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Kings of the Sun

By Elliott Arnold

unique in all history, the Mayans.
Greece and Rome had become
ancient legends in ancient books,
and the European civilizations
had entered into the age of the barbarians.
But in the tropical jungles
of Central America,
a civilization had burst into full flower.
Without metals, without horses,
without wheels,
these incredible people
built roads, pyramids,
temples worthy of ancient Egypt.
They charted the heavens,
devised a higher system
of mathematics than the Romans,
and created a calendar as accurate
as the one we use today.
But despite the maturity
of their art and their science,
in the most important part of their lives,
the worship of their gods,
they remained primitive.
Balam, the jaguar, eight times king!
Balam, the prince!
NARRA TOR. To the Mayans, the gods were
demanding gods, fierce and greedy,
granting nothing except for a price,
and that price was blood.
In their profound desire
to win favor from the deities,
the Mayans made human sacrifice
the keystone of their religion.
To die as a bearer
of a message to the gods
was the most exalted honor
a man could experience,
for when he was selected to be sacrificed,
in that moment, he himself became a god.
He was worshiped as a god,
granted any wish that came into his heart,
until the moment he was put to death.
NARRA TOR. For centuries, in small,
scattered kingdoms,

these people lived in peace
with themselves and their gods.
But then came conquerors from the West,
with metal swords,
which made them invincible
against the wooden weapons
of the Mayans.
One by one,
they swallowed up the little kingdoms,
until the last, the final stronghold,
Chichn Itz was theirs.
And their leader, Hunac Kell,
already as cruel as any god,
now felt himself as powerful as one.
I have served your father,
and I have loved you as a son.
Now I shall serve you
and love you as my king.
Balam ! Nine times king!
Balam, the jaguar, nine times king!
There is still time to let Hunac Kell
know that the Mayans are men.
No!
You must flee and preserve your life.
And become a coward before Hunac Kell?
You no longer belong to yourself, Balam.
You belong to your people.
-And how do I serve them? By deserting?
-Dead, you desert your people.
There's a time for fighting
and a time to make ready to fight.
He speaks wisely.
Let us lick our wounds, and then
make the invader choke on his sword.
There is no place to run.
Hunac Kell and his men
will scour the land.
If we are going to die, let us die here.
I've said your life is not yours to lose.
You're a king.
Act like a king!
We'll disperse,
join forces when we're strong again.
Disperse?

No, that's the one thing we must never do.
My father once told me
of an ancient legend,
of the time of the great earthquakes
when the land shook like the sea,
and men took to boats
and crossed the waters to the North.
Cross the waters?
We'd slide off the world.
The legend has no truth.
There's no record of it on any stele.
My father told it to me, Priest.
Ah Haleb.
There is a fishing village on the coast
not 10 days journey from here.
We will leave from there.
Men do not vanish into air.
There is a hidden passage.
Find it, and find the body of the king
and of his son as well.
Until I know that not one drop
of that blood remains alive,
I am not King of Chichn Itz.
Is your village near?
This is your king, Balam.
Answer.
It's just beyond that point.
We'll take to the boats
and cross the great sea.
But you will all die.
The legend says nothing
about boats coming back.
The legend does say that land was found.
Who brought back the word?
But why do your soldiers take our fish?
The catch will be useful to us
on the voyage.
-How many boats do you have?
-What you see there.
We will need all of them.
-The king has means of payment?
-No. But it will please the gods.
And be very displeasing
to the boat owners.

Seize this man who puts men before gods.

Wait!

You do acknowledge that I am your king?

Kings have always seemed far away.

Small in the distance like wars.

And defeated kings even smaller.

Listen, old man, tell your people

to fill every boat with supplies

and anything else that will be useful to us

in the new land.

-But how will we live after you go?

-Your people are coming with me.

To cross the water to their death?

If crossing the waters frightens you,

then you know little of Hunac Kell.

Every soldier that you see here

was once a hundred,

and their women are now slaves.

To my people, slavery may sound better

than the unknown.

I have ordered you and your people

to come with me.

Now tell them !

In spite of your youth,

you have the habit of command,

but habit is not always enough.

You dare to disobey?

This is Balam, king and son of kings

to the ninth generation.

And a stranger here.

My people respect the voice they know.

-Then give them the word.

-If I refuse?

-Ordinarily, I kill only as a duty.

-Leave him !

-Who is this girl?

-My daughter, Ixchel.

Instruct your father,

he does not argue with the king.

And has the king the right to order

our people to their death?

Until today this was a place of peace.

I will not surrender to Hunac Kell.

We must go to a new land

and grow strong and then come back.
Men alone cannot build a new race
in a new land.
That is why I need your people,
your women and your children.
Now tell them to get into the boats.
You are a new king, Balam,
young and brave and untried.
If my people go with you,
they will have many doubts
and great fears.
You should have someone at your side
whom they know and love.
I do not wear my father's crown
to share it with you.
Not with me, Balam.
With your queen, my daughter, Ixchel.
When the time comes,
I shall choose my own queen.
To my people, I am as royal as you,
so is my daughter.
Priests and soldiers in a womanless land.
Are you destined
to be king of a dying race, Balam?
(CONCH SHELL SOUNDING)
Hunac Kell. Less than a league away.
Hunac Kell is not a league away.
You have not felt his wrath, we have.
He is completely without mercy.
His strength is a sword of metal,
and we are powerless against it.
So you have no choice.
If we are all to survive,
you must come with me at once.
So I order you, gather your belongings
and go to the boats.
-Obey your king!
-They await my word.
-Then give it.
-After you have given me yours.
Will your greed
settle for nothing less, old man?
-Nothing less.
-We could take all of his people by force.

And be another Hunac Kell?

Very well.

If I live, I will marry her in the new land.

-The king vows this?

-By the gods, I swear it.

Obey the king!

Why did you do that?

Do you think I have no pride?

When you share his throne,

you will have no need to speak of pride.

Hurry! Load as fast as you can!

BALAM:

-Leave him ! Leave him !

-Please!

Away!

No! No!

The sea is not big enough

to keep us apart, Balam.

Wherever you go, I will find you!

Ixchel, I've tried so many times to tell you,

I do grieve with you

for the death of your father.

Yet there was a time

when you wanted it yourself.

The enemy killed your father, Ixchel,

not the king.

And who brought the enemy upon us?

When a man must think of many,

it's not easy to think of one.

Oh, God of Waters, the winds forsake us,

our men weaken and die.

I plead with you, do not abandon us.

We've lost another boat.

The god of the waters has abandoned us.

Turn back before it's too late.

You know the danger that lies behind.

There cannot be greater danger ahead.

It is not our lives Hunac Kell wants,

it's yours, Balam.

Fear presses down upon you, Priest.

Why not use your power? Pray for wind!

Balam, listen to me,

as you'd have listened to your father.

I now believe this voyage was doomed
from the moment
we did not make sacrifice.
There are things
that belong to the gods, Balam.
And things that belong to man.
In the name of all that we hold sacred,
give the word to turn back or I will.
-Do so and it will be your last.
-I, too, say we should go back.

BALAM:

An honorable death.
Once we both wanted that.
Must we all die for you, Balam?
Women and children, too?
(ALL SHOUTING)
There is new land beneath our feet
and a new life lies before us.
Let us then begin
with new feelings in our hearts,
old fears and old memories
to be forgotten.
From this time on,
it shall be as though we are reborn.
Before we left the old land, I made a vow,
that if we arrived here safely,
I would make Ixchel my queen.
Now, before all of you, I keep my word.
Priest, as the first act in this new land,
prepare to perform this marriage
as soon as possible.
There will be no need.
You were forced to take that vow.
Nonetheless it is sacred.
And that vow was made to my father.
And to these people
who bore witness to it.
It was made to everyone but me.
But no longer need you feel
the prisoner of a promise.
My father is dead,
and I release you from that vow.
There is much to be done.

We must clear the land,
build a temple to our gods
and houses for ourselves.
Our task will be hard.
But with faith, we shall endure.
Oh, God, lord of hills and valleys,
be patient with us
for we are about to destroy your beauty.
Suffer it, we pray you,
so that we may dwell here
and obtain our daily bread,
for in us there is a great hunger.
Send us the many blessings of thy bounty,
the life-giving sun,
the blessed rain, the fertility of the soil.
We pray you to suffer
no animal to attack us,
nor enemy to kill us.
It is a sense I have.
Because we saw one canoe
does not mean invaders have come.
The canoe is like none we've ever seen.
Where there is one there could be many.
As your chief,
I say strange boats carry strange people.
If the council agrees,
I will search for these strangers.
If I find them, I will bring back one.
Isatai, you will come with me.
One may have to watch,
the other must return
with word to the council.
We have been looking for these strangers
for more than five times
this number of days.
-And we'll look more.
-Maybe there are no strangers.
Maybe there was nothing more
than a big canoe.
Then we'll find that out.
-There is no need for you to do this.
-My place is with my people.
Now they're Balam's people.
You should be their queen.

lxchel, your father was wiser than that.
A king is a lonely man,
perhaps the loneliest man on earth.
Your father understood that.
He knew that for Balam to rule wisely
he needed someone at his side.
Someone he could confide in,
trust and love.
Both of you are lonely.
If he is lonely,
why doesn't he tell me himself?
How much longer
must you keep our farmers piling dirt
when they should be planting corn?
Until the temple is completed,
I cannot determine the day
the gods will favor our planting.
And there's been no rain.
Perhaps it never rains here.
We will not have to wait for rain.
Come with me.
lxchel works harder than any.
I told her she belongs with you.
It is no concern of yours, Priest.
My concern is with everyone here,
beginning with the king.
Before everyone I offered her marriage
and before everyone she made...
Because of a vow.
She's a woman. Go to her again.
-I am a king, I cannot plead.
-She will listen.
To degrade me again?
I have in mind to build a wall of stone here
so that the water will be held back.
And then to dig ditches
from here to the fields.
And then
we'll never have to depend upon rain.

BALAM:

This, I think, would be the place to start.
It may be done, Balam,
but first you must sacrifice.

This stream will become
the lifeblood of our village.
The God of Waters must be given a life
in honest exchange.
All work on the pyramid must,
for the moment, stop
until we have built this wall of stone
and prepared the fields for planting.
That is my command.
Tell your people that Black Eagle
has taken your chief,
and my warriors
will destroy the rest of you.
Let him live.
We have our offering to the God of Waters.
(CONCH SHELL SOUNDING)
(CONCH SHELL SOUNDING)
(CONCH SHELL SOUNDING)
(CONCH SHELL SOUNDING)
The barbarian has a killing wound
but he seems too strong to die.
I have felt that strength.
But how do we know the offering
of a barbarian will please the gods?
We are strangers here, he is of this land.
No one could better serve our need.
And we must see to it
that he is made well.
Where there's one there must be others,
perhaps thousands
and every one of them
looking for their chief.
Post guards around the village
and send out more searchers.
It will be done.
You have done enough for today.
You may go.
Ixchel.
There is...
There is something
I have wanted to tell you.
I have wanted to tell you
that I know how hard you work.
All of your people work very hard

and I am grateful.
I will tell them.
-He will let no one near him.
-It's like trying to help a wild animal.
Go back to him and heal his wounds.
A life offered to the gods
must be a whole one.
He frightens me.
I will try.
Say nothing of the sacrifice.
He will be informed at the appointed time
and in the appointed way.
He's like a wild animal
because he's being treated like one.
Remember, he tried to kill the king.
And remember that your high priest
has chosen him for sacrifice
and he should be properly honored.
Rest easy, Balam.
If the barbarians are out there,
the searchers will find them.
I only remember how Black Eagle
appeared like a spirit, from nowhere.
When I am asleep,
my eyes cannot see you.
During the long time of darkness
it seemed that I had died.
I hate death.
I remembered the living.
I was angry, it was taken from me.
Then I saw a woman.
I reached out and touched her.
And then I knew I was alive.
But why?
Why am I alive?
Why are you healing me?
Why?
Please sleep now.
Now I will sleep.
Black Eagle was right.
They are people
such as we have never seen before.
They live in a big place by the sea.
Their dwellings

are made of wood and stone
and are fastened to the ground.
They have built a tall mound of earth.
That mound will guide us
to where we will avenge our chief.
-How is Black Eagle?
-With me, as violent as ever.
Only lxchel can touch him.
You look tired, lxchel.
-Because of you I understand he will live.
-I will.
I will not disappoint you.
And I promise you
a much better fight than the last.
You have skill I have not known.
-Where do you come from?
-From across the great sea.
-What do you want on my land?
-To live here.
This land belongs to my people.
There have been many intruders before
and we have always driven them away.
But if your warriors
have some of your skill,
then this will be the greatest battle of all.
Balam,
practice with your sword, you will need it.
Balam.
Your woman is beauty.
Why do you call me his woman?
Because he is chief
and you are
the most beautiful woman here.
You haven't seen many of the others.
I don't have to see.
I know.
You must lie down now.
What do you give me now?
It is from our land. It will make you well.
Balam is a good fighter
but he is a fool.
Why do you say that?
If you are not his woman,
then he is a fool.

And it would be good to fight for that, too.
I am a man of faith, Priest,
but you must know
I have no love for human sacrifice.
I questioned it in our land
and I question it even more here.
Why must this man
be put to death, Priest?
A sacrifice to the gods
is not a personal matter.
It's a holy act for the good of our people.
Your feelings are of no importance.
As king you will have to do many things
you may not like.
When you do them for your people,
without hesitation,
then you will be truly king.
You will instruct him to put these on.
He will ask why.
As soon as he's properly attired,
we will answer.

BLACK EAGLE:

Such a long time you were gone.
-For you.
-For me? Why?
It came with us across the water.
It has great beauty.
Our people can do many things.
Your people.
Can your people jump on a buffalo
and ride it?
-What is a buffalo?
-It is a bull as tall as this house,
its horns long as my arms,
when it runs the earth shakes.
And our babies
lead them around by their noses.
How can your babies reach so high?
You haven't seen our babies.
Why am I being given this?
-To honor you.
-Honor?
A ceremony?

I know.
Your king has decided
to let me return to my people.
It is true.
Balam is not only brave, but wise, too.
I will carry back good words.
And when I leave,
I want you to come with me.
No one has ever been
as gentle with me as you, Ixchel.
And I have come to love you.
I want you for my wife.
And someday
we will watch our babies
lead buffalo around by their noses.
Ixchel.
-Speak, Priest.
-Yes.
Tell me of the ceremony.
Our religion teaches
that we may send messengers to our gods
to offer our prayers, our hopes,
to ask for good things for our people.
Black Eagle, you have been chosen
to bear our words.
The man thus chosen to look upon
our gods is honored before all other men.
He becomes himself a god.
Our people already look on you
as more than human.
They offer prayers in your name.
-Prayers?
-You'll be taken to the stone of sacrifice,
and thereafter you will live with the gods
for all eternity.
You knew.
And Ixchel, she knew, too.
The time for the sacrifice
has been set for tomorrow.
Until then you may have anything
in our power to give.
A child born to you now
would have the qualities of a god.
It would grace our people.

Any of our maidens would be blessed
if you summoned her to be your bride.
lxchel.
Send me lxchel.
It is time to prepare
to unite Black Eagle with lxchel.
I will not permit it.
Your people trust you, Balam.
Do not betray them.
As your king,
I am required to inform you that...
That Black Eagle has summoned you.
Yes, I know.
You must be very honored.
Deeply honored.
Then go.
He might've said one word.
One single word.
He wished Black Eagle
had chosen another.
-She went without question, Priest.
-What could she question?
She might have said
that she'd wished she'd not been so...
So honored.
You did not try to stop her?
No.
You are a king, Balam.
The last time you came here
you brought me a cape of many feathers.
I held you in my arms
and asked you to be my wife.
Now you come here as my bride
but not the way I asked.
My bride,
until tomorrow,
when your priests will come to kill me.
Honor?
Slaughtered.
-Slaughtered for superstition.
-No.
But father a god for you first,
then make your crops grow with my blood
and be honored.

It is being honored. It's our religion.
It is not the dying,
it is the manner of it.
You robbed me of a warrior's death.
You brought me back to life.
You allowed me to believe
I was returning to my people.
You let me love you.
Father a god!
But I don't want a son who is a god.
I only want a son
who will be brave as a child
leading buffalo around by the nose.
Then why did you ask for me?
I wanted you to feel my hate,
as I once wanted you to feel my love.
You sent her away.
I want nothing
from any of you.
-The time has come.

-AH ZOK:

Soon you will be a Mayan god.
It is fitting that you dress as one.
If the spirits in your heavens
can change me into a god,
they can change my clothes as well.
You will carry this petition
in the name of our king and of our people.
We ask only peace
and the fruits of our labor,
the blessings of the sun and the rain
and of the richness of the earth.
Blessings of the sun and the rain.
Richness of the earth.
You are fools.
Look around you, Balam.
The grass has always grown for us
and the trees spread their branches,
the rivers have flowed
and my people
have always enjoyed these blessings.
My people are the fiercest on earth.
Our land is red

with the blood of our enemies.
But never,
never have we shed one drop of blood
in sacrifice.
And never have we groveled in fear.
And I tell you this, Balam.
Never, so long as I breathe
one breath of life,
will I ever submit to this.
You will carry our message.
But not to our gods, to your people.
We asked for peace. We still ask for it.
Peace?
That choice will have to lie
with my people.
Go to them and carry my words.
I give you your freedom.
Take it.
Balam, I have tried to make you know.
You cannot bring this new life
to our people
without first giving a life.
For a thousand years
we've been bound by this law.
The gods cannot be cheated.
(CONCH SHELL SOUNDING)

AH HALEB:

Soldiers to your posts.
Women to your houses.
-I have set him free.
-Release him.
When he rejoins his people,
their strength will be doubled.
The king has set him free. Open the gates.
There was something in what he said
that made me trust him.
Yet the man
who was closest to me on earth is dead,
and the man
who swore to destroy us lives.
(SHOUTING AND CHEERING)
For the first time in many days
my eyes are happy.

Why did they let you go?
They let me go
because their chief wants peace.
They must be cowards! They fear us!
No, they are no cowards.
They fear no one but their gods.
You have chosen me to be your chief,
not to command but to guide you.
Now, these are my words.
There have been other intruders
in our land,
but never people such as these.
They have wisdom
that is different from ours.
They have skills, knowledge.
I am thinking
we can learn from these people,
if we live at their side in peace.
We have never lived
at the side of any intruder.
-I speak for war.

-ALL:

War! War! War! War! War!
As long as I'm your chief
you will listen to my words.
When those words
do not reach your hearts,
then it is your right to look among you,
and choose a new chief.
Go back to your house.
They've chosen war.
Load.
Wait.
Balam.
(CHEERING)
My people call themselves,
'Wanderers on the Earth,'
but where this large fire burns,
it means that Black Eagle is there,
and the wanderers have come to rest.
And where did they get the wood
for this fire?
Look at our stockade.

We needed firewood and we took it.
We always take what we need.
If we are to live together in peace,
there must be no wall between us.
Balam, I will try
to make my people understand
that they must change some of their ways
and learn some of yours.
And we have much to learn from you.
The last time I saw your village,
I was a prisoner.
Now I would like to see it with new eyes.
This is the writing I spoke of.
What is he putting down now?
He is telling how we journeyed
across the waters to a new land,
and of the new people we have met.
-About me?
-Yes.
Which one is me?
The crops, they grow in this new land.

MAN:

See that they do no damage.
It seems the gods received your message,
even though
Black Eagle never delivered it.
The crops grow faster in this new land
than they did at home.
And without human blood
to nourish them.
Have you forgotten so soon about Ah Min?
That he gave his life for this?
I have not forgotten Ah Min.
But we made this field ready,
we planted the seed,
and we brought the water.
This crop grew without sacrifice.
How can you make
Ah Min's death seem so worthless?
He loved you.
And I loved him.
And I wish he were here now to see this.
You see how the king denies our religion.

If he is not stopped,
he will bring destruction on all of us.
What strange skins.
-Where did they come from?
-We hunted them.
We've never seen such animals.
-Aren't they beautiful?
-If you like them.
If you had hunted these animals yourself,
you'd have a higher opinion of them.
I look upon you as one of us,
as one of my people.
Remember all those times in my hut
when we were alone,
I asked you to be my woman
and bear my sons.
But you didn't answer me.
Your lips are not sealed anymore, Ixchel.
Say now you will be my bride.
Go to him ! Be his woman! Bear his sons!
Before when he summoned you,
you went to him willingly.
And now I know
it was not for the first time.
Balam, wait.
Balam !
(ALL GASPLING)
No!
Our people cannot live together.
There is a wall between us.
Being rooted like trees
never was meant for us.
I take my people to where we belong,
where there is no roof but the sky,
where there are no walls
to the edges of the earth.
I take them to where birds sing for us,
and where we live free like the deer.
I would go with you.
I'd never leave your side except...
Balam.
I'm proud that you would fight for me
and grateful.
But I know what I felt

when I thought he was going to die.
After his words to you
he should have died.
But his words were the first words
he ever used to tell me that he loved me.
(CONCH SHELL SOUNDING)
(CONCH SHELL SOUNDING)

AH HALEB:

Balam's old enemy with metal swords
has found him.
They will destroy Balam.
-Sound the battle drums.

-ISATAI:

Until now, so did I.
Our king defies the gods
and we are powerless against him.
He is at the root of all our troubles.
But if Balam were dead, you could lead us,
and we could still make our peace
with Hunac Kell.
Balam, if you surrender,
I will spare your people!
Your life, Balam,
for the lives of your people!
If you do not surrender,
every man, woman and child will perish!
(SOLDIERS SHOUTING)

BALAM:

PLTZ:

Stand!
Balam !
Not even you can heal this.
Speak to your people, Balam.

BALAM:

The way to our homeland lies open.
But now, I look upon what we have here.
The grass grows,
the trees spread their branches,
and the rivers flow.

And we have not spilled one drop of blood
in sacrifice to the gods.
Can it not be that the gods are satisfied
with the sacrifices that each of us
must make in his day-to-day life,
that the test of a people is in the living,
not the dying,
and living in dignity
and decency and respect
is all that the gods require?
As for me, I remain here,
but in Black Eagle's way,
I give you your choice.
You may stay or you may go.
But if you choose to stay,
it will be without this.

ALL:

You never taught me to write,
and I never taught you to hunt.
And yet there are many things
we have learned from each other.
Don't be a fool the rest of your life, Balam.
Ixchel is your woman.
She has always been.
And now, more so than ever.