it was her. There was simply no doubt. It was her face, her hair, her way of moving.

Indy watched, stunned, as she stepped further out onto the street, stood there for a moment, and then looked cautiously to the right and left; the behavior of a person who was searching for something- or waiting for someone. And it didn’t take much imagination to figure out who she was waiting for.

Indy looked back at the soldier on the other side of the street. He had also noticed Anita and looked in her direction: But he remained completely relaxed and continued to lean against the

wall of the building. He obviously hadn't recognized her, instead just looked at her because she was an attractive woman.

Indy cast all thoughts aside, rushed back to his bed to get his hat and the rolled-up whip that was the only weapon Norten had allowed him to keep, and then swung out of the window with a single, determined movement. His fingers barely found hold on the soft wood of the frame, but his fumbling feet hit resistance. For half a second, he hung there, nearly frozen, on the wall, then, heart pounding, he removed his right hand from its hold and searched for somewhere else he could grasp to climb down the wall.

"Hey there!"

Indy resisted them temptation to turn around and look over at the man, who had obviously noticed his escape attempt. With clenched teeth, he continued climbing down the wall.

"Dr. Jones! What is this nonsense?! Are you trying to break your neck?"

Heavy, quick steps approached him, and Indy now did look back over his shoulder.

The man had left his post on the other side of the street and approached him with long strides and an enraged expression. He simultaneously heard a door fly open in the room above him and crash against the wall, and half a second later, a second, just as angry face appeared in the window above him. A hand stretched out and tried to grab him. Indy turned his head hastily to the side so that the outstretched fingers only knocked the hat from his head, but the sudden movement was too much. The tips of his fingers and toes, which had curled into tiny gaps and tears in the wall, lost their grip, and he felt himself start to fall.

Indy did the only thing he could do- he didn't try to cling to something, instead pushed off of the wall with all his might and simultaneously turned around.

The man beneath him was so confused that he didn't even cry out in shock as Indy fell towards him from a good four meters up and knocked him to the ground.

The collision knocked the air from Indy's lungs and made colorful stars dance before his eyes, but the soldier immediately lost consciousness.

“Stop!” the man in the window roared at him. “Dr. Jones, stop or I’ll shoot!”

Which of course, Indy didn’t do.

Just the opposite, he leapt up hastily, took a step in Anita’s direction, who had stopped at the sudden commotion, and then took two steps back to pick up his hat.

The movement probably saved his life, because the soldier’s words hadn’t been an empty threat. Above him crashed a shot, and where he would have been standing had he not gone back, a small explosion whirled up the dust of the street.

Indy flinched back, horrified, pressed himself against the wall beneath the window for half a second, and then threw himself instinctively to the side as he registered a movement above him.

The second bullet missed him by only a millimeter, tore a smoking furrow through the plaster next to his shoulder, and howled away as a ricochet.

As the soldier leaned forward, cursing, and aimed at him for a third time, Indy struck at him with his whip.

The tip wasn’t long enough to reach the window, but the perceived danger scared the man so badly that he lost his balance in the window and tipped forward with a scream.

Indy didn’t wait until he fell to the ground, instead ran with long strides towards José’s wife.

“Anita!” he screamed. “Stop!”

Instead of waiting for him, Anita turned around with a shocked movement and ran down the street. Her tight clothing and the high heels she wore hindered her so she couldn’t run very quickly. But she had a good lead, and before Indy could make up even half of the distance, she turned to the left and vanished into a small alleyway between two houses.

Indy cursed, ran even faster, and threw a glance back over his shoulder in mid-flight. One of the two soldiers was already getting up again, and in that moment, the door to the cantina flew open and Norton, Bentley, and the officer from the Saratoga rushed out.

Indy doubled his efforts to catch up with José’s wife. Gasping for breath, he ran into the alley where she had disappeared just in time to see the hem of her white dress vanish through a doorway.

With long strides, Indy set after her, knocked the door open with his shoulder, and suddenly found himself in a dark, pleasantly cool building. A half dozen doors branched off from the corridor, and to the left was a steep staircase made of worn stone, leading to the building's upper level.

Indy wasted a second standing there, eyes closed and listening, but he heard nothing. The house seemed to be just as dead as the street and the whole town.

His thoughts raced. Norton and the others were probably on their way here. He just had no time to tear open one door after another and search every room lying beyond; aside from the fact that the owners certainly wouldn't be happy about that. In near panic, he tried to put himself in the position of someone who had blindly stumbled into this house. Where would he turn?

His gaze remained hanging on the staircase. He had no idea where it went- but Anita probably hadn't known that either. Determined, he turned to the left and ran, taking the stairs three or four steps at a time.

As he reached the first landing, the door beneath him flew open with a massive crash and Norton and the others rushed in. Indy could hear their agitated voices, and a moment later another crashing and banging as they promptly began to pull the doors open. Furious voices rang out, and almost immediately there was the loud crack of a punch followed by the dull thud of a body. Bentley's men obviously weren't stopping to ask questions.

Indy looked around hastily. They would need only moments to search the lower rooms and either track down Anita- or come up here to continue their search above. His gaze felt over the closed doors, of which even up here there were a good half dozen. Almost indiscriminately, he selected the nearest door, went to it, and turned the handle.

The door didn't move. It was locked. The wood didn't seem as if it could resist a serious attempt to break it for longer than a few seconds. But the commotion that would cause would be heard below.

Indy turned to the next door and found that it was also locked. Suddenly, he heard a sound from the end of the corridor.

The last door in the hallway had opened a crack, and a shimmer of white fabric glowed in the half-darkness beyond. A pair of dark eyes, widened in shock, looked out at Indy: “Dr. Jones! Over here!”

Anita’s voice was just a hurried whisper, and yet Indy imagined for a moment that everyone in the house must have heard it. He threw a securing glance back to the staircase and then darted over to her as quickly and quietly as he could.

Anita opened the door just wide enough for him to slip through, shut it hastily behind him, and flipped a latch that he thought looked like even a five-year-old could easily break.

Indy turned around to her, confused, and prepared to ask a question, but Anita waved it aside hastily and placed a finger on her lips. “Not now!” she whispered. “Quiet!”

Indy obeyed. While Anita remained standing at the door and pressed her ear against the wood to listen, he took a step back and looked around the room. They weren’t alone. At a three-legged table next to the only window sat a perhaps thirty-year-old man and a dark-haired woman around the same age, who held a grubby child on her knee. None of them even made a sound, but all three of them looked at Indy and Anita with a mixture of confusion and deep terror that he didn’t understand at first.

Then he saw that they weren’t even looking at them- their eyes were fixed on a point somewhere between Anita and him, on a point in the middle of the room where there was absolutely nothing, and as he moved, none of the three reacted. It was as if they were stuck in a moment of timeless terror and no longer noticed what was going on around them.

Confused, Indy tore his eyes away from the sight and turned back to Anita, but she waved her hand again and pointed for him to be silent.

Footsteps now crashed out in the hallway, and Indy could hear as one door after another was opened- and often broken down. Just a few seconds, he thought, and they would be here.

He looked around for something he could use as a weapon. The room was tiny and served as a living room and a bedroom as well as a kitchen. On the counter was a heavy cast-iron pan; maybe not the most elegant weapon, but a very functional one.

Indy went over, took it, and stepped towards Anita on the other side of the door.

A brief smile stole over the face of the dark-haired Mexican woman as she saw what he held in his hands. She shook her head clearly, placed a finger on her lips again, and signaled to him with her eyes to move a bit to the side as the steps approached the door.

The knob was turned, and someone shook the door forcefully. The thin bolt groaned as if it would break at any moment. Anita quickly stretched her hand out and pushed him back, and the door was pulled halfway open with a jerk; the swollen face of the soldier Indy had knocked to the ground appeared in the opening and looked in.

Indy raised the frying pan and tensed all of his muscles for a powerful hit to add a bit of symmetry back to this face, but Anita held him back with a hasty hand movement and looked the soldier in the face.

“You don’t need to search this room,” she said.

The soldier blinked. For a fraction of a second, his face darkened in fury- and then something strange happened. Something vanished in his eyes, his face went slack, and Indy could see as every bit of energy drained from his body.

He slowly turned his head and looked back into the hall. “We don’t need to search this room,” he said.

“Dr. Jones isn’t here,” said Anita.

“Dr. Jones isn’t here,” repeated the man, as obediently as a robot repeating a given phrase at the push of a button. Then he turned around with slow, nearly mechanical movements and pulled the door closed again behind him.

Anita stepped back with a relieved sigh as Indy lowered the frying pan, confused, alternately staring between her and the closed door. “How... how did you do that?”

Anita raised her head and looked at him. Her face glimmered with sweat. Whatever she had done, it seemed to have used up all of her strength.

“I’ll tell you later,” she murmured. “Let’s get out of here, Dr. Jones. I don’t think I can fool them for long.” She pointed at the window. “Come on.”

The three people at the table still didn't move as Indy and Anita pushed past them and opened the window. Indy studied their faces with a mixture of fear and deepest confusion. He didn't know what scared him more- the uncanny condition of this man, his wife, and their child, or what Anita had done to the soldier.

Anita leaned forward, threw a hurried glance to the right and left down the street, and then looked back. "Help me," she said.

Indy also leaned out the window. Three meters beneath them, the street still lay there as if dead, but Anita didn't plan on climbing down there. Just the opposite, she climbed skillfully onto the windowsill, searched for a hold on his shoulder with her left hand, and stretched the other up. With astonishing strength, she clung to the edge of the flat roof, which wasn't too high over the window, pushed off, and swung up onto it with an elegant movement. A moment later, her face and hectically waving hand reappeared over the edge. "Quickly," she said. "They're coming!"

Indy wasted no time wondering how Anita knew that, instead stretched out his hands to the edge and followed her onto the roof. In nearly the same moment, he heard as the door in the room below him was torn open for a second time and heavy steps crashed through the room.

Anita pointed, gesticulating, to the other side of the building. On the far side of the roof was the end of a ladder. As quickly as they could, they crossed the flat, tarred roof. Anita swung herself onto the ladder without stopping and quickly started to climb down. And Indy followed her, pausing at the last moment to look back- just in time to see a large hand stretch out towards the roof's edge and cling to it.

The sight took away his last doubts as to whether Anita really knew what she was talking about. As quickly as he could, he climbed down the ladder after her, and it started to groan and shake beneath the weight of two people.

As they reached the ground, Anita turned indiscriminately to the left and rushed off. Indy followed her. José's wife turned into another barely meter-wide alleyway, ran to the other end, and turned to the left, then right, and left again.

For a good five minutes, they ran through the tangle of small, twisting alleyways that stretched between the tall white houses of Piedras Negras like a Minoan labyrinth, until Indy completely lost his bearings and was certain that their pursuers would no longer be able to track them down.

And there was also the fact that Anita had been going so fast that Indy just couldn't go any farther.

His lungs burned and his knees shook. Gasping for breath, he sunk down against a wall, wiped the sweat from his face with the back of his hand, and tried to gather at least enough air to ask a question.

It remained an attempt, and a helpless gasp.

Anita had also stopped. Despite the murderous pace she had set, she wasn't even breathing faster, and the expression of exhaustion was also missing from her face. She just looked tense.

"I think we lost them," she said, after she had thrown a long, examining glance down the alleyway behind Indy.

"Who the hell are you?" Indy murmured, exhausted. "And how did you get here?"

Anita smiled, amused. "You know who I am, Dr. Jones," she answered.

"Yes," murmured Indy. His lungs still burned like fire and his heart hammered as if it would burst. "You just didn't tell me that you're the current world champion in the marathon."

Anita's smile became a bit more mocking. "I spend a lot of time keeping myself in shape," she answered. "You should do it too, Dr. Jones. As you just saw, it has its advantages."

Indy looked at her angrily and made a corresponding gesture. "You know what I mean," he answered. "How did you get here?"

Anita remained silent for a moment. "The how isn't that important, Dr. Jones," she answered seriously. "What's important is *why* I'm here."

Indy rolled his eyes, sighing, but then just accepted it as fate. Now was neither the time nor place to play games with Anita.

"We have to stop José," Anita continued.

"Do you know where he is then?"

Anita nodded. "At the temple, Dr. Jones. I know the way. But I fear that I can't stop him alone. I need your help."

“Why?”

“He’s going to complete the summoning,” answered Anita. “Tonight, as soon as the moon is high in the sky. We have to stop him.”

“Oh?” asked Indy wickedly, “do we have to?” He made a furious hand movement as Anita prepared to answer. “You know, dear, I’m getting really tired of everyone telling me what I need to do or not do. As far as I’m concerned, your José can summon himself straight to hell, and take his nice friends with him. It doesn’t matter to me. The only thing I want is Joana.”

“But it’s also about her,” answered Anita seriously. “Believe me, Dr. Jones- if we don’t stop him, Joana will die. And not just her, but many others.”

Indy looked at her again, filled with boiling rage, but he said no more. And he knew that Anita was right. Just as his words didn’t truly reflect what he felt. It did matter to him what happened, even to José. It was just rage, and a good deal of this rage was directed at none other than himself. He felt as if he were suddenly blind and deaf. What had to happen before he finally figured out what was really happening here? Where was his ability to think logically and recognize hidden connections?

“Fine,” he said, resigned. “I’ll help you- under one condition.”

“Yes?”

“You tell me what’s actually going on here,” answered Indy. “The whole story. I want to know everything.”

“Now isn’t the time...” began Anita, but Indy interrupted her immediately.

“Then you’ll have to make time,” he said roughly. “The short version. Just facts, no background. I have enough imagination to come up with the rest.”

Anita looked at him for several seconds, almost frightened, but what she read on his face seemed to convince her that his words were serious. She paused for a moment, then she sighed deeply, nodded- and breathed in, shocked.

It was a moment before Indy realized that the horror in her eyes wasn’t because of him, but something behind him.

He turned around- and flinched back, just as horrified as Anita.

Behind him, a figure had appeared. But it was neither Norten nor one of his men. It was a giant, a man far over two meters tall with sun-browned skin, a broad, sharply-defined face, slightly raised brow, and a hook nose that would have looked aristocratic if it wasn't swollen and bruised.

Indy knew why this was. It had only been a couple of days since he had personally broken this nose. Behind him stood the giant Maya who had tried to kidnap Joana in the New Orleans harbor.

Judging by the treacherous glimmer in the Maya's eyes, he remembered this last meeting just as clearly as Indy. He smiled, but it reminded him of the grin of a hungry wolf that had finally cornered its prey.

Indy took a terrified step back and placed himself protectively in front of Anita, and the Maya warrior's grin grew even wider. He slowly lifted his massive hands and spread his fingers, but he didn't move from the spot.

Indy raised his whip. The Indian laughed quietly, shook his head, and came a step closer.

Indy wasn't surprised as he heard a sound behind him and noticed a brown-skinned giant on the other side of the alley, as if he had appeared out of nowhere.

"Do something!" he whispered. "For God's sake, do something, Anita!"

"But what?" asked Anita pathetically.

Indy's eyes wandered back and forth between the two giants. They didn't move, but the silent way that they stood there and stared at them was threat enough. Indy knew that this time he wouldn't come through with just a few bruises and a headache. The glimmer in the eyes of the giant with the broken nose was pure bloodlust.

"The same thing you did to Norten's man," he whispered. "Hypnotize them or whatever it was."

Anita shook her head choppily. "That won't work with them," she said.

One of the two men took a step. In his hand suddenly appeared a knife, the blade of which looked small in his massive fist, but it certainly wasn't.

Indy's thoughts raced. He knew that he didn't have even the slightest chance against these two titans. The whip was of little use in this tight alleyway, and even if he managed to succeed in hitting one of the two, the other would use the opportunity to attack him and kill him with a single movement.

"Do something!" he gasped, nearly hysterical. "Say a spell or something!"

Anita looked at him in irritation, but remained silent.

The native with the knife came closer and now stood only two steps from him. Smiling, he swung the blade from right to left, made a playful swipe at Indy's face, and laughed wickedly as he flinched back in fear and collided with the wall.

Something moved behind him. A third figure appeared in the alleyway, not as big and broad-shouldered as the Indian, and not really clear for some reason. It seemed to Indy as if there was only a shadow standing behind the giant warrior. But something about that shadow was familiar.

The Maya seemed to register the confusion in his eyes, because he stared at him for a second with distrust, then he shifted the knife from his left hand to the right, carefully took a step back, and turned around.

Even though Indy wasn't even looking at him, he registered that the Maya froze in horror in the middle of that movement.

Behind the giant stood an old man. And it wasn't just any old man- it was the old man who Indy had seen two times before: An hour before when he stood on the street in front of the cantina, looking in, and three years ago when he stood in his and Greg's way.

The old man said nothing. He didn't move, instead just stood there and looked at the two Maya. The expression on his face wasn't even unfriendly. Yes, he even smiled- but he did it in the way that a father smiled as he watched his children do something wrong that they didn't know they shouldn't be doing. And despite this mild, forgiving smile, there was also a strength and knowledge in his eyes that made Indy shudder inwardly.

The two Maya didn't just shudder inwardly.

The one with the knife stumbled back step by step until he had swayed past them and stood next to his comrade. On both of their

faces spread an unbelievable fear; a fear such as Indy had seldom seen on a person's face.

For several seconds, they just stood there, motionless, seemingly paralyzed by the gaze of the old man, then he lifted his hand and made a quick, almost pointing movement- and the two giants turned around on the spot and ran away as if the devil himself were after them.

Indy watched them, confused, before he turned around again and looked at the old man. This man was also no Mexican, as he had previously assumed. Now, as Indy was very close to him and he could clearly make out his face, he saw that he had the same features as the two Maya. The same sharply defined face, the same prominent chin, the same slightly raised forehead, which made his face seem strange to the eyes of a European. And those eyes...

Indy had never seen such eyes. They were the eyes of an old, no, ancient man. They were clouded with the decades, if not centuries they had seen, and Indy saw a knowledge and superiority within that touched him deeply.

"Who... who are you?" he whispered.

It wasn't possible for him to speak loudly. The mere presence of this old man seemed to turn something within him to ice. It was the same feeling that he had at Norten's hacienda when the fire serpent touched him: The sensation that he was close to something ancient, unimaginably powerful. But what was missing here was the roiling, boundless hate, the senseless destructive fury that had dwelt within the flaming body of the demon snake. Instead, he felt something like... wisdom. The enlightenment of a being that had existed for hundreds, if not thousands of years, that knew how unnecessary anything humans did was.

"Who are you?" he asked once more.

The old man smiled gently, stepped past him, and turned to Anita. He said a word in a foreign language that was completely unknown to Indy, and she answered in the same way, pointed at him, then at herself, and then made a gesture towards the south. The old man nodded, and in the smile on his aging face mixed a trace of sorrow as he turned to Indy.

Again, a second passed in which he just looked at him, and again Indy shuddered under that gaze as if at the touch of an ice-cold, invisible hand. "I knew that we would see each other again," he said finally.

He spoke quietly, and his voice had an oddly full, comforting sound; it wasn't the voice of an old man.

"It's been... a long time," answered Indy haltingly. He felt ridiculous for saying those words, but they were the only ones that came to him; the only words he could even manage.

The old man measured him with another very long and- at least Indy tried to convince himself of this- thoroughly benevolent look, then he answered: "You shouldn't have gone then. Now you must go back."

"I know," whispered Indy. He felt numb. His head was empty. He didn't ask the hundred questions he had wanted to ask this old man, said none of the thousand things that he wanted to say; he just stood there, looked at the ancient Maya, and shuddered at the aura of inconceivable power that the man with the old face let off.

"Who... who are you?" he asked with trouble.

Again, the old man smiled. "I think you know that," he said.

"No," answered Indy. "I..."

"Now isn't the time to talk," the old man interrupted him gently, but in a tone that showed he would tolerate no arguments. "You must go and stop them. The girl will show you the way."

"I... I don't understand..." stammered Indy, but the old man interrupted him again:

"There isn't much time. Go and do what you must do. Do it before the moon stands high in the sky."

"But I..." Indy stopped, confused, in the middle of his sentence as the old man turned around and walked off with slow, measured steps and shoulders hunched. Everything within him cried out to run after him, just grab him by the shoulder and drag him back to ask him all of the questions burning on his tongue. But he couldn't move. It was as if he was still paralyzed.

Only as the old man reached the end of the alleyway and vanished did the paralysis lift from his limbs. Deeply confused,

Indy turned back to Anita and looked at her with wide eyes. “What was that?” he whispered.

“I can’t tell you that, Indiana,” answered Anita. “Not now. He’s right- we don’t have very much time. We have to go to the temple and stop José before something terrible happens.”

“But I don’t even know exactly where it is,” protested Indy.

“I’ll show you the way,” answered Anita.

“But it... it’s almost fifty miles!” said Indy. “Through the jungle and with no vehicle! You can be certain that Bentley’s men will be keeping a close eye on the two trucks!”

“You came in the plane,” Anita reminded him. “Do you think you can fly it?”

Indy shook his head impulsively. “Fly, maybe, but not take off, and definitely not land.”

“We have to try,” insisted Anita. “Without transportation, it will take us two days to reach the temple. And we don’t have that.”

“But that’s suicide,” protested Indy.

Anita was no longer listening to him. Like the old man before, she turned around and left the alley with measured steps. And after a few more seconds, Indy followed her.

The river lay three or four miles to the southeast of the city, and Bentley’s men had camouflaged their small pontoon plane so well with branches and leaves that it took Indy almost half an hour to find it. Another half hour passed before the machine was far enough out of the foliage for Indy to think he could risk the take-off.

The only problem with this was that he didn’t know how to even start the machine.

They had circled the city in a wide arc so that neither Norton nor any of his men could run across them. But that meant that they took nearly two hours to reach the river and the Cessna’s hiding place, and Indy had tried at least twenty times during that time to convince José’s wife that it would be pure suicide for him to try to take the airplane into the air.

But she hadn’t been deterred, instead just doggedly stated that he would somehow have to do it. Indy would have felt better if

he felt even a tenth of her optimism. He broke out in cold sweat at the mere thought.

But something told him that everything that would happen if they didn't reach the temple in time and stop José would be much worse than a failed take-off.

Nevertheless, his hands shook as he climbed into the cabin next to Anita and wrapped his fingers around the throttle. Before him lay a chaotic collection of levers and instruments of which he could only recognize the fuel gauge, and then only with a great deal of trouble; it was in the lower third, more than enough fuel for the fifty miles to the volcano and back.

"Are you worried about the fuel?" Anita asked when she noticed his long look at the fuel gauge and obviously interpreted it incorrectly.

Indy shook his head. "No. It's only fifty miles. I'm just worried about the half mile up." He pointed with his hand at the sky, and Anita smiled briefly.

"You'll make it, Dr. Jones," she smiled confidently.

Indy rolled his eyes, turned back to the controls of the airplane, and desperately dug through his memories. He had watched Joana start the machine in the New Orleans harbor- but of course he hadn't really been paying attention to what she had been doing. He had been much too busy being afraid. And besides- that he might have to eventually start this airplane had been about the last thing on his mind.

"I can't do this," he murmured.

"But you need to, Dr. Jones," answered Anita calmly. "If only because of them."

Indy looked at her in irritation for a moment before he realized what she meant. His eyes wandered to where her outstretched hand was pointed.

Less than fifty meters away from them, two figures had stepped through the undergrowth that lined the river. Norton and one of Bentley's soldiers!

Indy saw the professor flinch, shocked, and then point with his outstretched arm at the airplane, swallowed down a curse, and stretched his hand towards what he thought was the ignition.

It was probably pure luck, but he pushed the correct switch right away, and luck continued to be with him; the Cessna's engine turned over slowly and then leapt to life; a deep, disquieting shudder ran through the hull of the pontoon plane, and Indy's heart made a frightened leap as the machine started to turn in place and simultaneously slide down the river. He also noticed out of the corner of his eye that Norten and his companion were starting to run. And the distance between them and the airplane quickly started to dissolve as the plane only slowly drifted from the shore.

Indy licked his lips nervously, suppressed the impulse to look back at Norten and his companion, and instead concentrated on studying the instrument panel in front of him. He carefully pushed the throttle forward and felt relieved as the plane sped up. But something scraped over the pontoon with a hideous sound, and for a short moment, he was nearly certain that the airplane was stuck somewhere. Then the Cessna got free with a jerk- and in the same moment, he felt something hard land on the pontoons beneath him. The whole airplane started to shake and spin on the spot with increasing speed.

"Jones!" Norten's voice sounded dampened over the commotion of the engines in the cabin. "Are you insane?"

Indy pushed the gas lever forward a little bit more and looked simultaneously at the shore: Norten had waded up to his knees in the water, but didn't risk going any farther. He gesticulated wildly with both arms. "Come back!" he screamed. "You'll kill yourself!"

In this point, he and Indy were of the same opinion- but Indy wasn't quite convinced that he would live considerably longer if he stopped the motor now and returned to the shore, falling into the hands of Norten and his companion.

"Where's the other man?" he asked as he clung to the throttle with all his might and tried to aim the propeller of the plane towards the middle of the river.

"What other man?" Anita asked.

From the roof of the airplane rang a dull crash, and then the sound of heavy, hammering steps made the thin wooden structure of the machine groan audibly.

“Him,” said Indy darkly.

The crashing came closer and was now directly over the cabin. Indy saw a distorted reflection in the water in front of the airplane, stretched his hand out to the gas lever, and pushed it forward a bit more with a jerk. A fraction of a second later, there was a second, much harder jerk that ran through the body of the airplane, and the sound of steps was replaced by the dull collision of a heavy body, almost immediately followed by raging blows.

But the splash of a body falling into the water from three meters up, the sound that Indy longed to hear, didn't come. Instead, there was a sudden splintering sound above him, and as he raised his head in fright and looked up, he saw a massive balled fist that had punched right through the thin plywood of the cabin roof.

Anita cried out in shock as Indy sped up and simultaneously pulled his head down, because in the forcefully broken hole in the roof now appeared a face contorted with rage, and the hand stopped just moving aimlessly from side to side, instead tried to grab his hair. Only a second later, the splintering noise rang out for a second time, and the soldier's other hand reached through the cabin roof and felt for Indy's face.

He leaned over like a racer bent over the handlebars of his motorcycle, screamed for Anita to pull her head down, and pushed the gas lever forward as the attack came. The Cessna's engine roared to life, and behind the two pontoons appeared small, frothy waves as the airplane moved faster and faster and shot towards the middle of the river. The man on the roof of the plane cried out in terror, but didn't give up wildly trying to grab Indy and hammering his fists against the roof of the cabin. Indy wondered how the machine could hold up to this rough treatment.

As if these words were a signal, the splintering sound rang out for a third time, and in the roof of the airplane appeared a third jagged gap through which a massive army boot appeared. The whole plane seemed to groan, and Indy had the feeling that he could feel it breaking beneath his hands.

He forgot everything he had told Anita and thought himself and slowly pulled the throttle back towards himself. The Cessna

shook, raised a few inches above the water, and fell back down with a terrible crash.

Anita suddenly screamed sharply and fearfully, and as Indy looked up and glanced forward, he was only able to suppress a scream with trouble. Less than a mile in front of them, the river made a sharp bend. The riverbed swerved at a nearly right angle- and it was decidedly too thin for Indy to hope not to ram directly into the shore. Not at the high speed the machine had now reached.

He closed his eyes, sent up a short prayer, and pulled the throttle back for a second time, much more decisively. Again the Cessna shook and groaned as if it was going to collapse, but then he felt the airplane slowly lift out of the water, and this time it didn't fall back. Slowly, painfully slowly, the nose of the Cessna raised, and just as painfully slowly, the jungle and the river started to sink beneath them.

From the roof of the airplane rang a shrill, fearful scream. Indy carefully pulled the nose of the airplane a little higher- and closed his eyes in shock as the forest's edge seemed to spring towards them. Something hit the underside of the plane with a nasty scraping sound; the Cessna bucked and shook like a stubborn horse, and the scream from the roof rose to a hysterical screech. So close that several branches clattered against the cabin, the Cessna brushed over the treetops, and shifted into a gentle left turn as Indy carefully turned the throttle.

The unwanted passenger on the roof stopped squealing like a stuck pig and instead focused all of his energy on hitting the airplane with all of his might. The thin wood started to groan and screech under the rough treatment, and in the plywood roof above Indy suddenly gaped another crack. He ducked instinctively as the man's hand missed his face by only a centimeter and knocked the hat from his head.

Through this sudden movement, the machine was knocked into a roll. Anita cried out in terror as the Cessna went into a left turn and nearly fell back into the river in a nosedive. Indy pulled desperately on the wheel, but the airplane seemed to have finally left his control and now raced in a steeper fall towards the river.

The man on the roof started to roar again and threw himself back and forth as if possessed. His fists flew aimlessly through the cabin, and this time Indy's movement came a fraction of a second too late. The soldier's giant hand crashed into his face and threw him back in his seat, and Indy automatically clung to the only handhold he found: the wheel.

The pontoon plane reacted very unwillingly to this rough treatment, even if this was probably how most airplanes reacted to someone winding of the steering wheel like a broken weathervane: It did a somersault. Indy cried out in shock as the sky was suddenly beneath them, and the man on the roof cried out in fear and clung with all of his might to the edge of the holes he had punched in the cabin.

Half a second later, he vanished, along with most of the cabin's roof.

Sky and earth finished their flip in front of the cabin window, and as if by a miracle- perhaps just pure luck- Indy managed to regain control of the machine. The airplane still tilted wildly back and forth, but no longer threatened to fall or turn in uncontrollable spirals, and a second before the nose of the pontoon plane swung into the air again, Indy saw a massive pillar of water splash out of the river far below him.

For nearly a minute, Anita sat next to him, completely frozen in her seat, not even daring to breathe. Then she gulped loudly and very audibly, turned her face very slowly to him, and stared at him with wide, disbelieving eyes.

"And you... you said you can't fly?" she murmured. "That... that was a loop!"

"I know," answered Indy, pained, as he tried to fight against the queasy feeling in his stomach.

"Good God!" whispered Anita. "I had never heard of anyone flying a pontoon plane in a loop."

"I hadn't either," answered Indy. But he did it very quietly. So quietly that he was nearly certain José's wife hadn't heard it.

And if she had, she apparently decided to ignore it.

His hands had almost completely stopped shaking as they approached the crater a short half hour later. Though Indy had

the feeling that they would start again very soon. He saw nowhere far and wide for him to land the airplane.

They had followed the path of the river for only a few minutes, then turned in a southern direction. For a while they had seen only jungle and seemingly random cleared-out fields, but for a good ten minutes, there had been nothing beneath them but a massive, impenetrable green cover. Indy hadn't yet asked Anita where he should land the plane. He had the certain feeling that he wouldn't like the answer she gave.

Instead of thinking about the landing and, with it, their probable deaths, he lifted his gaze and looked at the cone of the extinct volcano. The mountain had in the last few minutes transformed from a shimmering shadow on the horizon to a massive dome of granite and black lava, and into Indy's fear mixed an even stronger feeling of grief and bitterness. This was the place where Greg had died. He had realized that these feelings would catch up with him as they approached the mountain- but he hadn't thought that it would be this bad. During the last few minutes, he had relived those terrible hours. He even thought he could hear Greg's voice again as he begged him to leave and save his own life. And for a moment, he had to use all of his strength to rid himself of the image of the burned face that appeared before his mind's eye, and the horrible pain that these thoughts brought with them.

With all of his strength, he pushed the memories away and turned to Anita. "Where the hell are we going to land?" he asked. "I don't see a river or lake anywhere."

Anita threw him a brief glance and turned back to the green jungle landscape that spread out half a mile beneath the airplane. Without a word, she pointed at the mountain.

Indy looked at her, annoyed, but realized that he would get no other answer and obediently steered the machine higher. The black shimmering flank of the volcano passed beneath them- and then he saw a blue and silver flash at the bottom of the massive crater!

His eyes widened in disbelief. "The crater is..."

"...full of water, yes," Anita finished the sentence when he didn't continue. "That isn't unusual, Dr. Jones."

Indy stared between her and the circular lake at the heart of the volcano, stunned.

“You... you don’t think... that I can land there?!” he screeched.

“It’s our only chance,” answered Anita calmly.

Indy turned the wheel and put the machine into a lopsided turn over the volcano for a second time. “You’re completely insane,” he whispered. “That lake is tiny!”

“It must be at least half a mile,” Anita answered calmly.

“Half a mile!” groaned Indy. “Damn it, I’m not a pilot! I would be happy if I could land this thing in the Atlantic.”

“That would be of little use to us at the moment,” Anita answered, smiling. Then she was serious again. “Please, Dr. Jones! You have to try! We have no other choice. I’m certain that you can do it,” she continued with an encouraging, but slightly concerned smile.

Indy looked at her as if he seriously doubted her sanity (which in that moment he did), then he sent a last short prayer to the heavens, turned the airplane once more, and prepared to land.

Afterwards, he realized that this hadn’t even taken five minutes total. But while he was trying to land, he had the sensation that time was standing still. The sharp-edged lava rocks seemed to whistle only centimeters beneath the pontoons as he tried to take the machine into an even tighter spiral and slow down as he approached the volcanic crater. Once, he did ram into an obstacle, and the Cessna started to wobble and approached the surface of the lake much faster than Indy had intended. But he regained control of the airplane again and finally set the machine down in the water with a massive splash of spray and at high speed, much too high for him to imagine that he could stop it before it reached the other shore.

Somehow, he did it anyway. Indy didn’t know later what exactly he had done; he just hammered wildly at everything he found on the instrument panel and pulled at the wheel as if possessed. Not even a half meter before the sharp-edged lava spears and blades covering the shore of the crater lake, the Cessna came to a stop.

Indy turned the engine off, stared for half a minute out of wide eyes and without even breathing at the tangle of deadly rocks and ridges before them, and then sank down over the wheel with a groaning sound. His heart started to race as if it was going to burst out of his chest, and suddenly, his whole body shook.

“You did it, Dr. Jones,” said Anita. Her voice also shook, and as he raised his head with trouble after a few seconds and looked at her, he noticed that her face had lost all color. “You... you actually did it. Now maybe we have a chance.”

She breathed in deeply and audibly, pointed at the rocks on the shore, and said: “The entrance to the temple is nearby, Dr. Jones. I fear that José is already here. And if he noticed our arrival, things could get dangerous.”

“*Dangerous?*” Indy stared at her, stunned. He suddenly had trouble not letting out a loud, hysterical laugh.

The entrance to the cave was so perfectly camouflaged that Indy would have probably walked right past it if Anita hadn’t suddenly stopped and silently pointed at a shadow between the sharp cracks in the lava rock. Indy looked closer, but still couldn’t see anything remarkable. Finally, Anita began- very carefully, so as not to injure herself on the sharp rocks and lava- to climb up the steeply sloping inner wall of the crater. And suddenly, she vanished.

Indy stared at the place where she had stood before for a second in confusion before he realized that the shadow he had noticed wasn’t a shadow- but a black hole in the black rocks into which the sunlight vanished. Very quickly and much less carefully than Anita before him- with the result that his hands and knees got bloody scratches from the sharp rocks- he followed José’s wife and found himself inside of a low, but very large cave that must reach deep into the mountain.

“Where are we?” he asked. “Is this the way to the temple?”

Anita didn’t answer at once, instead looked at him silently for a moment, visibly nervous. It was too dark in the cave for Indy to be able to make out her face, but he sensed her uncertainty.

“I hope so,” she said finally.

“You hope so? That’s a bit weak- don’t you think?”

“Possibly,” answered Anita, unperturbed. “But it’s all I can offer you at the moment.” She went farther before Indy got a chance to answer, and Indy swallowed back the remark that lay on his tongue and hurried to keep step with her before he lost her in the twilight of the cave.

After barely a dozen steps, the twilight became complete darkness. Indy regretted now how quickly he had left the airplane. He hadn’t even taken the time to search through the machine for a flashlight, a rope, or some other useful object. So he had no other choice than to rely on Anita to find the way in utter darkness. The last gray shimmer of daylight had remained far behind them, and as Indy turned as he walked and looked in the direction from which he had come, he regretted it almost immediately, because behind him was the same impenetrable darkness as in front. He no longer saw his guide, instead oriented himself by the sound of her steps and her light breathing.

“Does José know about this entrance?” he asked through the darkness.

“I hope not,” she murmured. She continued in a slightly derisive tone: “But he will soon if you keep yelling like that, Dr. Jones.” She made a movement that he could only hear, not see. “It isn’t much farther. But be careful. The last bit is dangerous.

Her warning unheeded, Indy prepared to ask what she meant by that- and in the same moment, he lost the ground beneath his feet.

The formerly slightly sloping floor turned into a pile of debris and rubble, the surface of which immediately gave way beneath his weight. Indy suppressed a scream at the last moment, waved his arms futilely for several seconds, and fell back hard. In an avalanche of rubble, debris, and bits of rock, he slid down a good ten or twelve meters before he stopped with a painful jerk.

As he lifted his head a moment later, groaning, and opened his eyes, he at least saw something again; even if it was only the colorful stars that danced in front of his eyes due to the pain.

“Do you think that’s being careful or quiet?” asked Anita.

Indy swallowed down all of the impolite things that lay on his tongue and pulled himself up with trouble. The colorful stars before his eyes vanished, but a murky red veil remained, and it

was a moment before Indy realized that he was really seeing light now. For the first time in an eternity, he saw Anita as a blurred shadow in front of him.

“Are you hurt?” she asked, suddenly very serious and without the least trace of mocking or scorn.

“No,” said Indy. “A few scratches, that’s all.”

“Good,” replied Anita. “Then follow me. And- *please*, Dr. Jones: For God’s sake, be quiet!”

Indy briefly wondered what god she was referring to, but didn’t bring that up now, instead followed her wordlessly.

They moved on in the direction of the red shimmer of light, and it quickly grew in intensity and soon turned out to be the flickering light of countless torches that burned somewhere in front of them. In the cold, previously flat-smelling air of the cave mixed the smell of smoke, and another moment later, Indy thought that he could hear something: A dark, swelling murmur, like the distant rustle of water or song.

Anita was always two, three steps ahead of him. Now and then she lifted her hand and gestured for him to be quiet, and although Indy couldn’t make out her face, he felt her fear.

But maybe that wasn’t it. Maybe it wasn’t her fear that he felt gnawing at him, but his own. Yet it wasn’t this cave that scared him. He had been in tighter spots before. He had no fear of small rooms or the darkness; he couldn’t afford something like claustrophobia in his profession. But he had never been in a place like this. Something... was here that terrified him. And it grew stronger, stronger with every step he took towards the red lights and singing.

And then he knew what it was.

It was the same feeling that had overcome him two times before: Once at Norten’s hacienda, and again a few hours ago, in the presence of the old Maya. The feeling that he was in the presence of something old, massively powerful.

They stopped when they reached the end of the tunnel. Before them lay a somewhat over two-meter-tall, unevenly formed break in the wall, behind which a giant cave stretched. And it wasn’t just a cave, but a massive rock dome, a cathedral of black lava frozen in bizarre shapes, the ceiling of which was as high above

their heads as the floor lay beneath them, and was lit by dozens, if not hundreds of burning torches. Nevertheless, the light barely managed to free even a small part of the cave from the darkness.

And as Indy saw what the cave held, he breathed in sharply in disbelief.

Beneath him rose a mountain within a mountain. But this massive structure of black lava was made by human hands. In the exact middle of the cave rose a gigantic step pyramid. Its form resembled all other Maya pyramids, but it was not built of sandstone, but black lava, and it didn't consist of blocks stacked one on top of the other, instead was chiseled directly out of the stone of the mountain. And it was bigger, much, much bigger than any other Maya pyramid he had ever seen. A massive staircase led up to the platform at its top, and up there burned countless fires in small metal bowls that were arranged in a circle around a massive stone altar.

"What is that?" he whispered, stunned.

Anita flinched, shocked. Although he had spoken very quietly, his words returned as uncannily distorted echoes off of the black stone around them.

"The Temple of the Serpent," she whispered, after she had hastily retreated to the hallway. "The shrine is inside of the pyramid."

She spoke very quietly, and her words came only haltingly over her lips. She also looked shaken. Indy didn't need to ask to know that Anita had never been here before. And that the sight had shaken her just as much as him. The thought calmed him, but he couldn't say why. He simultaneously wondered how she could have found the way here.

But that wasn't important now. "Do you know where your husband is?" he asked.

Anita made a movement that seemed to be a mixture of a shake of the head and a shrug. "Probably inside the pyramid," she said. "But I don't really know."

"Then we have to go inside," Indy decided. Anita flinched visibly, and he also didn't feel half as certain as he was acting. This invisible, dark presence was still there and stronger than

ever. And the black pyramid in the heart of the volcano was the source of this oppressive feeling.

He went back to the entrance into the large cave, searched with his hand for a firm hold on the wall, and leaned forward as far as he dared to. The sight left him dizzy. Below him, the wall of black lava plunged certainly thirty, if not forty meters or more into the deep before it ended in something that looked from this height like a pincushion with little points and ridges, but which was really a tangle of man-height lava spears and razor-sharp spikes. And the wall above it was as slick as if it had been carefully polished. Only here and there could Indy see a crack, a split, somewhere that the fingers of a skilled climber could find hold. But at the moment, he didn't feel like a skilled climber.

"Is there another way down?" he asked quietly.

He didn't even have to turn to Anita to sense her shaking her head.

Indy sighed, got down onto his hands and knees, and swung his legs over the edge of the cliff. The tips of his boots scraped over the glass-like wall and found hold in a tiny crack. With a pounding heart and hands damp with sweat, he climbed down centimeter by centimeter.

It was a nightmare. The wall was as smooth as glass, and his hands were damp and slipped constantly. Twice he reached a place from where he could no longer go on so that he had to climb back up quite a bit to search for another way. His muscles were soon hard and cramped and hurt unbelievably, and blood gushed from his torn-up fingertips and made the rock even slipperier. That he didn't give up after a couple of minutes and climb back up was probably just because he no longer could.

As he finally reached the base of the wall, he was so exhausted that he collapsed with a gasp and lay there for several minutes, breathing heavily and heart racing, before he had regained enough of his strength to at least be able to open his eyes.

As he lifted his eyelids, Anita stood before him. She also looked exhausted, but not as badly as he was. Her hands weren't bloody, not even her clothes were untidy.

"How did you get down here?" he whispered, exhausted. "Did you fly?"

Anita shook her head. "There are ways that only I can go," she answered mysteriously.

With an unwilling growl, Indy sat up halfway and looked at his scraped hands. "When this is all over," he said, "then you'll have to answer a lot of questions for me."

"I will, Dr. Jones," answered Anita very seriously.

The words- and, most of all, their tone- reminded him why he had even dared this dangerous climb. He stood up completely, looked searchingly to all sides, and then crept between the bizarre sculptures of lava to the pyramid.

The uncanny song grew louder the closer they got to the pyramid. And Indy also saw that the uncanny red light that filled the cave wasn't just from the torches and fire bowls- the ground that they walked on was warm, even hot in some places, and here and there, a dark red glow rose from tears and cracks in the ground. The closer they got to the pyramid, the more intense the stench of fire and brimstone became, and a few times, a dull rumbling came from the ground. The cave must have been directly over a part of the volcano that was still active.

Finally, they reached the mighty building, and Anita pointed towards a door filled with red light. The swelling hum of the uncanny song had grown so loud that they could speak to each other in normal voices without the threat of anyone hearing them. Still, Indy caught himself lowering his voice to a nearly fearful whisper as he turned to Anita: "Stay here. I'll go first and see if the coast is clear."

Anita shook her head heavily, but Indy didn't let her get a word in. "I need someone to watch my back," he continued. "So be a good girl and wait here."

Quickly and before Anita found a chance to argue or hold him back, he stood up and crept, hunched, through the last meter to the pyramid. He wasn't at all certain that she would actually stay behind; but as he turned around in the doorway and looked back at her, he noticed the white shimmer of her dress between the pillars of lava. It was a bizarre sight; she looked small and vulnerable, like a fairy lost in a forest of stone who could no longer find her way back.

Indy banished those foolish thoughts and concentrated on what lay before him.

His heart pounded as he went through the massive door in the side of the lava pyramid. He quickly noticed that his first impressions had been correct- the pyramid wasn't made of blocks stacked atop one another, but chiseled out of the stone of the mountain. Alone the idea of how much effort this would have taken made Indy shudder. What powers had created this?

He slowly continued on. Before him lay a giant, square tunnel with walls that were covered with reliefs and chiseled images of ancient Maya deities, but also scenes in the daily life of this lost people. Red light and the swelling, monotone sound of song hit him, and in the distance he saw the steps of a staircase that wound deeper into the heart of the mountain. Everything within him resisted the mere idea of going down there. But he had no other choice if he wanted to save Joana. And anyway- Indy had the certain feeling that he could no longer go back even if he wanted to. So he continued slowly forward as his gaze moved over the images and demonic figures chiseled in stone.

Most of them he could recognize- the Maya were a people with an incredibly developed culture, despite the sometimes barbarian rituals that had been part of their religion. But they were also a people of numerous gods, and while he slowly approached the top step of the staircase, he began to realize that they had and praised even more gods than modern archaeology had assumed. He saw Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent, in a hundred different forms, but he also saw other... things. Flickering, black things, the sight of which made him almost physically uncomfortable, massive, dreadful things with gaping eyes and terrible snouts, winding around people as others praised them, flying colossi that glided over the land and destroyed everything that people had fought to erect on the stony ground. And- it was crazy, but nevertheless- for a moment, he wondered in all seriousness if these things were just fantasies, or whether they had perhaps existed, not imagined gods that lived only in the heads of those who worshipped them, but living demons that killed and destroyed and lived off the prayers and fears of the lives they ruled over. Maybe, he thought, shuddering, Bentley

was mistaken. Maybe that was what José would try to awaken that night, and if so, then the Commander with all of his canons and warships would be unable to stand against this, because these were powers against which human weapons were useless.

He struggled against these ideas as well and tried to push them back to where they belonged- in the realm of the ridiculous- and placed his foot on the top step.

The red light became more intense as he followed the winding staircase down. It simultaneously grew warmer. The smell of brimstone was so intense that it was hard for him to breathe, and his whole body was bathed in sweat.

So as not to completely lose his orientation, he counted the stairs as he went down, but gave up after 250. He must be deep, deep beneath the pyramid and the cave; maybe halfway to hell.

Finally, the stairs ended- and this time Indy no longer managed to suppress a shocked cry, which only didn't give him away since it vanished beneath the monotone singsong of hundreds and hundreds of voices.

Before him lay another circular cave, the ceiling of which rose twenty or thirty yards above him in a dome of needle-sharp spears and spikes. How deep the ground was beneath him, he couldn't say- and it didn't matter, because the ground wasn't ground, but a lake of boiling, red-hot rock that constantly flashed and bubbled, from which came hissing blasts that threw up tongues of flame. There was only a small ring of rocks along the wall that went around the lava and connected with the hall.

And yet, he had reached the heart of the temple.

Directly above the lake of boiling rock, like the web of a fantastic, nightmarish spider, hung a platform of black obsidian that was held up by laughably thin strands and columns of stone. Some of them were no thicker than a finger, others so wide that he could have comfortably walked across them, and they all grew completely horizontally out of the wall of the cave, laughing in the face of nature and the rules of logic in holding up the stone platform. Golden pieces of jewelry, weapons, and ritual objects of inconceivable value hung on all the walls of the cave, and as Indy took another step, he flinched back in shock, because he

suddenly was facing two guards wearing the feather cloaks and crowns of Maya kings.

The two warriors didn't move. And they also couldn't, because they weren't living men, but statues of black lava, true to life and so artfully carved that Indy lifted his hand in confusion and touched one of the faces to convince himself of what his eyes were telling him. The stone was warm. Everything here was warm. The stone beneath his feet was even hot, and the air had meanwhile reached such a temperature that every breath made him feel as if he were breathing in chunks of glass. Glowing hot chunks of glass.

Only with trouble could he tear his gaze from the two stone guards near the entrance and turn his attention back to the stone spider web over the crater. The logical part of his brain objected to this sight. But there was something else within him, something much, much older, and this part knew well enough what lay before him and felt the ancient, evil power that existed in this place and cried out to him to turn around and run while he still could.

Ignoring his own inner voice, Indy snuck on until he found a place on the wall where he could climb up a bit to get a better look at the platform.

On the black circle of shimmering lava rock stood hundreds and hundreds of Maya, naked except for the loincloths and feathered headdress of their people, but every one of them was armed and some painted with bright earthen paint. The Maya formed a single, stacked half circle, in the center of which was the square, black block of an altar.

Before the altar stood José.

Indy was much too far away from him to be able to recognize his face, but he wore the same green ceremonial cloak that he had seen him in aboard the *Saratoga*, but a headdress of a different color. He stood there, motionless, as if frozen, and had both arms raised in a reverent gesture. Only his fingers moved, and although Indy was so far away from him that he more suspected the movement than truly saw it, it still made him shudder. They matched the rhythm of the uncanny singsong that the Maya warriors created, but there was simultaneously something snake-

like, uncanny, that only increased Indy's animalistic fear of this place.

And suddenly he saw that it wasn't just José's fingers that were moving.

The ground on which he stood moved. Glimmering shadows slithered here and there, scaly, slim bodies glided over and alongside each other, brushed over José's feet, and coiled up his legs.

Snakes!

José stood in the middle of a living carpet of creeping, slithering snakes.

An icy shudder ran down Indy's back. *Snakes!* Why did it have to be *snakes* of all things, the only animal in the world that he truly *feared*?

Indy shook away the thought of those repulsive creatures and instead tried to concentrate on the figure in the green feather cloak; but he found that more and more difficult, because his strained mind suddenly filled every shadow with slithering movements, every sound with the light scraping of hard scales on the rock, and every light with the flash of staring reptilian eyes.

José still stood there, arms raised and motionless except for the movements of his hands, but his warriors had started to move. Most of the Maya still crouched on their knees with their heads down, their upper bodies moving in rhythm with the uncanny singsong, waving back and forth, but in the middle, a small gap had appeared, and Indy flinched, shocked, as he saw two Maya warriors step towards their priest, escorting a third, smaller figure in an ankle-length white gown between them.

It was Joana.

Indy couldn't make out the expression on her face, but she moved slowly with the jerky steps of a person who was no longer in control of their own will. Indy's face darkened at the thought of what José must have done to make her like this.

His gaze felt over the wide circle of the crater cave. He would have to get closer to José and the altar if he wanted to help Joana—but how? There were certainly a dozen stone strands that were wide enough for him to reach the stone platform in the middle of the crater, but they didn't offer the slightest bit of cover, and he

had pushed his luck enough already. For a moment, his eyes slid over the ceiling, and for an even shorter moment, he played seriously with the thought of swinging along between them, but quickly threw that out. He would need the skill- and the number of legs- of a spider if he wanted to hold on up there. So he did the only thing that remained to him- he continued to watch what was happening in front of him.

The two Maya had reached the altar and let go of Joana. She was very pale, and the expression on her face was one of emptiness, but also filled with deep pain that shook Indy. The white bandage on her forehead seemed to glow in the blood-red light of the cave.

José slowly turned around and went to the girl, then stretched out his hand.

“Give me the amulet,” he ordered.

Joana started to shake. Her lips moved as if she was trying to say something, but he heard no sound. Slowly, as if she was struggling with all of her strength against the movement, she lifted her arm, stopped, lifted it a bit farther- and let it fall again.

José said no more. For a moment he stared at Joana penetratingly, then he turned with a deliberate gesture, stepped very close to the altar, and placed the spread fingers of both of his hands on the black stone. Indy now saw that the surface of the pool of lava wasn't empty. In a nearly closed circle shimmered twelve tiny golden disks- the amulets that José had already offered up. Only one gap now remained.

“You're strong, my child,” he said with an oddly reassuring tone and without looking at Joana. “But your strength is of no use. The day has come that Quetzalcoatl will wake. Nothing can change that.” He turned with a jerk of his head and now looked at Joana. “Will you really throw away your life just to make a point?”

Joana's lips started to tremble more. Her eyes filled with life again, but also with fear. With an indescribable fear. Her hands shook.

“Give me the amulet,” said José again with a gentle, nearly irresistible voice. “I can sense that you have it. Don't make me use force.”

Joana still didn't move. Even over the great distance, Indy thought he could feel the compelling power of José's words- but the girl resisted. Again she moved her arms as if to lift her hands, and again she didn't complete the movement.

José sighed deeply. "You disappoint me, child," he said. "Your life is still too young to throw it away. Know that I can finish the summoning even without that necklace. Don't give me the amulet, and Quetzalcoatl will drink your blood when he wakes. He will wake either way.

And icy shudder ran down Indy's back. José was completely insane, that was now clear to him. He would finish the summoning whether he had the thirteenth amulet or not, and God alone must know what would happen then; and maybe not even him. José slowly reached beneath his green feather cloak, and as he pulled his hand back out, it was holding a small dagger with a blade of black obsidian. He stepped back and made a commanding gesture with his free left hand, and Indy watched out of eyes wide with disbelief as Joana turned in a strange movement and, at another gesture from José, lay down on the altar. She didn't touch the amulets lying in a circle, and her head lay so that it filled the place of the missing thirteenth pendant.

"Quetzalcoatl!" called José with a shrill, ringing voice, and the kneeling Maya took up the call and repeated it: "Quetzalcoatl!"

Indy shuddered. From the throats of these men, he heard the word differently, completely differently than he had ever heard it before. It wasn't just a name; it was something dark, something monstrously powerful, a word, the mere sound of which spread fear and shock and terror, and suddenly he knew that whatever he may be, Quetzalcoatl was no merciful god, no god of comfort and love, not a god who gave, but one that just demanded and took.

Once more, José called Quetzalcoatl's name, and once more the choir of hundreds and hundreds of Maya intoned the word.

Indy's thoughts raced. He had to do something- *but what?*!

José walked with slow steps around the altar, stopped behind Joana's head, and gripped the knife with both hands. Slowly, very slowly, he raised it high over his head, and Indy could see

the muscles beneath his green feather cloak tense. “Quetzalcoatl!” screamed José for the third time.

But before the choir of natives could repeat the word for a third time and turn it into a dark storm that could shake the entire mountain, Indy leapt out of his hiding place and cried out with all his might: “No!”

José froze in the middle of his movement. The heads of dozens, then hundreds of Maya warriors turned with a jerk in his direction, and several of them leapt up and reached for their weapons.

José lowered the knife and made a calming gesture towards his warriors. “No,” he said. “Leave him.”

For several seconds, he just stood there and stared at him, and Indy could see the mixture of surprise and wicked triumph in his gaze. Then he lowered the hand with the dagger, circled the altar with measured steps, and made a requesting gesture.

“So you did come, Indiana. I knew that you wouldn’t abandon the girl.”

“Leave her alone!” yelled Indy angrily. “If you need a human sacrifice, then...”

“Yes?” asked José slyly as Indy didn’t continue.

Indy breathed in deeply. His thoughts spun in wild circles, and he developed and threw out hundreds of plans in a fraction of a second. “Then take me,” he said finally.

José didn’t look at all surprised. He smiled, but it was an evil, a through and through evil smile. Finally, he repeated his requesting gesture, and Indy started to move with slow steps. He had to use all of his willpower to step out onto the small ridge of rock. What had seemed to him before like a wide, naturally-grown bridge over the boiling lava turned out to be a strip of rock as thin as a handkerchief that was as slick as polished glass. Fifty or even a hundred meters beneath him, the lava bubbled fiery red, and from the depths came a sticky gust of wind that made breathing nearly impossible. Nevertheless, he continued on without even stopping for a step.

The Maya to the right and left of him moved to the side as he reached the stone circle in the middle of the crater and

approached José. But they immediately closed ranks behind him again.

“I take it that you have come to return my property,” said José as Indy reached him and stopped two steps away.

“Your property?”

A shadow crossed José’s face. “Don’t play the fool, Indy,” he said. “The amulet. Give it to me!” He stretched out his hand commandingly.

Indy shook his head. “You’re wrong, José,” he said. “I don’t have it.”

“You lie!”

“Let one of your men search me if you don’t believe me,” said Indy calmly. “I don’t have the amulet. Just as little as Joana does.”

José’s expression seemed to freeze. For several seconds he studied Indy penetratingly, as if he was trying to discover the thoughts behind his forehead, then he said again: “You lie!”

“I’m telling the truth,” insisted Indy. “You should have searched a bit more thoroughly, my friend. What you’re looking for is still on the ship.”

“Then blood must fill the missing link of the chain,” said José.

“You’re completely insane,” whispered Indy.

José smiled as if he had complimented him. “Perhaps,” he said. “But I also don’t want to argue with you, Indy. And for our old friendship, I will give you one last gift- you may choose whose blood it is that will be spilled. Yours- or the girl’s.”

He took half a step to the side and simultaneously turned to make an inviting gesture towards the altar. Indy really did take a step- and then stopped as if frozen.

The snakes! They were still there, kept in a circle of two or three meters around the altar as if by an invisible wall. There were hundreds, if not thousands of these reptiles forming a living carpet on the ground. Everything within Indy clenched in pain at the mere thought of crossing the invisible boundary and standing in the middle of the teeming, creeping mass.

A smile crossed José’s lips as he noticed Indy’s pause. “Have you not overcome your fear of snakes, Indy, my friend?” he asked mockingly.

“Don’t call me that,” growled Indy angrily. José’s smile grew even wider. Indy took another step and then stopped. And against his better judgment, he tried a final time to appeal to José’s reason: “You can’t be serious about this!” he said. “Do you really plan to awaken this... this *thing*?”

This didn’t manage to shake José. The smile on the South American man’s face remained unmoving. “You speak of Quetzalcoatl, our lord and god,” he said.

“I don’t know what it is!” replied Indy brokenly. “But you must sense it too. You must feel what’s happening here.”

“Of course,” answered José calmly.

“Then you’re even crazier than I thought,” replied Indy. “You can’t sense it? Whatever is kept in this place, it’s *evil*. It isn’t a god that you’re going to awaken!”

“Certainly not by your definition, Indiana,” answered José calmly.

“You won’t succeed,” said Indy. “You can’t finish the summoning without the right amulet.”

Maybe I have it,” said José. “Only one of the thirteen is the right one, but I have twelve. The chances aren’t bad.”

“One to twelve that you’ll kill yourself and everyone here, you fool?”

“Quetzalcoatl will hear my prayers. And it doesn’t matter whether the right amulet is here or not. Blood will set right what metal is unable to do. And now go!” The last three words had a commanding tone, and as Indy still paused to continue, two Maya warriors appeared behind him and shoved him so that he stumbled over to José.

A shot cracked.

The Maya to the left of Indy stumbled forward with a squawking scream, went down to his knees, and then fell into the mass of twisting snakes. Between his shoulder blades was a small, round hole.

For half a second, everyone seemed to hold their breath in surprise; and then around Indy, an unholy chaos broke out. A second, third, fourth, and fifth shot cracked, and more Maya warriors fell to the ground, struck, but Indy didn’t dwell on that, instead got up with a sudden jerk, took a step to gain momentum,

and leapt with all of his strength. For one terrible moment, he had the feeling that his leap was too short and would land him in the mass of glimmering snake bodies, then his hip collided hard with the edge of the stone altar, he instinctively clung to it, and then used the momentum of his own movement to reach the top of the stone block. He collided hard against Joana and broke the ring of small pendants she lay in the center of.

Shots were constantly cracking now, but as Indy straightened up, he saw that the massive Maya army was grabbing their weapons and aiming their blow dart guns, arrows, and axes at a handful of figures who appeared in the entrance of the tunnel through which Indy had also entered the cave.

But none of the Maya shot, because in that moment, two shots cracked, one after the other, and between José's feet, sparks flew up from the stone, so close and precise that it couldn't be chance.

"Hold them back, my friend," Indy heard in a familiar voice from the edge of the crater. "I know that you can kill us- but then you'll die too."

José froze. Indy saw as something in his face worked as he looked in horror at the two muzzles that Bentley and one of his sailors aimed at him. Norten and the two other men stood near the ship's captain and aimed the muzzles of two bulky submachine guns at the Maya army. And then Indy watched in disbelief as two, three, finally four more shapes stepped out of the low tunnel. One of them was Anita, who fought in vain against the grip of an over two-meter-tall giant with a hook nose and a raised forehead. There were three of these giants. They were the three giant Maya warriors who Indy had already met several times!

"It seems as if we came just in time," continued Norten with a bleating laugh. "You weren't going to break your word and carry out the ceremony on your own, were you, old friend?" He shook his head reproachfully.

"What do you want?" asked José calmly.

Norten laughed. As if there weren't a good two or three hundred Maya warriors aiming their weapons at him, he moved to the crater's edge, and stepped without pausing onto a thin band

of rock. “Call your men back,” he said. “They should lower their weapons or I swear that none of us will get out of here alive”

José didn't move. None of his warriors lowered their blow dart guns or bows, but they paused to fire at Nortén although he was a defenseless and easy target. Then men obviously knew that they would be risking their ruler's life with their darts, because Bentley and the soldiers had proved that they were expert shots. And Indy was no longer so certain that their chances were so unequal. The two soldiers with the submachine guns stood a bit too far away for the blow dart guns to have a high probability of hitting them; on the other hand, there was nowhere on the small rock ledge where the Maya could hide or flee, so the fire of the submachine guns would find them helpless.

As Nortén strolled across the rock with slow steps, Indy leaned down over Joana and shook her by the shoulder. She groaned quietly, her head rolled back and forth, and her eyelids fluttered, but she didn't wake up. He shook her harder, finally pulling her up by the shoulders and gently slapping her face- and that helped. Confused, Joana opened her eyes, raised her hand to her burning cheek, and looked at him with a mixture of reproach and surprise. “What...?”

“Not now,” Indy interrupted her hastily. “Don't say anything- please!”

He looked around desperately and searched for a way out. But there was none. Around them was the army of Maya warriors, and on the other side the rock ended in an abyss, under which boiling lava bubbled.

Without pausing and with the naturalness of a man who is conscious of his complete invincibility, Nortén strode through the Maya warriors to José and stopped two steps from him. “Surprised to see me again, old friend?” he asked, smiling.

José stared at him with unconcealed hatred. “What do you want?”

Nortén shook his head mockingly. “I think we need to talk, my friend,” he said. “You doing all of this alone wasn't our agreement- I think.”

José remained silent. Something worked behind his forehead, and it wouldn't have amazed Indy had he given the signal to

attack despite the weapons aimed at him. Norten seemed to have come to the same conclusion, because he shook his head again and made a calming, but also threatening hand movement.

“Whatever you’re planning, don’t do it,” he said. “I know that you can kill me. But then they would,” he pointed at Bentley and the soldiers, “kill you. In that same moment. And then there would be no one left to fulfill this task. You don’t want that, do you?”

“You are an unbeliever,” said José hatefully. “Your presence here offends the gods.”

“That may be,” answered Norten with a shrug. “But I’m here now, aren’t I?” He laughed, stepped past José, and looked at the altar. “Ah, Dr. Jones,” he said with acted surprise. “You’re here as well, how wonderful.”

“How did you get here so fast?” asked Indy.

“If one really wants something, there’s always a way,” replied Norten. “I must compliment you, Dr. Jones. For a man who supposedly can’t fly, you landed the airplane masterfully in that crater. The return trip will be somewhat more complicated, I fear.”

Indy’s gaze wandered between Norten’s and José’s faces, back and forth. His initial relief to see Norten and the soldiers was making way for concern. Within a few moments, he was no longer certain whether he may not have jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire.

Norten took another step back and made a hand movement. “If I could please ask you to get down from there.”

Indy paused. He slowly stood up, pulled Joana up with him, and calculated the distance for which the ground was covered by a carpet of snake bodies. It was a good three meters- a distance that he could have normally leapt over without difficulty. But Joana was still uncertain and swaying on her feet.

“Oh, I forgot,” said Norten, smiling. “Your fear of snakes. Forgive me, Dr. Jones.” And then he did something that completely shocked Indy. Smiling, he stepped closer to the altar, and where he walked, the mass of snakes split and freed a small path.

“Please, Dr. Jones.”

Indy pushed off of the altar, pausing, and Norten stretched his hand out to help Joana down. Without the snakes even touching them, they stepped through the mass of thousands of animals that slid back behind them as silently as they had moved aside. And suddenly, Indy had the feeling that he had made a terrible mistake. Something was different, completely different than he had previously assumed.

Norten waited until Indy and the girl were a couple of steps away, then he stepped back to the altar and studied the arrangement of the amulets that José had placed there. With conscious movements, he pushed them back to their original places until the circle was nearly closed. Then he turned to Joana and stretched his hand out. "You have something that belongs to me, darling," he said.

Joana stared at him and was silent. José said: "She doesn't have it."

"Did she tell you that?" asked Norten, laughing. José nodded, and Norten's smile grew even wider- and a bit more wicked. "I fear this dear child has lied to you, old friend," he said mockingly. "She has had the amulet since you kidnapped her from the ship. I know it." He was silent for a moment in which he continued to stare penetratingly at Joana, then he reached out his hand again, this time with a commanding gesture. "Please!"

Joana still didn't move. For a moment, an expression of anger crossed Norten's face, but it didn't replace the wicked, through and through cynical smile. With almost measured movements, he pulled a polished, two-edged knife out of his belt, and the blade shimmered in the red light. "I can make you give it to me," he said. "But I don't have to. A face like yours would be too much of a shame to disfigure- don't you think so too, Dr. Jones?" With the last words, he turned around and walked towards Indy. The knife blade approached his throat.

"I think that I'll cut your face to shreds, Dr. Jones," continued Norten in a tone as if he were talking about the weather. "It will certainly be interesting to find out how much pain you can take. And how long your little friend can listen. Mostly that."

Indy pulled back as far from the approaching knife blade as he could, but collided with the first Maya warrior after only a

couple of steps. Strong hands grabbed him and held him tight while the tip of Norten's knife again approached his face. Very lightly, without even tearing the skin, it moved over his cheek and towards his left eye.

"Stop!"

Norten really did stop in mid-movement, but he didn't pull the knife back, instead just turned his head to Joana. "Yes?"

"Stop, Uncle Norten," said Joana once more. "I'll... give it to you."

"I knew you were a sensible girl." Norten lowered his knife, turned completely to the girl, and stretched his hand out again. Joana paused for a second, then she lifted her right hand to her head, reached beneath the white bandage on her forehead, and pulled out the tiny amulet to give it to Norten.

"Not bad," said Norten in recognition. "You have quite the imagination, I have to give you that."

He closed his hand around the amulet, looked at José triumphantly for a moment, and then stepped back to the altar without another word. With a quick movement, he placed the last amulet on the empty place to close the circle of small, round, gold dots, and stepped back again.

Indy expected something to happen now. José also looked ready to leap for a moment, but nothing changed. After a second, Norten reached into his pocket, pulled out a pocket watch, and opened the lid. "It isn't time yet," he said. "Just another five minutes, but that should be enough." He turned to José. "I don't hold it against you for trying to fool me," he said. "To be honest- I would have done the same thing if I could have. But as things are, we probably need to rely on each other, don't we?"

"You will never be able to awaken Quetzalcoatl," said José darkly.

Norten shrugged his shoulders. "I wouldn't be so certain of that, my friend," he answered. "And even if so- then we'll do it together." His hand made a wide, fluttering gesture that encompassed the whole cave. "I would say that this situation is a classic stalemate. We can kill each other or finish this great work together. What do you prefer?"

"You can't be serious, Norten," called Indy, horrified.

Indy pointed with a head movement at José. “I would expect nothing else from that fool- but you? You’re a sensible man, Norten! Come to your senses! Can’t you sense what’s in this place?”

Norten turned around. His eyes flared up like a madman’s. “Do I sense it?” he repeated. “What kind of question is that?! There is a source of massive power here, Dr. Jones. And it will be mine! For all my life I have searched for this, and now I have reached my goal.”

“All you’ll find here is death,” murmured Indy seriously. “Or something worse.”

“We’ll see about that,” answered Norten. Still smiling, he reached into his jacket pocket, pulled out a short-muzzled revolver, and shot José in the head at close range.

Joana moved her hand to her mouth in shock, and the army of Maya warriors cried out in a hundred-voiced, horrified scream. But before even one of the warriors could point their weapon at Norten, he moved back with a lightning-fast movement and put both hands up, and something- *uncanny* happened.

Norten said no words, but nevertheless, Indy could feel the silent, hypnotic power that suddenly emanated from him. His eyes seemed to glow as if they were filled with the same smoldering embers as the heart of the volcano beneath them, and something like an invisible aura of crackling power surrounded him. For several seconds, he just stood there, motionless, with arms raised high in a commanding manner, and then Indy could sense as the natives behind him lowered their weapons one after another.

“The traitor is dead!” he cried. “This man lied to you! He wasn’t Mossadera. I’m not either, but I can do what he never could have. I will reawaken your god, and you will be as strong and powerful as you once were.”

And although Indy was certain that most of the Maya behind him hadn’t understood a word, it still had the same effect. One after another sank to their knees until all of them had their heads down meekly.

Norten slowly lowered his arms again. In his eyes still glowed this uncanny, insane fire as he turned to Indy. “And you, Dr.

Jones,” he said, “will experience the unique spectacle of seeing a true god awaken.” He giggled. “Isn’t that every scientist’s dream?”

“You... you’re insane,” whispered Indy, shaking.

Norten continued on as if he hadn’t heard those last words. “I fear that you won’t survive this spectacle, Dr. Jones,” he said. “But for a real man of science like you, that price shouldn’t be too high.”

Again he looked at the pocket watch. Then he lifted his hand and waved to the men on the crater’s edge. The three Maya warriors, Anita, and Bentley and one of his companions walked across the small stone ridge towards them. The two men with the submachine guns remained where they were. The weapons also remained aimed at the Maya army, Indy noticed.

Time seemed to stand still. Norten had mentioned five minutes, and if he had told the truth, then the time must be mostly gone. Only a few seconds, thought Indy- and something *unimaginable* would happen. On the altar now lay all thirteen amulets, and that meant that the correct, the magical amulet in which Quetzalcoatl’s dark power was trapped, must be among them. If no miracle happened, then he wouldn’t be able to stop the awakening of this dark, timeless god.

While his companions slowly approached through the army of kneeling Maya, Norten turned back to the altar and raised his hands once more. His lips began to murmur dark, incomprehensible words in a long-extinct language and his hands simultaneously moved in the same, uncanny, snake-like movements as José’s had before. He stood there like that for several seconds, then he lowered his arms again, stepped back, and went over to the three giant Maya who led Anita between them. At a commanding wave, one of the men handed him a packet wrapped in sailcloth.

And in the same moment that Indy saw it, he realized the full truth. He had seen this packet before, and it hadn’t been that long ago. He knew what it held even before Norten opened it and pulled out the green feather cloak and the matching feathered headdress, slipping it on.

“You?” he whispered, stunned, as Norten turned around again and stepped towards him, smiling.

Norten nodded. “Yes. I admit that you gave me quite a fright when I found you in my cabin.”

“I’m an idiot,” whispered Indy. “It... it wasn’t José’s cabin. It was yours!”

Norten laughed in amusement and remained silent.

“You were the man I saw,” continued Indy. “Not José.” He pointed at the giant Maya triplets. “And you sent those men to kill Joana and me.”

“Not kill,” answered Norten, shaking his head. “They were to get the amulet, that’s all. But that’s the problem with my employees today- they don’t always do what I tell them to.” He sighed mockingly. “It’s hard to find good staff.”

For a moment, he waited in vain for Indy to answer, then he went back to the altar and raised his hands again. Again he began those snake-like, invoking movements, and again his lips whispered those dark words in a language that Indy couldn’t understand, but that still managed to amaze him. And this time, the choir of Maya warriors took the words up and repeated them, louder and louder and falling into an arrhythmic, swelling song that made an incantation out of the words, a key of noise that opened the door into the past, into a dark epoch of sinister gods.

Indy sensed that something would happen almost a second *before* it happened. It wasn’t visible. Something... seemed to move. It was as if the whole world slipped a little bit in the direction in which shadows and nightmares lived. The anxious feeling within Indy became a silent, ringing scream, and he saw out of the corner of his eye as Joana also crumpled next to him, but was incapable of turning his gaze from Norten’s tall figure in front of the black altar.

The ground beneath their feet began to shake. A dull, uncanny rumble rang out from the surface of the lake of lava beneath them, and it grew noticeably warmer. The red light from the depths grew in intensity, and the song of the Maya warriors grew louder, more hectic, more forceful.

The surface of the lava lake began to throw up bubbles. Hissing lines of white fire flashed in the red glow, flames rose,

roaring, nearly to the edge of the stone circle, and suddenly Indy thought he could see something like a massive, winding body, something like a snake of pure embers that floated in the middle of the liquid stone.

Norten's upper body began to wave back and forth. His voice grew louder, the words that he let out were now screams, incomprehensible, throaty sounds that came from no human or human-created language, but were older, much older. Indy saw Bentley and his companion grow more and more nervous, while an enraptured expression appeared on the faces of the three giant Maya. "Now," he whispered so quietly that only Joana could understand. "If we have a chance, then it's now."

The girl nodded nearly imperceptibly, and Indy tensed all of his muscles to spring from the Maya's grip. But he got no chance.

A dull blow shook the cave. The rock plateau swayed, the small strands of lava and stone that held it creaked audibly, stones broke from the ceiling and fell down to sink into the glowing lava- and suddenly something bloomed up, monstrous, glowing white, from the boiling mass of stones!

QUETZALCOATL!

A high scream from hundreds of throats shook the cave as Quetzalcoatl's fiery body rose high out of the lava and the serpent god stared at the tiny people with eyes of embers.

Slowly, with waving movements like the head of a cobra that was studying its prey, the massive head of the fiery god moved back and forth, and Nortén raised his arms with a scream- and pointed at the two soldiers on the crater's edge!

The men realized at the last moment what was going to happen and raised their weapons. The dull rattle of submachine gun fire was lost in the roar of the volcano and the screams of the Maya, but Indy saw the flash of muzzle fire- and then Quetzalcoatl touched the ledge where the soldiers stood, and the stone glowed bright white. The bodies of the men turned to ash even before they could catch on fire, and in nearly the same second, Bentley and the third soldier also died, hit by dozens of tiny blow darts that the Maya warriors shot at them. Everything went so fast that Indy didn't have time to be scared.

Norten turned around, looked dismissively for a moment at the two motionless bodies that lay near José, and then turned back to the altar. The glowing, flaming body of the Maya god slid back, vanished completely into the lava for a moment, and straightened up again, an uncanny something of pure energy, radiating a murderous heat and an even more murderous rage. The gaze of his small, evil eyes glanced over the figure in the green feather cloak, slid over the crowd of kneeling Maya, and then went to the altar. Even Nortén took a step back as the white-hot thing sank down and Quetzalcoatl's head touched the first of the thirteen amulets.

The tiny amulet glowed white for a second, then turned to cinders.

Norten's hands again began the circular, snake-like movements, and Quetzalcoatl's head slid on, touched the second pendant, and destroyed it as well, then the third, fourth, fifth. One after another, the small bits of metal glowed and turned to ash until only one was left- the amulet that Joana had been carrying.

And Indy wasn't the least bit surprised. Deep inside, he had sensed it, back in Nortén's hacienda, when that terrible creature had been near him. He had suspected that *he* was carrying the right pendant; the one he had received from Swanson in the hour of his death.

And then Quetzalcoatl's fiery head touched the amulet- and destroyed it.

Norten froze in mid-movement. His eyes bugged out as he lost his composure, and his face lost every bit of color. The song of the Maya also ended abruptly, and the three warriors who had held Anita went down as if punched.

"No!" stammered Nortén. "That... that cannot be."

The hellish snake straightened up again with a monstrous roar so that its head hit the ceiling and part of it turned into white embers that dripped to the ground and hit several of the warriors. The invoking song of the men had become a choir of terrified voices as Quetzalcoatl threw out one more loud, angry roar and spread fire and death over the assembled crowd.

"No!" screamed Nortén over and over. "No! No!"

Chaos broke out on the stone circle. Suddenly, the men leapt up and ran around blindly, in a panic, Norton constantly screamed Quetzalcoatl's name and stretched out his arms to the monster as if he could stop it through the mere strength of his desperation. Determined, Indy grabbed Joana with his left hand and Anita with his right hand and just ran. The Maya who had held them before was so confused that he didn't even try to stop them.

The cave shook. Flames taller than houses flew from the throat of the volcano, and the ground was so hot that Indy cried out in pain. Quetzalcoatl raged like a demon unleashed from hell, and more and more rocks and liquid stones fell from the ceiling and onto the Maya warriors like deadly projectiles or splashed into the lava. The whole mountain seemed to shake. A deep, grinding rumble rang through the ground, and suddenly the back wall of the rock dome split completely and spewed out a stream of white, boiling stone that missed the rock plateau by only a meter.

The lava bridge began to break apart behind them as they rushed to the crater's edge. Indy watched in complete horror as the rock beneath their feet shattered, as thin, red streaks of liquified stone appeared like bloody wounds on the surface of the rock, and he felt as the small bridge slowly, but mercilessly began to sink beneath them. They were still three meters away from the crater's edge, then two- and then the rock broke! Indy shoved Anita and Joana so that they stumbled the last bit to the safety of the crater's edge, threw himself forward with desperate strength, and sensed as he leapt that he wouldn't make it. His hands slid over the glass-smooth rock, slipped off- and clung tight to something.

With a jerk that seemed to tear his spine in half, he came to a stop, searched with desperately stumbling feet for an uneven patch in the wall where he could find some hold, and felt himself start to slip again. Behind him raged Quetzalcoatl, spewing death and fire over the men who had gathered to awaken him, and Norton still cried out with all of his strength. His feather cloak and his headdress were both on fire, and his voice no longer sounded human. But it wasn't Quetzalcoatl whose fiery embers singed him. It was the snakes that slithered around the altar in

hundreds and thousands. As if at a silent command, they slithered towards Norton, wound up his legs, slithered over his arms and his shoulders and his face, and where they touched his skin, it flared up like dry wood.

Again the whole mountain shook as if under a blow, and as Indy looked down, he saw that the surface of the lava lake had risen. Spewing flames and sparks and heat, the bubbling lava rose up, and the heat became unbearable. The rock he clung to seemed to glow. Indy smelled his own smoldering hair and watched in terror as gray smoke curled up beneath his fingertips. His strength failed. He let go.

And in the same moment that he started to fall, a small, but incredibly strong hand grabbed his wrist and held him tight.

Indy glanced up and looked into an old face covered in deep wrinkles and creases. Effortlessly, like a grown-up lifting a child into the air by the arm, the old Maya pulled him up to the crater's edge and let go of his arm. Indy shook, sank down against the wall in exhaustion, and flinched back with a cry, because the stone here was also glowing hot.

Stunned, he stared at the old Indian, searched in vain for words, and then looked back into the cave. On the stone circle over the crater, there was no one left alive. The rocks glowed red and began to melt, and where the altar had been pulsed a ball of intolerably bright white light like a giant, incredibly evil heart. Out of the crack in the opposite wall flowed more lava and filled the lake up, the surface of which rose faster and faster, and the air was so hot that Indy felt as if he were breathing in flames.

"Who...?" he began, but the old man lifted his hand and cut off his words.

"You must go, white man. Quickly. I can't protect you much longer."

"Mossadera?" Indy whispered. "You're...?"

The old man smiled. "Go," he said. "Take the white girl and go while you still can."

And as if to underline his words, the cave shook beneath another massive tremor, and this time a large part of the roof broke and dragged down with it what remained of the altar platform.

Indy turned around, grabbed Joana's hand, and ran. Closely followed by Anita and the old man, they rushed back up the staircase, and behind them, boiling, hissing stone rose into the cave, snaking through the passages and the temple and the steps of the staircase nearly faster than they could run from it. It was so hot that the stones around them let off steam and melted like wax in the sun, but something protected them. Some power, just as old and perhaps even stronger than Quetzalcoatl's, let them live and gave them strength to keep going, although Indy had the feeling after only a few moments that he would simply collapse in the next moment. Engulfed in a wave of burning air, they stumbled out of the entrance to the pyramid.

Indy moved to turn back in the direction from which they had come, but the old man pointed to the right, and he followed the gesture without thinking about it for a second. Behind him, the whole massive building started to collapse. Jagged cracks like frozen, glowing red lightning split the surface, and glowing lava began to drip from its flank. Even the large cave that stretched above them bobbed, and even here stones, rubble, and embers rained down, but they were untouched, as if by a miracle. They crossed the cave, followed by cracks in the ground where embers reached for them like liquid white snakes, ducked beneath a bombardment of glowing rocks, and were tormented by the unabating rumbling and crashing of the mountain starting to break down around them. It was a race against death, and it wasn't one that they won on their own, but because of the old man, who protected them with his incomprehensible power.

Sometime, after several hours, as it seemed to Indy, they tumbled, gasping, outside, and found themselves standing on the shore of the crater lake again. The airplane rocked before them on the waves that the bubbling water created. Massive gas bubbles rose out of the bottom of the crater and burst, and gray smoke hung over the water.

Indy prepared to rush on, but as his feet touched the water, he cried out in pain and flinched back. The lake was boiling. White steam rose from the waves, and here and there it glowed red in the depths.

Zigzagging, they ran along the shore to the airplane and reached it, still unharmed, as if by a miracle. Joana climbed hastily up to the open door of the Cessna, but Indy stopped and turned around.

Anita and the old man stood behind him. Anita looked exhausted and was hurt, but Indy couldn't see the slightest fear on her face, and although the thought seemed ridiculous to him, he knew that nothing would happen to her; just as little as to this old man, who was older, much, much older than he had previously thought.

He prepared to turn back around and pull himself up into the airplane, but he sensed that he still had something to do. He turned around again, stepped towards the old man, and looked at him.

"You can come with us," he said against his better judgment. "The airplane is big enough."

Mossadera shook his head with a gentle smile. "Nothing will happen to us," he said. "Don't worry about us, white man. Get the girl to safety." He lifted his hand.

Indy stared at his small, creased fingers for a moment, then he placed his hand in his jacket pocket and pulled out what was inside. For a moment, he wondered how he hadn't realized this; at least aboard the ship. But perhaps it needed to happen like this. Perhaps something had made sure that he didn't notice so that things could take their course.

He slowly pulled his hand out again, studied the tiny, inconspicuous chain for a moment, of which every single link took the form of a tiny snake biting its own tail, and finally dropped it into the old man's palm.

"Do you regret it?" asked Mossadera.

Indy thought over that question for a moment, then shook his head. "No," he said honestly. "There are things that should remain forgotten."

The old Maya sorcerer smiled in a difficult to interpret way and looked at the chain in his hand, the magical object into which he had placed Quetzalcoatl's magic hundreds of years ago. And as he did that, it began to change. Every chain seemed to run together, form into a single solid, shimmering serpent body, its

head crowned by two tiny wings. A second later, it vanished, and the old man's hands were empty.

“Go,” said Mossadera. “Take my blessing and that of my daughter and go. And never forget your own words, white man: there are secrets that should remain undiscovered.”

Indy slowly turned around and went to the waiting airplane. Joana had already started the engine and waited impatiently for him to climb into the cabin, and the lake started to shake and bubble even more. For a second, he wondered whether she could still make it, but in nearly the same moment, he knew what the answer would be. And without the slightest haste, he climbed on board of the airplane and looked at the old Maya and his daughter until Joana turned the plane and the two shapes vanished into the gray haze over the lake.

Ten minutes later, the Cessna shot out of the massive cloud of smoke rising out of the supposedly extinct volcano, its motor howling, and only a moment later, the mountain exploded in a brilliant cloud of fire, the thunder of which must have been heard hundreds of miles away. Indy felt a slight regret at the thought that now all of the magic of these ancient people who had lived hundreds of years ago had been destroyed, never to be recovered. But he simultaneously thought of what he had said himself and that Mossadera had repeated: That there were secrets that should remain undiscovered.

For all time.

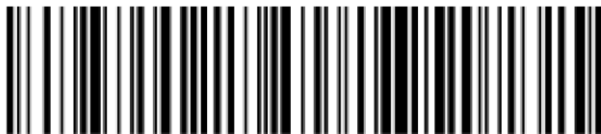
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