

# **Premonitions**

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Lara's eyes shot open and panic rushed through her body. She began to kick furiously, trying to prevent her body from shutting down. Her lungs began to fill with water as she fought against her hang glider to get out. All of a sudden, she remembered Winston's letter. He had said that he had left something for her in her boot. She quickly grabbed at the bottom of the sole, and ripped open the compartment. As she reached inside, Lara realized this could be the end. Such a silly way to go, especially considering everything she had been through.

Her hand grasped a hold of something and she pulled it out. Lara had to stop herself from crying out when she saw what it was – an aqua-lung. She thrust it into her mouth and sucked in a mouthful of air. Her lungs burned. Lara began to pull the glider away from her body and kicked upwards. Several minutes later her head broke through the surface. She ripped the aqua-lung from her mouth and gasped in the clean fresh air. Once her heart stopped racing, Lara pulled the glider underneath her, and grasped a hold of the metal bar. She lay exhausted in the water as the ocean currents carried her body along. Her eyes slowly closed as she fell into a deep sleep.

Rays from the sun shone down onto Lara's body and the heat awoke her. She blinked several times, trying to remember where she was. Bright, blue water completely surrounded her, with nothing else in sight. She pulled as much of the hang glider out of the water as she could. She desperately needed a raft, and this was all that she had to work with. Lara grabbed the knife strapped to her right calf and cut the glider in half, removing the damaged wing. She flipped the good wing over, pleased that it was curved perfectly for her raft. She climbed into it slowly, pulling the other wing on with her. Luckily for her, the metal bar helped to keep the wing from collapsing inwards. Lara laid down to rest, and once again began to doze.

A little while later Lara awoke once more from the hot sun which was beginning to slowly burn her body. Her black catsuit was directly attracting the sun. She unzipped the suit and pulled it off. Underneath she wore khakis shorts and a white crop top. The damaged wing was completely dry now, and Lara took out her knife and began to cut it into smaller pieces. As she unfolded another part of it, she was surprised to find her shades tangled in the material. She placed them in the raft along with pieces of the wing in a small pile. She took off her backpack, and for some reason couldn't remember what she had in it. The sun was extremely hot and she was feeling quite lightheaded. She opened her bag and began to remove its contents. The first thing she took out was her water bottle.

She hadn't noticed her dry throat until then. She was parched! Unfortunately the bottle was only about half full. She quickly unscrewed the cap and tilted her head back. Her mouth burned as the water rushed in her arid mouth. She drank a few more mouthfuls and replaced the cap. She couldn't drink all of it, because it was all she had. Too bad she was lost in the middle of the ocean and not a lake. It was hard to look at the water knowing she couldn't drink any of it.

Just then, Lara thought of something. Maybe she could desalinate it? It was hard to say if it would work or not, but she had to try. Water was essential at this point for survival. She grabbed a piece of material from the pile and cut some of the poles out of the stitching. Then, she cut another piece into thin strips and began to build a small pyramid out of the material. All she had to do now was wait for the sun to do its work. She positioned the water bottle and returned to her backpack. The next item she retrieved was a piece of paper. Most of the ink was smeared, but she could still make out the words. A smile lit up her face as she re-read it. Because of Winston, she was still alive. If he hadn't of put the aqua-lung in her boot she would be dead for sure. Lara

carefully folded the letter and placed it back inside her bag with the used aqua-lung. She was keeping them for sure.

Lara pulled out her magnums, grappling hook launcher, and Heckler & Koch. Each gun didn't have many shots left in them, but she wasn't about to toss them away. She put them in a corner of the raft along with her catsuit. Next, grinning, she removed a pack of flares. If she survived this, she would have to thank Zip. Suddenly, her face fell into a frown. What had happened to Zip? When Lara escaped she didn't see the chopper anywhere. She closed her eyes and shook her head. She hoped he had gotten away in time. She picked up the sunglasses and fiddled with the mic. Nothing. She was probably too far from him anyway to pick up any signal. The last two items in her bag were packages of food that she had taken from the compound. There wasn't a lot, but she had enough to last her a couple days if she was careful with it. It wasn't the food that she was worrying about, though. If she didn't have anything to drink, she would be lucky if she lasted even a couple of days. She turned around to check on the desalination process. Already it was starting to fill with water droplets. Lara smiled as a drop fell into the bottle. Within a couple hours her bottle would probably be full again.

Lara's body was starting to bake from the sun. There had to be something she could make, some sort of a shelter. The only other material she had though, was the few pieces that were left from the damaged wing. After several minutes, Lara had successfully cut part of the wing into a square piece. Using small poles from the stitching, she was able to create a small canopy for herself. It really only covered a portion of her body, but it was better than nothing. Pleased with her work, Lara decided to rest for a bit. Moments later her eyes shut once again.

It was pitch black when Lara awoke. She fumbled around, trying to find something to hold onto. She had been asleep for several hours and hadn't prepared for the night. After getting her bearings in the raft, she found the pack of flares. She took one out and lit it. Instantly, a brilliant flame came to life. Its brightness was comforting, since she was beginning to feel very alone. She put her backpack on, with the pack of flares inside. She didn't want to risk losing them. Next, she picked up one of her magnums and put it in her bag. Just as she was reaching for the other gun, something hard hit her from behind. Shooting forward, she landed roughly on her face. A huge wave crashed overboard, soaking her entirely and flooding the raft. Quickly, she pushed herself up into a crouch and held onto the large metal bar as she rode over each wave. After what seemed like an eternity, the ocean suddenly lay still again.

Lara flopped back down into the raft. Totally exhausted and drenched to the bone, her body began to shake from the sudden chill that swept over her. She sat back up and fumbled at her backpack, retrieving another flare. Her face sunk even more when she looked at her raft and discovered that everything was gone. The waves had swept everything away, except for her water bottle which lay in the water on the bottom. Her lips formed a thin line as she continued to stare ahead. She looked at the ocean around her, hoping to at least see her catsuit floating nearby, but no such luck. All that she had left now was one magnum, her backpack, some food, four flares, and Winston's letter and aqua-lung. "Could be worse, right?" Lara sighed as she placed her flare between her knees and began scooping water out of the raft with her hands. It was going to be a long night.

Lara's eyes fluttered open and she looked around. The sun was beginning to rise, already warming the chilly early morning air. Lara's stomach growled loudly. She reached into her

backpack and took out a package of food. She ate it quickly, making sure not to leave a single piece behind. Her gaze suddenly shifted to the water bottle on the bottom of the raft. A sudden desperation jolted her forward, and she grabbed the bottle. There was one mouthful of water in it. Lara's throat felt like it was going to close over. She tilted her head back and poured the water into her mouth with a smile on her face.

“Ugh!” Lara spat it all out and grunted as an unwelcome taste of salt filled her mouth. She spat over the side of the raft several times, trying to rid the awful taste from her mouth. The salt stung her throat quite badly as she grimaced with disgust for a moment. Lara angrily whipped the bottle over the raft into the ocean. “*So much for that*”, she thought. She sank back into the raft and sighed. Small specs of blood fell from her lips as she ran a finger over her dry, chapped lips. What was she supposed to do now? She had practically lost all of her belongings during the night. Lara looked around her, desperately hoping to see a ship, or even an airplane, but the only thing in sight was the ocean which wasn't so appealing anymore. Lara sat hunched over in the raft as she pressed her palm on her right temple. Her headache was getting worse, and she felt quite dizzy. Her stomach ached and suddenly she felt very sick. She leaned over the edge and held her braid back with one hand as she vomited into the water. She was suffering from heat exhaustion and needed help soon. She scooped up some water in her hands and washed off her mouth. She held her stomach with one hand as she laid down and fell into a deep sleep.

A cool breeze whispered around, combing itself through Lara's hair. It flew around her body, tumbling over her face and into her parted lips. Lara's eyes slowly opened as she breathed in the salty air. Her body ached from being cramped in the raft for so long. Pushing herself up

onto her side, her vision blurred as her eyes squinted in the dark. Her throat burned from getting sick and her mouth was very acidic. The moon hung high in the nighttime sky, casting a warm and glistening glow over the water. Lara looked to the left, and gasped. Lara rubbed her eyes and stared in astonishment. In the distance, a dull light shone from what appeared to be a large boat! This was her chance! She had to get their attention. She whipped off her backpack and fumbled with the clasp. Grabbing a flare, she cracked it to life in less than a second. She reached up as high as she could and waved the flare around frantically. She whipped it side to side, up and down. She called out to the boat, yelling as loudly as she could.

A sudden panic gripped her chest. They weren't coming towards her. She grabbed another flare and using both hands, waved the two of them around. It wasn't working! She continued to yell at the boat for a moment longer when she remembered her magnums. She threw one flare up as high as she could into the sky. A couple seconds later it fell into the water. Hopefully someone might have seen it in the air. She reached into her backpack and grabbed the pistol. It had only three shots left in it. Lara whipped her other flare into the air and fired one shot above her. One second later, she fired another. She breathed heavily as she held the hot gun against her lips. The moonlight reflected in Lara's eyes as she watched the light from the boat completely disappear into the night.

"Damn," Lara whispered through clenched teeth. She closed her eyes and dropped the gun onto the floor. She laid back down as she pushed a couple stray hairs away from her face. She stared up at the sky and at all the glistening stars until a soft breeze helped close her eyes for the night.

A water drop hit Lara's nose. Then a second later, two more hit again. She tossed momentarily in her sleep, but after a huge drop trickled down her face she was wide awake. Lara looked up into the sky and watched as several raindrops fell all around her. The sun was just beginning to rise in the background. She laughed out loud as she tilted her head backward and opened her mouth. Hundreds of raindrops fell into her mouth and a large smile spread over her face. Within a couple of minutes it was pouring rain. She looked around her raft, frantically trying to find her water bottle. A second later, however, she remembered that she had tossed it overboard. She shook her head with exasperation. The rain continued to pour down as she tried desperately to figure out how she could collect water. Then an idea struck her. She reached into her backpack and took out the empty aqua-lung. She unscrewed the valve then tilted the lung sideways on the floor of the raft. A fair amount of water had already collected on the floor, so all she needed to do was fill the lung up with what was there.

Once it was full, she screwed the valve back on and replaced it into her backpack. After a couple more minutes, she began to scoop water into her mouth that had started to collect on the floor once again. Lara's smile never left her face. Not even after the rain had stopped, and the water had completely evaporated from the raft. Her throat and mouth no longer itched and burned like before. She grabbed the last package of food and began eating it slowly. When there was only half left, she returned it to her backpack. Couldn't eat all of it just yet. After drinking a mouthful of water from her aqua-lung, Lara stretched out on her back and stared at the passing clouds. She began to pick out certain pictures that they seemed to create. She continued to stare at the sky, daydreaming about the pictures forming before her.

***THUD.***

Lara jerked upright. Something underneath pushed at the bottom of the raft. She whipped around. *Thud!* Lara grabbed the magnum and turned around again. A large shark fin suddenly broke through the surface inches away from the boat.

*Bang!* Lara shot the last bullet from her gun. Blood spilled instantly out of its wound, spreading rapidly in the water. The shark surfaced a moment later, blood turning the seawater a dark foamy red. Relief swept through Lara, and after a few minutes, she laid back down in the raft. She held the magnum above her, turning it around and around. Should she keep it? There weren't any more bullets in it. She decided to anyway, just in case it might come in handy later on.

For several hours Lara rode along in her raft without moving much. The heat was getting a little overbearing once again, and her muscles began to ache more so than before. She took out the aqua-lung and drank a few mouthfuls of water. She still felt quite nauseous and thought for a moment the water wasn't going to stay down. She gave herself a minute, breathing slowly until she was confident she wasn't going to be sick. Lara turned to her right and her eyes widened in shock. Lara forced the water down her throat and gasped. A small boat was in sight! Lara pushed herself up onto her knees and had to catch the side of the raft to keep her balance. She was feeling very lightheaded all of a sudden.

"Hey!" she shouted. Her voice was quite hoarse and weak. Lara tore her backpack off and grabbed her flares. Even though it was the middle of the day, it couldn't hurt. She cracked the flare and began waving it around the air.

"Over here! Help!" Lara yelled as loud as she could, causing her throat to start burning again. The boat was coming closer! Lara continued to yell, waving the flare even faster above her. It seemed like it would never reach her. She kept yelling, even when it was only a dozen feet

away from her. A moment later, the boat stopped in front of her raft. Lara had to stop herself from jumping with excitement. She couldn't believe it, they had come! A man emerged from one of the doors. He waved at Lara as he walked up to the boats' railing.

"What happened to you?" he asked. He had a strange accent, one that Lara couldn't pinpoint. He looked quite scruffy. His hair was curly and was in need of a cut. It was quite evident that he hadn't shaved in a couple days, and his white t-shirt that he wore was stained in various places.

"I had a little accident," Lara replied. "I've been stranded for a couple days now."

He looked a little surprised. "For someone whose been out here for that long, you don't look too bad."

"Lucky, I guess."

"Well, come on board. I'll gladly help you out."

"Where are you headed?"

"Philippines."

Lara nodded. "Sounds good to me."

The man tied a rope to her raft, and helped her climb onto the boat. He extended his hand to her.

"My name is Brian, by the way."

"Lara."

They shook hands.

"There are a couple of us on board. Come inside, and I'll introduce you to them," he said.

Lara tried her best to keep her balance as she followed him through one of the wooden doors. The boat was made entirely from wood and was a fair size. There were a couple doors

visible to her, and she assumed there might be more on the other side. They climbed down a couple stairs into the bottom of the boat. It was a decent size, comfortable for the three others who were down there. The room was equipped with a small refrigerator, camp stove, and sink. A large table occupied the majority of the room. There was another door on the far side. Everyone looked up as Lara and Brian entered the room. There were two other men, and one woman. Brian stepped forward.

“Look what I found floating by,” he said. “Simon, Gretchen, Howie, this is Lara.”

Lara smiled wearily and said hello to the group. Brian briefly told them about her condition.

“You’re lucky to be alive,” Gretchen exclaimed, “and to be in the condition that you’re in.”

Lara nodded. “I’ve been in some pretty tough situations before, but this one seemed like there was a lot less of a chance of making it.”

Gretchen patted her on the back. “Well we’re glad we found you. There aren’t too many ships out this way.”

Brian smiled at Lara. “We’re going to fix you up! Lets get you some food and I’ll show you where you can sleep. We happen to have one extra bed.”

“Guess I do have a lot of luck on my side,” Lara smiled. She waved to the others, and followed Brian through the other door.

“We’re all really close,” he said. “We’ve been traveling all over the world together. I think you’ll get along fine with everyone.”

They passed through a short hallway where he pointed at a door which was the boats’ only bathroom. Opposite to it was a small closet, and at the end of the hallway was a bigger

room. There were two sets of bunk beds, and a cot pushed up against a wall. A small dresser separated the two beds.

“Cozy,” Lara said.

“Very, and sometimes a little too cozy,” he laughed. “Have to watch out for Simon. When he’s seasick, you don’t want to be in the bunk below him.”

Lara grinned and nodded at the cot. “Good thing I can move it around then.”

“Of course. And if you feel more comfortable, you can move it out to the main room if you wish.”

Lara shook her head. “I think it’s fine right here. A little company might be nice.”

Brian brought her a large glass of water and a plate of beans and a baked hotdog. She felt nauseous again when she tried to eat. Brian gave her some medication to help her stomach, and she managed to eat a good amount of the food. Her stomach rumbled with satisfaction as she crawled onto the cot and wrapped a blanket around her. Brian also brought in a fan and angled it so it would provide her with a slight breeze. He used a swab to remove the dried blood from her lips and applied a cool cloth to her forehead before leaving her to rest. The hum of the fan slowly faded as Lara fell asleep.

Cooking smells wafted throughout the room. Lara awoke as her stomach started to grumble. How long had she been asleep for? Howie walked into the room.

“Ah, someone’s finally decided to get up!”

Lara let out a big yawn and nodded. “Am I in time for breakfast?”

“Lunch, actually. Come on out, we’ve got lots.”

Lara made her way to the bathroom, pressing her hands against the walls for support. She felt dizzy, obviously her body still needed more healing. She turned on one of the taps and splashed water on her face. One glance in the mirror proved Brian's statement false from the previous night. She did not look very well! She noticed they had a small tank which held water that had been desalinated. Now if only she had that on the raft! Her arms were weak and fixing her braid proved to be more difficult than she had anticipated. When she was finished, she slowly made her way to the main room where she joined up with everyone.

After eating fresh salmon, mixed vegetables, and some bread, everyone got right to work. Howie was like the boats' mechanic. Everyday he made several rounds on the boat checking to make sure everything was ok. Brian was like the captain, and the leader of the team. He was up above, steering the boat. Gretchen was the main navigator. She mapped out where they were going, and where they were at all times. Simon was in charge of catching food for the crew, and cooking it. He was also in charge of mop duty after each seasick episode.

They had left Lara by herself, instructing her to rest. She was still quite exhausted, both mentally and physically. No one could really understand what she had gone through until they had done so themselves. She had a couple spots on her face and arms that were burnt, but luckily they weren't too bad. Gretchen gave Lara a new shirt to change into and a pair of long shorts. As Lara drank some water at the table, she began wondering more about the crew. What exactly were they going to the Philippines for? They hadn't told her. Perhaps they were moving there, or just going for a trip? Lara stood up and began walking around the room. Large maps were posted on the walls with various locations mapped out in different colours of marker. One map showed their route to the Philippines. Circled on the map in red was Aparri. It was near the tip of the country. So that's where they were going, but for what reason?

“Lara!” Simon called from the top of the stairs. “I need your help!”

She left the maps and climbed the stairs onto the deck. Simon had caught a huge fish, and Lara helped him lift it out of the water into a cooler.

“Supper tonight?” she asked.

“Oh yes. This one’s going to be tasty.”

Lara made her way over to Brian and leaned against one of the railings.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

“Much better. Just needed a good sleep and some food.”

“I can tell you’re used to this sort of thing,” he said, studying her.

Lara nodded. “I’m sort of used to being put in these kinds of situations.”

“I can kind of say the same thing. This crew has been through a lot as well.”

Lara shifted her weight slightly forward. Was this a good time to question him as to what they were really doing? Brian gave her a funny look suddenly. He had noticed her body language.

“Something wrong?”

“No,” she stammered, “just feeling a bit tired again. I think I’m going to go rest.”

“Ok, we’ll wake you later on.”

Lara nodded and made her way back down the stairs. When she arrived in the main room she closed the door behind her. Something was up, she could tell. Lara looked at the maps on the wall again. Nothing stood out at her. She moved swiftly to the sink and began going through some drawers. There wasn’t anything of interest in them. She licked her lips and looked around the room. Her gaze shifted to the closet across from the bathroom. She ran over to the door and grasped the handle. Just as she was about to turn it, the main door swung open and Howie

walked in. Lara pushed herself backwards into the bathroom and shut the door. She waited a moment, then casually exited the bathroom and joined Howie at the table.

“Hey Lara, feeling better?”

“Much better,” she replied. She looked at the strange piece of equipment that he had on the table in front of him. “What’s that for?”

“This? Oh, it’s ugh, a part off of the desalination system I’m fixing.”

“Ah, I see. Well I hope you can get it working.”

Howie nodded. “Always the same problem with it. Piece of cake.”

The door opened again, and Gretchen, Simon, and Brian joined Lara and Howie at the table. Supper was served an hour later. Afterwards, Lara wasn’t left alone for the remainder of the evening, so she couldn’t explore anymore. Perhaps the next day she would be able to. Lara joined Brian up top as he steered the boat towards Aparri. She watched as her raft rode over the waves behind them until she was ready for bed. After the anchors had been lowered, everyone went to bed. Lara waited in her cot until she was sure that everyone else was asleep. She opened her backpack and grabbed the last flare. She tucked it into one of her back pockets and made her way slowly out of the room. She crept along the wall as quietly as she could, and once she arrived at the main door, she climbed the stairs to the top of the boat without making a single noise.

A chilly breeze awaited her on deck. The moon shone above her in the clear sky. She cracked the flare, and looked around the boat. There were three cabins that she hadn’t been in yet. She went up to the first one, and pulled carefully on the wooden handle. She stepped inside and quietly shut the door. She moved the flare around in front of her. The room was extremely small and there were cardboard boxes piled everywhere. She opened one of them and peered

inside. It was full of glass bottles. The next one had a couple fishing nets, and the one underneath was full of rags. This was just a storage room, there wasn't anything here.

Lara quickly left and went to the next cabin. She went inside and looked around. There were several jerry cans filled with the boats' supply of gasoline. There were also a few boxes of tools and some folded tarps.

"Darn," Lara whispered. She returned to the deck, and just as she made it to the last cabin door, her flare died. "Apparently my luck just ran out," she sighed.

"Lara?"

Lara jumped and turned around. "Gretchen! You startled me."

"Sorry. What are you doing out here?"

Lara casually leaned back against the railing and discarded the flare into the ocean.

"Couldn't sleep, so I came up here for some air."

"Same here."

Lara noticed she looked a little worried. "Something wrong?"

Gretchen paused for a moment before answering. "Just a little anxious about something, but I'm fine." She gave Lara a little smile then returned to bed.

Lara stayed where she was for a little while longer. There were all these clues indicating something was up, but she couldn't pinpoint it just yet. All of the places on the map that had been circled weren't in any particular order. They seemed to be scattered around everywhere, which would indicate they weren't really traveling. Howie wasn't really working on the part for the desalination equipment. She had been in the bathroom after talking with him, and it was working just fine. She also could tell her question had caught him off guard. And to top off all of

that, Gretchen said she was worried about something. Lara made her way back to bed, and lay awake for about an hour until her eyes finally closed for the night.

The next day went along pretty much like the previous one, except for the fact that the entire crew seemed uptight. They were all eating dinner without initiating much conversation.

“When will we be arriving in Aparri?” Lara asked suddenly, but calmly.

“Two days at the most,” Brian replied as he stuffed another piece of food in his mouth.

Lara waited for it.

Brian suddenly froze, and looked up at Lara. “How did you know we’re headed there?”

The others stopped eating and stared at her, a bit astonished.

“I’m a smart girl. So are you going to let me in on your little secret?”

“Secret? What are you talking about?”

“I know you don’t travel for leisure. I also know Howie wasn’t really fixing that piece to help with the desalination yesterday.” She watched as he shifted uneasily in his seat. “Looked to me like some sort of a tracking device.”

Brian frowned at Lara. “We rescue you, then you start making accusations against us?”

Lara waited a second before responding. If she said something wrong, she could blow her chances with them. “Let me help you.”

Brian stared at her for a moment, studying her carefully. “We could use some extra help.”

*Too easy*, she thought.

“But you don’t even know what we’re doing, so why volunteer yourself?”

“I’ve been through a lot. Probably more than you have. And I’ve got skill. *Killer* skill.”

Brian smirked. “Love the sales pitch. All right, I’ll tell you what we’re doing. But if you cause us any trouble, your raft is only a ropes length away.”

Lara smiled and leaned back in her chair as he began to tell her everything.

It was two o’clock in the morning when Brian woke everyone up. “Lets go guys! We’ve got lots of work today, and we’ve got to go over the equipment with Lara. You’ve got fifteen minutes to get up and eat. I’ll meet you all on deck.”

Everyone jumped up immediately. Lara headed for the bathroom first and got washed. She was feeling much better and was eager to get started on another adventure. She was already bored of her accommodations. Exactly fourteen minutes later, everyone met Brian on the deck. He had a bunch of boxes out beside him.

“Ok guys. We’re going to divide some general equipment up first.” He handed Gretchen a backpack and tossed two more to Simon and Howie. He went to pass Lara one, but she shook her head.

“I’ve already got one,” she smiled, holding up her prized bag.

Brian pulled out several packs of flares, and gave everyone two packs each. Next, he passed each crew member a small pocket knife. Lara still had one in her backpack, but an extra one wouldn’t hurt. Howie tossed the device that he had been working on to Gretchen.

“It’s fixed again,” he said.

Lara couldn’t help but let out a small chuckle. It was some sort of a tracking device, just as she had suspected.

Brian opened up another box and began to remove its contents. He gave everyone some spelunking gear which included a small light that could be attached to the individual.

“Does the light recharge on its own?” Lara inquired.

“Unfortunately not. Someone forgot to pack the good ones,” Gretchen replied sarcastically, giving Simon a look.

Brian took out a bag and emptied it onto a box. It was money, but Lara wasn't sure of its currency. He distributed some to everyone, then walked over to Lara.

“The currency in the Philippines is made up of Pesos and Centavos. The coins are twenty five centavos, one peso, five pesos, etcetera. Got it?”

Lara nodded.

“Ok, everyone has the proper footwear I see. Lara how are your boots?”

“Fine. I've been letting them dry out here in the sun.”

“Great. Next we'll go over the outfits. When we get there, we'll all be wearing pants and t-shirts. Once we've reached the area, we'll switch to shorts.” He gave everyone their clothes and moved to another box. “Time for the goodies.” He pulled out two magnums and tossed the pair to Howie. “Lara, do you know how to use one of these?”

Lara smiled as she pulled out her magnum from her backpack. “Just need bullets and one more.”

He tossed her another magnum and a few boxes of bullets. He gave everyone else their weapons, and then moved toward the last box. He took out several canteens and gave them to everyone. “Don't forget to fill these up before you go. Ok, that's all the gear we're traveling with. We're traveling light this time, so try and conserve what you can. I have no idea how long this will take, so be smart with your supplies.”

Everyone agreed and began packing their gear into their backpacks. When Lara was finished, Brian asked her to go with him down to the main part of the boat to talk.

“In the Philippines, people speak English and Filipino, which is based on Tagalog dialogue. Are you familiar with it?”

Lara shook her head. “I’ve heard of it, but I’m afraid I don’t know it.”

“Ok, it might make things a little tough, but once we’re at the site you won’t have to worry. We will translate for you while we’re there. Try and remember just two words for now.”

“I can do that.”

“Oo means yes. Hindi means no.”

“Ok, got it.”

He gave her a look. “You sure?”

“Oo,” Lara smiled.

Brian laughed as he made his way to the sleeping room. “Perfect, I’ll see you in a couple of hours.”

All of the crew members had decided to take a nap. They said they needed all the strength and energy for what was ahead. Lara had decided to stay up. She didn’t need to rest. She was always ready when she needed to be. They were supposed to be arriving in Aparri that evening. Lara made her way up to the deck, and leaned against the railing as her thoughts drifted to what lay ahead. It wasn’t going to be easy, but she could hardly wait.

At 4:30pm the crew got up and joined Lara on the deck. They were only fifteen minutes away from their docking spot. Gretchen brought everyone some food and they ate it quickly. Lara went to the bathroom and filled her canteen with water. She didn’t want to be without it again! Lara grabbed her holsters from the bed on the way out, adding them to her backpack.

Brian gathered everyone together. “Ok team, listen up! Quick checklist before we land. Flares and knives?”

“Check,” the crew replied.

“Lights and gear?”

“Check.”

“Guns and canteens?”

“Check.”

“Gretchen, tracking system?”

“Check.”

“Ok, we’re all set. Now remember, we stick together at all times. Let me deal with anyone we run into. Also, absolutely NO talking about the site. When we get there we’ll go into the town and find some place to sleep for the night. Any questions?”

“Hindi,” Lara smiled.

Two minutes later, they reached the shore. Howie and Simon jumped off the boat into the water. They tugged on the boat’s ropes, pulling it to shore. There were several trees nearby, which they fastened the ropes to. Brian carefully lowered the boats’ anchor into the ankle deep water.

“That way if someone tries to make a fast getaway, they’ll have to move that first.”

Lara adjusted her backpack, then jumped off of the boat. Gretchen and Brian jumped next, joining up with the rest of the crew.

Gretchen checked her device. “Five minute hike to the road from here.”

“Piece of cake,” Lara responded. She let Brian and Howie go ahead of her, then followed close behind. Her boots dug into the ground as she climbed, making sure not to lose her footing. She glanced down and was just able to see part of their boat. Hopefully no one would take it on them. Lara had all of her belongings with her anyway, but as of right now it was their only mode

of transportation. Once the crew made it to the top of the hill, they emerged in front of a dirt road which was completely deserted.

“Now where?” Simon asked.

“Now we wait,” replied Brian. He took a seat on the ground, and the rest followed suit.

For about three minutes no one said a word until Brian jumped up. “Get up!” he said.

Lara jumped up, and noticed a weird vehicle driving down the road.

Brian ran towards the road. “Bayad!”

The vehicle started to slow down, and Brian yelled at the others to hop on. Lara ran towards the vehicle and hopped on as well. The driver didn’t even stop! As soon as all of the crew were on, he resumed normal speed.

“Lara, pay the driver four pesos,” Brian instructed.

She took the money needed out of her backpack and gave it to the driver. The crew did the same, then found a seat. There were other people in the vehicle as well.

Brian took a seat beside Lara. “This is one form of transportation here. It’s called a Jeepney. As you saw, the driver doesn’t stop for passengers but slows down enough for them to hop on.”

“I suppose getting off is the same?” she asked.

Brian grinned, amused by her obvious reaction to the vehicle. “Yes, but you yell *para* when you want off. Oh, and for every five hundred meters traveled, we have to pay an additional fifty centavos.”

Gretchen tapped Brian on the shoulder. “About fifteen more minutes,” she said, pointing to her device.

Lara watched the passing scenery. Every five hundred meters the crew paid the driver more money. They soon entered a small village.

“Bayad!” a small boy called out. The driver slowed down by the boy. “How many can you fit in?” he asked.

“One more!” the driver called back.

The boy hopped on, and paid the driver.

Brian let out a chuckle.

“What is it?” Lara asked.

“It’s what the driver always says,” he grinned. “It’s just an expression they use.”

“Ok, we’re here!” Gretchen said, pointing to a small building.

“Para!” Lara called out. The driver slowed down and the crew jumped off. Lara watched as the strange vehicle continued on, and laughed as she saw more passengers jump from it. She followed the crew toward the building.

“This is where we’re going to spend the night. So once you’ve checked in, feel free to visit some of the shops around here,” Brian told the group, “but make sure you’re back by nine o’clock tonight, because we have more to discuss.”

Brian helped Lara get checked in, then left the building. “Are you hungry?” he asked.

“Famished, actually.”

“Lets go over here,” he said as he pointed to a small eatery.

Lara walked over with him. The spot had a huge tarp which hung above four tables. There was a wooden stand covered in all sorts of different food. There were a lot of people eating there, all speaking Tagalog.

“Mangadang gabi,” the owner of the stand said to them as they approached.

Lara looked at Brian for a translation.

“Good evening,” he said.

She smiled at the man and nodded. “Mangadang gabi.”

“What would you like to eat?” Brian asked. “There’s coconut milk, rolls, noodles, and some seafood.”

“Anything’s fine,” she answered.

Brian looked at the man and pointed to the noodles first. “Pancit, lechon, milk.”

The man nodded and began scooping two large servings onto some plates.

“Magkano ito?” Brian asked.

“One peso.”

“Mura!” Brian exclaimed. He gave Lara her plate of food and sat down at a table.

“Well I haven’t got a clue what you just said!” Lara laughed.

“I ordered us both noodles, roast pig, and coconut milk. All the talk afterwards was just about the price of it.”

“Well the food looks delicious.”

“Eat up!”

After they were finished eating, Brian said he had to go for a bit to make some last minute arrangements. Something to do with transportation and lighting.

Lara decided to wander around the small marketplace for a bit. The last thing she wanted to do was stay cooped up again. It felt great to be able to move around freely once again. She returned her plate to the man who owned the small sidewalk stall, also known as a kainan.

Afterwards, she spotted a stall selling books. She went over and smiled at the woman.

“Mangadang gabi!” Lara said as best as she could, happy to remember the translation.

The woman returned the smile and answered, “Kumusta ka?”

Lara gave her a puzzled look and shrugged her shoulders.

She laughed and pointed to one of the books on the table: Tagalog to English.

Lara eagerly picked it up. “This is exactly what I need.” She flipped to find the translation for *kumusta ka* and discovered it meant, ‘how are you’? She found the translation for, ‘I’m fine’, and answered the woman. “Mabuti ako.” Lara definitely would need this book for the rest of the time she was there. It was invaluable and she didn’t like to rely on others to translate for her, especially because of what she had gotten herself into. She flipped through the book and found the next translation she was looking for. “Magkano ito?”

“Five pesos.”

Lara paid the woman and left. She tucked the small book into her backpack, and continued through the market. There were a couple of other items she wanted to pick up before she met up with the crew again. After walking to near the end of the market, one of the stands caught her eye. She walked over to it and greeted the man. He had racks of various colourful necklaces for sale. Lara pointed to a long necklace, made of wooden beads.

“Magkano ito?” she asked.

“Ten pesos,” the man replied.

Lara shook her head and with the help of her book replied, “Mahal.” There was no way she was going to pay that much for a necklace!

“Five pesos?” he answered back, making an offer.

“Oo,” Lara nodded and paid him. She tucked the necklace in her backpack and turned around to head back. On the way she bought an extra canteen and went back to where she had eaten lunch for her last stop.

The man greeted Lara and she held the canteen up in front of her. Instead of looking up the translation to what she wanted, she pointed at the coconut milk then to her canteen.

He nodded and filled it up for her. "One peso," he said.

Lara gave him five pesos instead and safely tucked the freshly filled canteen into her backpack. She knew it would come in handy later on as the coconut milk had multiple uses. Lara left to meet up with everyone. The building they were spending the night in was quite old. It was made out of a variety of materials, but mostly clay. Each visitor got their own room which consisted of a small cot and table. Brian had gone over some finer details with the crew, and then retired for the evening. He said they were getting up at *ala six*, which meant six in the morning.

Lara lay on her back as she stared up at the ceiling. Her room was starting to grow darker as the sun continued to set outside. She waited until the moon had taken its place, then began to go through all of her items in her backpack. If she wasn't prepared, she could get into trouble, and her plan wouldn't work out. A small grin swept Lara's face as she put the canteen that was filled with coconut milk in her backpack, along with the necklace she had purchased. After everything was organized to her liking, she closed her eyes for the night. Tomorrow she would finish her plan.

Lara held onto the side of the jeepney as it bumped and rattled along the road. It was six o'clock in the morning and the entire crew were on their way. Brian had hired a private driver to take them part way to the site. From the drop off point, they were going to have to find another mode of transportation. They were currently about thirty minutes away from their first stop. As they continued to ride along, Lara pretended to be very interested in the scenery so she could avoid all eye contact with the crew. They couldn't be trusted and she wanted to take part in the least amount of conversation with them.

Brian had explained everything to Lara the previous day. They were heading to a site that was supposedly stashed with billions of dollars worth of artifacts. Legends said the Japanese looted twelve countries in east and South-East Asia and had shipped everything to the Philippines. For decades, many treasure hunters had tried to find where the treasure was hidden, but didn't have much luck. Rumors claimed that the entrance was at the bottom of a river, and the chambers below were completely trapped. Lara was excited to be a part of the search. This was her chance to see if the legends were true! The only problem was that the crew she was traveling with was planning on raiding everything and taking the loot for themselves. There was just something wrong with stealing everything from a tomb. A nice souvenir was all that was needed. Lara had agreed to help them, and had arranged a certain price she had wanted for herself. Of course, in actuality, she had been lying. She wasn't really going to let them take all the treasure. If it had been brought here, then this should be its final resting place. It wasn't going to be easy though. Essentially it was her against the crew, and the people in the Philippines. Everyone wanted the treasure, but Lara was planning on stopping them. She just hadn't figured out how.

"We're here!" Brian shouted suddenly. He grabbed his gear and paid the driver generously. They were deep in the rainforest and had to go by foot the rest of the way.

Lara followed the crew in single file. Wet twigs and leaves brushed by them as they ploughed in deeper. She wiped a line of sweat from her forehead with the back of her hand. They continued on for about two hours without a break. All of a sudden, Gretchen stopped and pointed to a tree stump.

"Look! There's a marking on this."

Everyone closed in on the stump and looked at the picture that had been carved into the tree. It was an arrow with several small circles all around it. The arrow was pointing in the direction that they had been traveling in.

“Perfect. We’re following the right path,” Brian said, “lets continue!”

Simon groaned and slumped onto the ground. “Wait! I can’t walk for a bit, I’ve got to rest.”

Brian rolled his eyes and sighed. “Ok fine. Twenty minute rest, then we continue.”

Lara found a dry spot on the ground and sat down as well. She took out her water canteen, and drank several mouthfuls. The symbols that were marked on the tree were also part of the legend. Apparently there were many symbols and markings which were supposed to lead to the entrance. She couldn’t wait to continue.

After another long hike that lasted two and a half hours, the crew finally stopped for another rest. Brian gave everyone some food to eat as he began to talk about some more symbols that they had passed.

“We’re almost there. I know because of the markings. We should be getting close to a river soon. Once we reach that, it should be a piece of cake to the entrance.”

Ten minutes later the crew began their hike again. As they continued on, they passed several more markings on the trees. None of them spoke as they made their way through the rainforest.

It was noon when the crew finally arrived at the river. Lara drank the rest of her water, then re-filled her canteen. She joined back with the others just as Brian was taking out an inflatable raft. Within a minute it had self inflated.

“Hopefully we can all fit in here,” he said. “This will save us a lot of walking time. Gretchen, do you have our location?”

“Just give me two more seconds.” She pushed a couple of buttons on her device and nodded. “Ok, got it. We’re almost there. By boat it will take about two hours or so. If we were to walk, it would be at least five or six.”

“Great, lets get going. Everybody in!” Brian pushed the raft into the water and held it in place as everyone climbed in. He hopped in last, then pushed the raft away from the shore. The gentle current picked them up and began to pull them along.

Lara leaned against the side and rested as she enjoyed the ride. The river wasn’t very wide, but was large enough for their boat to travel along without turning around in circles. The scenery was absolutely breathtaking. Everything was so green and lush. Brilliant green moss covered large rocks trailing along the shore, and climbed up in tangles among the tall trees. Birds flew amongst the greenery, chattering away. Lara could also see different fish swimming in the river. As they drifted further along, Lara spotted more symbols on some of the rocks in the water, leading the way.

About an hour and a half later, Lara felt uneasy all of a sudden. She glanced around her, but didn’t see anything strange. She couldn’t ignore the feeling, because it was one that had saved her many times before. She casually reached into her backpack and took out one of her magnums.

Brian shot her a strange look. “What are you doing?”

Lara’s gaze shifted behind him suddenly. She flung her arm up and fired two bullets.

Brian flinched and ducked down. “Are you crazy?!” he yelled.

Lara shot around quickly and fired two more shots. “Watch out!” she called out as a swarm of arrows flew towards them. She quickly rolled out of the raft and into the water. They were being followed and shot at!

She surfaced and shot down another man near the edge of the water. The rest of the crew fired at the other enemies who suddenly appeared. Without any warning, something bit Lara’s leg. She cried out in pain and stopped treading water. She sunk beneath the surface and cringed in agony. Several large piranhas circled around her about to attack again. She shot several bullets at them, hitting them square on. She looked around but couldn’t see any others. Using her good leg, she kicked her way back to the surface.

Lara whipped around in the water just in time to see one man send an arrow right towards the boat. She shot one bullet at him before forcing herself back under the water. When she came up for air, she shot several quick glances all around. She couldn’t see any other men, but their raft had been hit. It was losing air quickly, and the crew were scrambling to try and stop it.

“We don’t have anything to patch the hole with!” Simon exclaimed.

“Move back!” Howie shouted. He quickly grabbed at his backpack and whipped out some tape. He worked quickly to patch the hole as best as he could. “It won’t hold for long, and it won’t be able to hold everyone.”

Brian hopped out of the raft. “We’ll let Lara and Gretchen stay then since they’re the lightest.”

Simon and Howie climbed out and the three men hung onto the raft as they continued down the river. Lara climbed into the raft and clenched her teeth as she lifted her injured leg into the raft. Blood gushed out of her wound, spilling down her leg. The piranha had taken quite a

chunk out of her leg, and loose flesh lay shredded around the wound. Blood continued to pour from her leg as she tried to figure out how to stop the bleeding.

Simon was the first to react and grabbed a bandana from his backpack. He pushed himself onto the raft and worked quickly to tie it tightly around her wound. He wrapped it around her leg several times and tied a knot to secure it. Lara thanked him as he scooped water in his hands and tried to wash away the blood on her leg. She sighed as she realized the wound would probably limit her.

“I wonder if anyone else was following?” Lara asked.

Brian shook his head. “Should be ok. Getting out with everything might be more of a challenge, though. These people here want to make sure that none of it gets out. Of course, they have to find us first.”

Lara stayed alert for the rest of the trip. She had been the one to spot their first visitors, and she didn’t want to rely on the crew to warn her of the second.

The gleaming sun was setting when Gretchen informed the crew they were minutes away from the site. Lara hadn’t spotted any other men since their first attack, but she was still on the lookout. Five minutes later, they pulled the raft out of the water and onto the ground. They were in the dead of the rainforest, completely hidden by all the trees. The river had changed shape where they were. It expanded into a fairly large circle. The trees around them formed a canopy, completely blocking out the sky above them.

Lara limped along the edge of the river to where the water seemed to stop. She peered over and saw that there was a huge slope. She took a mental note of it, then casually returned to the group.

Brian waited to speak until everyone had taken a seat on the ground. “Ok crew, we’re here. I think we should camp out and wait until the morning to begin. What do you think?”

Everyone nodded their heads. A fresh start would be best for everyone. After eating a quick dinner, they retired for the evening. Lara found a comfortable spot, and settled down. Her leg was very sore and it was important that she rested it. She woke up several times during the night, checking to make sure everything was still ok.

A shrill cry from a bird awoke the entire crew the next morning. Lara pushed herself up and joined the rest of the group. After eating some fruit from nearby trees, they all gathered at the side of the river for a short discussion. It was decided that Lara would look for the entrance since she appeared to be the most eager. After all, she had lots of experience as she was the one who found an entrance at the bottom of a lake in Australia before! She was concerned about her leg but convinced the others that the water would be good for it.

She adjusted the straps on her backpack and lit a flare. With one breath, she dove into the river. She opened her eyes and swam downwards. It was very deep which seemed odd. As she continued downward, Lara moved the flare in front of her to light the way.

It was extremely difficult to see anything because there were a lot of branches and leaves scattered throughout the water. When she reached the bottom she began feeling along the sand. She ran her hand through the mud, hoping that it would catch on something. After about twenty seconds she swam back to the top for air.

“Find anything?” Brian called out.

Lara shook her head. “It’s really dark down there.” She took another deep breath and dove back down again. This time she swam in the other direction. About ten seconds later she saw something huge in front of her, stuck on the bottom of the river. She swam towards it,

holding her flare extended in front of her. As she got closer, she could see that it was some sort of a monument. It was massive! Lara guessed that it was about seven feet long. As she swam around, she noticed that the monument had been carved into a heart shape. She swam right up to it and ran her hand over its incredibly smooth surface. All of a sudden, her hand dipped inwards, and she pulled it back quickly.

Her flare was starting to die as she realized there was a large hole in the center of the heart. Just as the flare diminished, she shoved her arm into the hole. Her fingers touched a small lever, and she pulled it down. Lara pulled her arm out, and kicked with her good leg to the surface.

“Still nothing?” Brian asked.

“I found a lever!” she replied. She climbed out of the water and looked at the river.

“Nothing’s happening though, usually it starts bubbling by now!”

Simon sighed. “You mean we came all this way to find out it’s broken?”

Lara laughed as she jumped back in the water. “These things are never broken.” She dove down once more while lighting another flare. She reached her arm back into the hole and felt the lever was still down. She swam around to the other side and felt along its back. Nothing there was of any use. Just as she was on her way to the front of it again, something shiny caught her eye. She lowered the flare, and swam down. At the bottom of the monument was a shiny piece of metal. It was in the shape of a tail and seemed to be pointing at something. She stuck her hand in the mud and felt another lever. Before pulling it, she ripped the metal tail from some weeds and put it in her backpack. Without the tail showing the way, hopefully no one else would be able to find the lever. She pulled the small lever and swam away from it.

Almost instantly, a billion bubbles burst through the floor of the river. They pushed Lara upwards as she watched another stone starting to rise from the bottom. Just as her head broke through the surface, the stone from below had completely risen out of the water. It was huge! Lara quickly climbed out onto the ground and stared at it with fascination.

“Amazing!” Gretchen exclaimed.

The other crew members murmured in agreement.

Lara stepped forward. “Well this is a little different from before.”

“What now?” Gretchen asked.

“This is the easy part,” Lara smiled. She walked to the edge, and placed her toes just over the edge. Before losing her balance, she forced her body forward, falling in an arc. She extended her arms and landed with her hands grasping part of the rock with her feet still planted against the edge. She applied more pressure to her good leg, trying not to strain her bad one too much. There were numerous symbols engraved on the front of the rock which were similar to the ones that they had been following. In the center was a small button. She gently placed her index finger on it, and looked back at the crew.

“Everyone ready? You’re going to have to move fast!”

“Ready. We’ll be right behind you,” Brian answered.

“What exactly are we doing?” Simon asked.

“Probably falling quite aways. At least, that’s usually how it goes,” Lara shrugged.

“You’re welcome to wait here.” She pushed the button and held on tightly as the rock started to shake. Suddenly, it started to crumble! Lara had to grip harder as huge pieces of the rock fell into the river. Because of the fallen rocks, a large hole had been created. Without hesitation, she pushed off the bank, and jumped straight into the hole. She landed quite hard on her back and felt

a nice burn starting to arise. She continued to slide down as the tunnel she was in sloped down on a higher degree. Her body bounced around roughly as she picked up speed. Lara grabbed a flare and struck it against the wall. A brilliant flame burst to life and reflected each water droplet on her face.

She held the flare above her as she continued down. Suddenly, the tunnel sloped into a hard left. Lara was flown into the opposite wall, her shoulder taking most of the blow. A moment later she could see the end of the tunnel. She flew through the hole and became airborne as she exited the passage. She dropped her flare as she fell fifteen feet into a deep pool of water. A moment later she surfaced and climbed out onto the bank. She took a look around the small room. It was fairly dark inside, with its only light source being a solitary torch. Just as she picked it up, she watched as Gretchen fell into the pool.

“Are you ok?” Lara called out.

Gretchen climbed out of the pool grasping her arm. “A bit bumpy along the way.”

They both waited until everyone had made it down. Brian was the last one to arrive. He joined the rest, and took the torch from Lara.

“Well that was quite the ride!” he laughed. “Everyone ready to continue?”

Lara took out her light and attached it to one of her backpack straps. The others did the same, then waited for instruction.

Brian made his way over to the room’s only door. “From here on in, everyone’s to follow me.” He pushed open the door and stepped into the first chamber.

Lara followed behind the crew. She didn’t trust Brian much, and she figured he didn’t really understand how places like these worked. This was fine however, she liked being entertained.

The first chamber was fairly large. It was filled with different pillars, each seeming to lead them down a certain path. It was very hard to see where they were going because there weren't any extra torches in the room. Each crewmember had their disposable lights clipped onto their shoulder straps of their backpacks, except Brian who carried their only torch.

A picture on one of the pillars caught Lara's attention. She walked closer to it, until her light illuminated it enough for her to see. The word *mahulog* was written above it. As they continued on, she noticed it was painted on almost every pillar. She glanced ahead and saw that the others hadn't noticed them. Lara wanted to look up the word in her book, but she didn't want the others to know she had it. When they had reached the other side, they stood before another door. Brian turned around and smiled at the group.

"Easy, isn't it?"

Lara shook her head. "We haven't even started yet."

Brian pushed the door open and stepped into a very narrow hallway. There was only enough room to walk in, single file.

"Wait!" Lara called out.

"What is it?" Brian answered.

"This room might be trapped."

Howie laughed. "It's only a hallway, relax." He pushed by Brian and began walking away from the group.

Lara watched as he faded out of the light from the group.

Brian gave Lara a suspicious look. "Looks ok to me."

**BANG!**

Lara's eyes flashed when she heard the crash. She lit a flare and whipped it as hard as she could down the hallway. It bounced off something, and fell to the ground.

"What the...?" Brian whispered. He walked swiftly towards where her flare landed with extreme caution. He held the torch out in front of him and stopped dead in his tracks when he saw what had happened.

Lara stood behind Brian as she watched a huge platform rise off the ground. She could hear the clanging from the chains as they lifted it back into place.

"*Howie!*" Gretchen screamed. She ran toward him, but Lara grabbed her arm.

"Do you want that to happen to you too? Don't go any further." Lara yelled as she picked and tossed it a little further. It landed beside Howie, illuminating his crushed body. Fresh blood pooled beside him, mixing with the dust on the floor. One of his arms was completely bent in the wrong direction.

"Ok, time to continue," said Lara. She picked up a large rock from the floor, and threw it near the corpse. Instantly the mechanism was triggered, and the platform smashed once again to the ground. It flattened Howie's body even more, breaking more of his bones on impact. "Get ready." She waited until the platform started to rise again, then ran forward, ducking to surpass the platform. Her leg burned as she ran and almost lost her footing. The others made it safely to the other side where Lara was waiting.

Brian wiped his forehead with his free hand and let out a small sigh.

"Not so easy anymore, is it?" Lara stated.

"We'll see. Can't get much worse than this." He looked horrified.

Lara had to keep herself from laughing. She'd been through a lot of tombs and had surpassed traps far worse than a falling ceiling. Lara tightened the knot on the bandana then

continued to catch up with the group. They found themselves at a dead end when they reached the end of the tunnel.

“Guess we have to head back?” Gretchen asked, a bit puzzled at the sudden end to the tomb.

“Looks like it,” replied Simon who had the same expression.

Brian looked at Lara and handed her the torch. “Bet you know what to do.”

She took the torch from him and smiled. She had finally taken over. Turning around, Lara held the torch close to the wall as she crept along. Scuffing her boot, bits of sand crumbled away into dust. She extracted one of her pistols from her holsters and aimed it at the wall. After shooting several bullets, she re-holstered the weapon.

“A little trigger happy?” Brian stated.

Lara took a step forward then side kicked the wall. It crumpled inwards where Lara had shot around. She looked at the small hole, then at Brian. “Apparently not enough.” She fired more bullets and kicked out a larger hole. She hopped down onto her stomach and crawled through the hole, with the other three following behind.

When Lara crawled out of the hole, she stood up and brushed some dust from her clothes. She looked around the new room. It was quite large and had just enough light coming from a couple torches on the wall to just make out the rooms’ contents. Lara could just make out various ledges and slopes in the room. She loved spots like these – she rarely could be followed! The only problem would be navigating around. She couldn’t carry a torch while maneuvering around, and her light on her backpack was beginning to dim.

Brian joined up with Lara, and took the torch back that she was offering. He nodded towards some closed doors nearby.

“They’re never open, are they?” he laughed.

“Only the ones that will slam shut behind you,” she replied. She walked over to the door with him to inspect it. There wasn’t anything strange about it. It had different carvings on it, and also had pictures around the edge. In the center the word *dos* was engraved.

“Is this Tagalog?” Lara asked as she pointed towards the text.

Brian nodded. “It means ‘two’.”

She took a step back from the door and turned around. Something in the corner caught her eye, and she proceeded towards it.

“Two what?” Simon asked.

“Maybe two keys, or two doors?” Gretchen suggested with a shrug.

Lara walked up to the object that she had spotted. It was a mirror that had been bolted into the ground. The light from her backpack barely cast a glow on the glass. She bit down on part of her lower lip as her eyes surveyed the room, and stopped at the torches mounted on one of the walls. She took the pocketknife from her backpack and very carefully etched a thin line into the mirror. The line separated the mirror in half. Pleased with the line, Lara applied more pressure on the blade, which cut deeper into the glass. She cut along the line as carefully as she could, only causing the glass to crack a little further in one spot. When she was finished, she pulled one of the halves from the stand.

“Hope that doesn’t give you seven years of bad luck!” Simon exclaimed.

Lara gave one of her magnums a pat. “No need to worry as long as I’ve got these,” she smiled. She approached Brian and handed him the piece of mirror. “I need you to help me with this. It’s too dark to go through this room, so I need some extra light.”

He held the mirror where she instructed, and then returned to the original mirror. She turned the stand, aiming it at the torches on the wall. Instantly the light reflected off the mirror and bounced onto Brians'. From there, it bounced upwards, hitting another mirror that had been hidden.

Lara gave a nod of satisfaction as the entire room came to life with an ambient glow. She moved over to a block and climbed on top of it. She looked back at Brian and pointed a finger at him. "You can't move a muscle until I'm finished."

"What about your leg?"

"Don't worry, I should be ok."

He gave her a thumbs up sign with his free hand, then mumbled, "Mamaya pumatay," which wasn't supposed to be audible to Lara.

Lara pretended not to hear him as she adjusted one of her holsters. She stretched her arms out in front of her, and flexed her fingers. She pulled her right glove on a little tighter, then jumped up, and caught a hold of another ledge. She pulled herself up, then turned around. Another landing stood in front of her, not too far away. After taking a step back, she ran forwards, pushing off the edge at the last second. She flew gracefully through the air, perfectly in line with the landing. The cool air whipped under her braid, pushing it up as she continued the jump. She landed on the block and bent her knees slightly to minimize some of the impact. This didn't help her bad leg though, it throbbed as a reminder.

After taking a quick look around her, she noticed the next part would be quite easy if she could use her other leg more when landing. She side rolled to the right, jumped forward, side rolled to the right again, then began to slide down a sharp slope. Lara quickly jumped up and caught hold of another ledge. She pulled herself up, and smiled when she saw a lever in front of

her. She looked down at the group, then realized they couldn't see her from here. She quickly grabbed her book from her backpack eager to find out what Brian had said.

"Lara?" a voice called from below. "Have you found anything yet?"

She peered over the ledge then back at her book. She had to know what he had said.

"Yes!" she yelled back. "Found a lever! Just have to re-tie one of my boots." Mamay? Was that what he had said? She quickly flipped through the book. No entry for mamay, but there was mamaya. That was it! She read the translation quickly: *after awhile, soon, later on*. Soon what? She frowned as she tried to remember what the other word was.

"Ugh," she grunted. She couldn't remember. Lara pulled the lever, and looked over the ledge again. The door remained closed.

"Heard a click!" Gretchen shouted, "but it won't open."

"I'm not finished yet!" she answered. The word two was on there for a reason. She shook her head as she looked around for where she could move to next. Directly above her was another ledge. Once she mounted it, she was posed with a small problem. The light from below wasn't reaching up this far. She strained her eyes, but wasn't able to make out anything. She lit a flare, and threw it forward. It landed on a ledge nearby that had been invisible until now. Lara walked to the edge and mounted her feet firmly. Bending her knees slightly, she sprang from the ledge landing safely on the next one. She picked up the flare and looked around. Another ledge, which was mounted on one of the walls, wasn't too far away. She threw the flare onto it, and followed close behind with a running jump.

Lara retrieved the flare and smiled with satisfaction when she saw the last lever directly in front of her. She pulled it down, and part of the wall swung open in front of her. She peered inside and saw a huge hole. Thankfully, someone had provided her with a ladder which she used

to get to the bottom. She followed a short passageway and hit a dead end. Waving the flare around looking for a way out, Lara realized she was already standing in front of the exit. She dropped the flare, and pushed a large stone out of her way. She emerged back into the room with the others just in time to see them entering the doors that she had opened. So much for saying thank you! She hurried to catch up to the group, walking close behind Gretchen.

“Nice work Lara,” Gretchen said as she admired all the artwork on the passing walls.

“Might want to watch where you’re going,” Lara exclaimed, pointing ahead.

Gretchen turned around and stopped dead in her tracks. They all arrived at the edge of a huge slope, and Gretchen would have been totally caught off guard if Lara hadn’t said anything.

“This looks like fun,” Brian said as he peered downwards.

“Watch your step,” Lara replied as she jumped forward. She formed a perfect stance as she slid down. Slopes were usually piece of cake for her, but her bad leg made it more difficult. She lit a flare, and held it in front as her boots continued to side overtop of the rubble. The three others followed behind, and had also gotten flares out. Lara led the way, and they followed her every move. It was dark, really dark, and Lara had a bad feeling in her stomach. She whipped her flare further down the slope, and smiled as a razor sharp blade was illuminated. She bent her knees just a little more, and waited for the perfect moment.

“Get ready to jump!” Lara called out. At the last second, she pushed off of the ground and jumped over the blade. She didn’t bother looking back to see how everyone else was doing, since there were more obstacles ahead. She lit another flare and threw it twice as hard as the first one, slightly pulling a muscle in the process. Both flares tumbled down the slope, showing everything in her path. A grin swept across Lara’s face as her next obstacle came into view.

Three blades. Three moving blades. Three *deadly* blades. She watched as both flares successfully rolled right under each one, briefly reflecting off of the silver finish.

“Three more!” Lara called out as she jumped over the first. The second she landed, she thrust her body up into the air again and quickly adjusted her stance. When she landed she jumped once more, clearing the last blade. She glanced ahead and noticed that one of the flares had disappeared. She cracked another one to life and threw it ahead, and just noticed a tiny flash of silver in the air. Not good.

“Watch me!” she yelled as she watched the second flare disappear as well. At the last possible second Lara jumped forward and ducked her head as low as she could get it. While airborne she saw for a split second, the flares trapped a pit of spikes. Once she had made it safely to the other side of the pit, she looked back and could barely make out the wire that was strung across the slope. She grimaced as she pictured someone sliding right through it. This explained the pit afterwards though, all the pieces had to go somewhere!

Brian had noticed the weird way that Lara had maneuvered up ahead, but couldn't figure out why she had done that. He followed suit right when she did, and just missed the wire by a couple centimeters. Surprisingly, Gretchen and Simon were also successful at surpassing the deadly trap. Suddenly the slope flattened out and Lara slid to a halt at the bottom. She looked back and watched the rest slide down to safety. Simon lost his footing at the bottom, landing face first on the concrete floor.

“Better here than up there,” Lara said as she gave him a pat on the back. She turned around to face a large gold door.

“Gold is good,” Brian exclaimed with a not-so-nice glint in his eye.

Lara smirked. “The treasure’s not in there, we haven’t even gotten past the easy traps yet.” Before continuing, she picked a pebble out of a gap on the bottom of her boot and chucked it aside. She smiled at Brian and gestured towards the door. “After you.”

For the next little while, the group moved about the tomb with ease. They followed several tunnels which lead them even deeper inside. Lara was fascinated with the markings along the walls. She had seen hundreds during her journeys, but each one was new and alluring. What was even more impressive about these walls though, was that they were almost entirely made out of gold. Lara wished she could take part of it home to replace her current trophy rooms’ door! The tunnel grew much narrower suddenly. Everyone had to walk single file from this point on. Brian led the way, still with a tight grip on the torch.

Lara’s eyes twitched straight forward, ahead of everyone. She could hear something ahead further in the tunnel and strained her ears, trying to make out the sound.

“Blades up ahead,” she blurted out suddenly.

Everyone stopped and turned around to face her. At this point though, no one questioned her statement as she had proven herself thus far. After proceeding another couple hundred of meters, they arrived at a set of spinning blades. Brian was leading the group, so he was first in line.

Gretchen checked her tracking system, and scowled when she discovered it had stopped working. “No way around these,” she mumbled.

Lara leaned sideways to view the next obstacle. “Ah yes, *these* things.” She made eye contact with Brian and nodded for him to go. “Just have to time it right,” she said with assurance

as she had surpassed many of these before. She watched as the blades spun around in a large circle and struck out every once in awhile, hoping to slice passing intruders.

Brian seemed mesmerized by this trap. He stared intently, then quickly tossed the torch successfully through to the other side. After another moment, he took a deep breath and forward rolled through the circle, just as the blades had retracted momentarily. He picked up the torch and waved at the others.

“It’s not too hard!” he called out to Simon who was next in line. “Just have to watch for the pattern.”

Simon looked back at Gretchen with an uneasy look on his face. “I don’t feel so good,” he wailed.

Gretchen gave him a pat and he rolled forward through the ring. Gretchen was next. The blades continued to spin around, never slowing for a second. She watched carefully, and sprung forward at the last possible second. She was too slow. One of the blades lashed out and ripped through the back of her shirt. She cried out as she tore free, leaving a large hole in her shirt.

Lara waited patiently until it was her turn. She gracefully rolled through and joined up with the others. The tunnel ended ten feet later, revealing a small hole in the ground. At this point, the area had widened and was large enough for everyone to stand around the hole.

“Won’t need your torch for the next bit,” Lara observed after peering below. She jumped back and hung suspended on the edge. “See you down there.” She let go and landed on a small slope below. She slid down, and forward jumped onto a large platform. From there she jumped down onto the ground.

Lara took a look around before any of the others had arrived. The room was fairly small, and in the very center was a small statue. She walked over and noticed a name engraved at the

base in large letters: *Yamashita*. She also noted the floor that surrounded the statue. It would definitely crumble if anyone were to step on it. Lara forward jumped onto the first piece and she felt it rumble beneath her. Just before it fell, she hopped to the next piece, making her way around. Once she had landed on the last piece, she jumped back to where it was safe.

“So much for keeping this place intact,” Brian chuckled from behind. Gretchen and Simon stood beside him.

Lara looked down and saw spikes in the pit below. “Just helping to keep you intact,” she proclaimed. She took a walk to the back of the statue where there was one spot that the spikes did not occupy. “We can get down here,” she pointed.

Brian nodded at the statue before moving on. “Yamashita was the one who had all of the treasure stolen. He was the governor of the Archipelago. His full name was General Tomoyuki Yamashita.”

Lara jumped into the hole, and began to crawl through a tight crawlspace in front of her. Dirt from the ground found its way behind the bandana and stung Lara’s wound. She had to rest for a moment before continuing. Brian followed behind, then Gretchen, and Simon who listened to his story with interest.

“Archipelago?” Lara asked.

“A group of islands,” Brian stated. “According to the legend, they began their looting after defeating British forces in Malaya and Singapore.”

“Why the Philippines?” she questioned.

“That was in 1945 when the ir empire collapsed.”

Lara continued on as she thought about the legend. For years many treasure seekers had tried to get the treasure, but none were successful. She didn’t even know how many had actually

found the entrance! The end of the crawlspace led to a very small room. Everyone crawled in and looked around. The walls had been painted silver with various drawings done in a light blue. On one wall there was a large figure of a man that had been painted with extreme detail.

Lara walked over to the painting for a closer look. The man sat on a throne, above a pool of water. There were small gold specs throughout the water. His eyes looked upwards at the water that was falling over him.

“We’re almost there,” Lara announced.

“You would know,” Gretchen rasped quietly, but loud enough for Lara to hear.

Lara followed the man’s gaze up to the ceiling of the room. A large hole was visible, and she guessed it was a couple hundred feet up. Many torches were mounted on the wall, near the ceiling. Their glow illuminated the room, as it reflected off of the shiny paint.

“They certainly didn’t make this place even,” Lara noted. “Up, down, up, down.”

Brian nodded in agreement. “Hope it’s a little easier getting out! We’ll have a lot to carry.”

A wicked grin splashed over Gretchen face at the reminder of the treasure. Lara knew it was impossible for them to reach the ceiling with the gear that they had with them. There had to be another way up. A pressure pad? Hidden ledges? She made her way around the room feeling along the floor with her boot. When she felt a bump, she scraped her sole overtop to remove the sand. Nothing so far.

“I’m sure our ropes will reach up there,” Gretchen stated smugly. She pulled her backpack off and collected her gear.

Lara ignored them as they began to put the ropes together. She focused her attention on the wall again, studying the pictures more intently. She ran a hand along the paint as she studied

each picture. Her hand brushed over a bump. She whipped her hand from the wall, and bent down, getting closer to one of the pictures. It was a button! She didn't want to push it in just yet, there might be more. As she continued to scan the wall, she realized she was looking at a map. There were six buttons all together, each representing a different location. Which one was she supposed to press?

Lara backed away from the wall with her hands planted firmly on her hips. Her eyes drifted along the walls, searching for an answer. When she arrived back at the painting of Yamashita, she stood frozen in place. She got it!

“What'd you find Lara?” Simon asked, proceeding towards the buttons.

“Don't touch anything!” she insisted.

“Brian! Check these out!” he pointed at one of the buttons, and not realizing what they were, pushed too hard against it.

“No!” Lara lamented. Before anyone had time to react, a huge puff of powder burst out of the button into Simon's face.

“Ugh!” he cried out. He grabbed at his face, trying to brush away the powder. It had filled his nose, eyes, and mouth. Suddenly he started screaming as it began to burn his skin.

Lara grabbed at her backpack and withdrew her water canteen. She unscrewed the cap and ran over to him, pouring the water onto his face. After watching Lara, the others had gotten theirs out too and poured water over him as well.

Simon fell to the ground landing amongst the sand and wet spots from the water. He continued to wail until he stopped suddenly out of the blue. He lay motionless. His mouth hung open, and his eyes bulged.

Lara bent down beside him and gently nudged him. She stood up and shook her head.  
“He’s dead.”

“Dead?!” Gretchen rasped. “You killed him!”

Lara returned her hands to her hips. “Who pushed the button? Not me, since clearly I’m not the one on the floor.” Turning her back to Gretchen, she rolled her eyes. She focused her attention back to the buttons. Each location was written in hieroglyphics which she deciphered in her head. Baku, Mongolia, Xian, Moscow, Quito, and Aparri.

Simon had pressed the Aparri button. That left five more. But how many were traps? She went over the names in her head again.

“Figured it out yet?” Gretchen pressed.

With a sly smile, Lara nodded. “Press all of the buttons. You’re bound to hit the right one eventually.”

Gretchen scowled and walked to the other side of the room. Lara was hoping that she would have a little accident too. Aparri was where they had started out. She hadn’t heard of Baku. Mongolia, Xian, and Moscow were in Asia. Quito was in South America. So Aparri was not part of the puzzle anymore, which made sense because it wasn’t part of Asia. She walked back to the buttons and pressed the button for Mongolia. Nothing happened. She then pushed Xian, and Moscow without anything bad happening. That left Baku. It was risky. Maybe there were two parts to the puzzle? She looked back at the painting and studied it for a moment again. With a quick breath she pushed the button and immediately side flipped away.

Lara could hear a strange sound, but wasn’t quite sure what it was. She braced herself as the walls around them started to shake. She looked around, ready to move away from any danger which might emerge. Less than a second later, ten shoots of water burst into the room. It sprayed

out of the painting on the wall, where water droplets had been drawn. The room was filling up fast, and the others scrambled to pick up their gear.

“Look what you did!” Gretchen shouted at Lara.

Lara couldn't help but shake her head at her. She hated working with incompetent people. They were the ones who usually would get everyone killed. The water continued to flood the room. Just as it began to surpass Lara's neck, she started to tread water. The water pushed them up higher and higher. She noticed blood seeping out of the bandana into the water. Hopefully some of the dirt would be washed away.

Brian gave a thumbs up to her. “Great job! This is fantastic.” The water stopped just as it neared the torches at the top of the room.

Lara swam to the hole, and pulled herself out of the water first. “Whoever made this knew exactly how much water to put in here,” she observed. She made her way into the crawlspace leaving room for Brian and Gretchen. The group made their way through the tunnel in complete darkness. All of their lights had burned out long ago, and a flare at this point would be more annoying than helpful.

After a long hard crawl on the knees, they finally reached the end. The tunnel grew in size allowing enough room for them to stand. An eight foot door stood in front of them, which was made out of silver. Many intricate patterns had been engraved on it. *Yamashita Yaman* was written in gold lettering in the center. Lara stepped in front and slowly pushed open the door.

A chorus of low pitched humming greeted the group as they entered the room. Torches lined the walls casting dark ominous shadows. The floor on which they walked was made out of glass, revealing rushing crystal blue water below. Lara's eyes followed the channel of water that

led to the very center of the room. Her gaze lifted and was instantly fixated on the prodigious sight in front of her.

The others also had stopped to view the scene. In front of them stood an eminent statue of General Tomoyuki Yamashita. As in the drawing that they had passed earlier, he looked upwards with a radiant and mischievous smile on his face. His arms were positioned like the typical Egyptians drawn in books. His right arm extended outward with his forearm raised perpendicular. His hand was bent back, palm upward. His left arm was bent the exact opposite, forearm lowered to be perpendicular this time. In each hand, he held several large solid gold bars.

Hanging from his hands were two wood platforms. It looked like a levy system as one was stationed directly below his hand, and the other far below. What was most peculiar though, was what surrounded the statue. Lara was drawn forward, leaving the other two behind. A large waterfall flowed ovetop of the statue. Thousands of gallons of water flowed from high above, curving perfectly over Yamashita. The water, however, was light green in colour. Lara tilted her head slightly, studying the uncouth liquid. It was remarkable to look at, but she suspected something was wrong. She turned around, hearing the tail end of Brian's conversation with Gretchen.

“...yaman ngayon.”

Lara looked at him and asked, “Everything ok?”

He nodded, giving Gretchen the faintest smile. “See that waterfall? That's our problem. All the legends claim that the treasure was guarded by a poisonous waterfall. Once we figure out a way around it, we can start collecting our treasure.”

“Better take a little jaunt around then.” She turned back around and made her way back towards the statue, with the others following close behind. “We need to get onto his hands,” Lara stated. The most obvious route was through the falls, then to climb up. She took a look around the room, and a small crack in the wall caught her eye. She moved swiftly over to it, and jumped up to grab a hold.

Her fingers slipped a little from the loose rock. She shifted her weight, moving sideways along the wall. From where she was, she could see a small ledge about half way over the water. The falls were a couple meters on the other side.

“Follow me,” she said as she continued along. Her fingers dug deep into the cracks, gripping as hard as she could. One slip would definitely mean the end. Every once in awhile she had to scoop out loose debris so she could continue on. After quite the workout on her hands, she finally reached the ledge. She triple checked her position before letting go. She landed on the ledge, and looked back to see how the others were doing, then turned back around.

The falls were really close now, and Lara detected a weird odor from the mist. She surveyed her new surroundings and discovered a small alcove ahead. She peered at the small opening and guessed it was about half a meter from the falls. This might be tricky. She hopped back, and gently stretched her bad leg. If she jumped too far she’d sail right into the poison. If she made too short of a jump, she’d land in the poisoned water below. Both were not options. She carefully eyed her preferred landing spot, then shot forwards. About five inches from the edge of the ledge she pushed off and flew towards the alcove. Lara arched her body midway to decrease her overall distance, and landed half a foot from where she had eyeballed. Not bad.

She stuck her head out of the hole and looked around the corner. Brian and Gretchen were almost at the ledge. Once they both had landed safely, Lara held her hand up at them.

“Wait! I have to move a block out of the way first. Hold on a second.”

They acknowledged her by nodding.

She tucked back into the alcove and quickly grabbed her Tagalog book from her backpack. She looked up the second last word that she had heard Brian say – *yaman*. It meant ‘riches’, or ‘treasure’. The last word, *ngayon*, took a bit longer to find because of its spelling. It was defined as ‘now’. She tucked the book away and pushed a large rock out of the alcove. It fell rapidly, creating a huge splash in the water. She motioned for the others to follow, then proceeded into a tunnel that the rock had been hiding. There wasn’t any need of lighting a flare, as a torch at the end of the tunnel illuminated off of the golden walls. Lara ran her hand along one of the sides as she moved further along. The wall was incredibly smooth and flawless. When she was about half way, she noticed something up ahead. Darts.

She waited until the others had caught up with her, and pointed ahead. “Poison darts, to add to our theme today.” Lara walked forward to where the first emitter lay, where it rapidly shot out darts from the wall. She waited until it was momentarily safe to proceed. She darted forwards and encountered another set. These ones were perfect headshots and were easily surpassed by rolling under. The next ones were a bit tricky as there were a set of darts above one another. At the last possible second Lara dove forwards, sailing through the middle of the trap. She somersaulted and stood up. Continuing down the tunnel, she didn’t bother to wait for the others. She liked to have first look at the next section. When she reached the end, Lara found herself emerging from a small hole in the back wall, directly behind the statue.

When Brian and Gretchen had caught up once again, Lara pointed ahead. “Have to go down first using the pulleys.”

Gretchen huffed, and stated, “Why go down when we can all clearly see a lever up top?”

“In my years of adventures, I’ve learned sometimes you have to recede to *proceed*.”

“Fine. I’ll go up top then.”

Lara looked over at Brian. “Are you coming with me? I need someone to help with the pulley.”

He nodded and gave Gretchen a pat on the back. “Lets get going.”

Lara performed a perfect running jump, landing on a small ledge on the back of the statue. She pulled herself up onto another ledge. Directly in front was a short hallway. At the end was a slope, leading down into complete darkness.

After Brian had arrived, Lara lit a flare, and threw it down the slope. It tumbled down the hill, landing in a pit of spikes.

“It isn’t a tomb without these,” she smiled. She turned around, and slid down backwards. Just as she began to fall off the edge, she reached up and caught a hold. She looked behind her and saw a crawlspace just above the deadly spikes. She looked up at Brian who had lit another flare to help them see a bit better. “There’s a crawlspace behind me,” she said. “Watch your jump.” She pushed off of the wall, turning in the air and grabbed a hold of the edge. She pulled herself up, and crawled to the end where she emerged onto a ledge behind Yamashita’s right hand.

Brian joined her on the ledge, and gazed at the large gold bars resting on his palm. Both of them walked onto his hand.

“There’s writing on here,” Lara pointed out. “*Lumubog, magpataas, lumubog.*”

“Down, up, down,” Brian translated, still fixated on the gold.

“Must have to do with the levy. I’ll go down, then you come down to lift me back up. I might be able to push one of the bars onto the platform to get you up.”

“Ok, that sounds good. I’ll go to the other hand.”

Lara nodded then carefully stepped down onto the platform. Instantly the old chains came to life, slowly lowering her towards the base of the statue.

“Hey Lara!” Gretchen called from above.

Lara tilted her head and looked up. She had a hand on the lever.

“You’re wasting your time! This is the way.”

“Gretchen! Don’t pull it!”

“Why? So you can take all the credit when you find the treasure first? I don’t think so!”

She slammed the lever down hard.

Lara watched as a small platform rose out of the water below. Water rushed off of it as it surfaced. Gretchen didn’t waste any time getting down to it. She jumped on, and it began moving towards the channel of water that they had walked over when they had entered the room.

“Get off of there!” Lara shouted. Gretchen wasn’t listening anymore. The platform floated right under the waterfall. Gretchen fell onto her back from the force of the water. She started screaming and tried desperately to wipe the poisoned water from her body. The poison was doing its job, and she was dying quickly. She rolled into the water, obviously trying to get out of the waterfalls’ path. She splashed around frantically before her eyes widened as death slowly pulled her under.

Brian stared at the spot where Gretchen had vanished.

“She didn’t listen to me,” Lara declared.

Brian swallowed a lump in his throat and nodded. “See anything down there?”

When the platform had reached the bottom, Lara hopped off to take a look around. There were more large bars of gold, but far too heavy to carry. She walked around to the other side of one of the gold pieces and smiled.

“Lever here!” she called up. She pulled it down and looked around.

“Don’t see anything happening,” Brian called back.

Lara stepped back onto her platform just as he started to descend on his.

“Could be timed,” she replied. She hopped off the platform when it arrived back at the top. Brian waited below. She found a smaller block of gold and pushed it onto the platform, but it didn’t budge much.

“Lets see how much you’re worth,” Lara laughed. She pushed a couple more blocks on until it slowly began to descend, lifting Brian back up to the top. Once he arrived safely, he maneuvered around the statue to meet up with Lara. Both of them looked down at the floating platform.

“Looks like that’s the only way,” Lara stated.

“Then looks like you’re going to go first,” he replied.

Lara turned to him frowning, and just happened to see him raise his hand in time. She ducked out of the way from getting a nasty blow to the head. She kicked out, intending on tripping him, but he held his ground too well. He kicked her square in the stomach sending her flying over the edge.

The wind was instantly knocked out of her as she took the hit. She grabbed a hold of the ledge with one hand and struggled for a moment to catch on with her other hand. She hung above a small landing, but she wasn’t sure if she could make it down safely.

Brian suddenly appeared, towering over top of her with a vicious grin on his face. He held a pistol in his right hand, and had it aimed at her head.

“You can’t kill me yet,” she grimaced.

“Why’s that?” he answered, toying with her.

“You don’t know where the treasure is.”

He laughed, and pointed behind him at the large gold blocks.

Lara didn’t waste one second. She whipped herself back onto the ledge and kicked him in the back. He staggered forward and turned around, firing three shots at her. The first one missed her completely. The second she ducked under, and the third she back flipped away from. She fell through the air and landed roughly on the ledge below. She skinned her shoulder quite badly. She withdrew both pistols and held them above her head, aiming at the ledge above her.

“Did I get you Lara?” he whispered.

She didn’t make a sound.

“Are you lying dead below me, or are you just pretending?”

She looked to the right of her, down at the platform in the water, then back up to the ledge.

“Guess there’s only one way to find out!” he laughed. Without any other warning, a huge gold block was pushed over the side. It plummeted to the ledge, crashing with a huge bang, completely shattering the ledge on impact.

Brian looked over the ledge in anticipation. She wasn’t there. He looked at where the block had landed on the base of the statue and at the destroyed ledge. Not there either. He wiped a hand on his forehead and jerked around, expecting her to be sneaking up from behind. Not there.

“You look slightly confused,” Lara called up to him. She waved from her position on the floating platform. He whipped his arm down, firing several shots at her. Lara did her best to avoid them, maneuvering around on the platform, trying not to fall into the dangerous water. The platform started to move towards the falls for the second time.

“You’re in a little pickle Lara,” he noted happily. “Should have learned from Gretchen.”

Lara laughed as she extracted the coconut milk canteen from her backpack. She unscrewed the cap and tossed it aside. She poured the milk all over herself. Just as her back was about to be hit with the water, she winked at Brian and gave a little wave.

He watched as Lara passed right through the waterfall. She stumbled at first but quickly regained her balance. They made eye contact as she continued backwards, nearing the channel of water. He went to fire another shot at her but gasped when the glass floor behind her exploded.

Lara held Brian’s gaze with a smile as the glass burst from behind her. The platform floated down the channel and the glass continued to explode, clearing the way. Just before the channel sloped down, she tossed the half-full canteen into the water. It bobbed upright in the waves – it was Brian’s only hope of survival.

She crouched down and held onto the platform as it slid down a slope into a new room. It was weird that she was being propelled this way when the water had been flowing into the pool. Then she realized it was connected to a track beneath her. When she reached the bottom of the slope, the front end hit the water, splashing water on Lara. She flinched but remembered it was safe. She turned around, and her eyes widened at the new sight.

The platform continued through the water at a much slower pace than before. Long sheets of thin, veil-like material hung from the ceiling. The wispy material slipped overtop of Lara as

she passed through, softly fluttering back down behind her. She used her hands to help push them aside, eager to see what was ahead. A soft fog suddenly rolled overtop of the water, climbing onto the platform, swirling around Lara's boots. She looked ahead and saw two large white sheets blocking the way. Lara reached for her pistols but stopped. A soft light illuminated the sheets from behind. Different specs of ambient light danced and sparkled on the white cloth. Just as the platform was about to pass through, the sheets were carefully swept to either side of the water. Lara watched as the cloth floated past, the bottom trailing gracefully behind. As her gaze shifted ahead once more, her eyes were instantly lit up from the scene in front of her.

The channel of water ended here and she stepped off of the platform onto the ground. Soft gold tones reflected off of her face. She looked all around in amazement. Thousands of solid gold bars filled the room. They were stacked in perfect rows with velvet sheets carefully laid between each brick. Lara walked silently between the rows, not touching anything. She sought treasure but never took much, a souvenir at the most. She lived for searching out various locales around the world. Her satisfaction came from her discoveries and explorations, not from taking the whole prize at the end.

More sheets hung overhead at the end of the row she was in. Using one of her hands, she slid the soft material out of her way and her mouth dropped open in awe. A small statue of Yamashita lay situated in a pool, with even more gold bars surrounding him. She made her way closer to him and noticed there were small gold flakes in the water. It was absolutely amazing to see all the treasure in the tomb. Lara couldn't believe how much gold was sitting before her, and it was all here because of a huge looting party that happened many years ago. She looked at the statues' eyes for a moment trying to figure out why it had all been shipped here. In any case, she had now proven that all of the legends were true.

A small laugh escaped from her lips when she noticed something else in the pool. She stepped into the cool water and waded towards the center where she reached down through the glittering water and picked up a small gold boat. It resembled the one that had rescued Lara. She held it up in front of her, examining the fine detail of every inch of the boat. She flipped it over and noticed some words engraved on the bottom: *Magtiyaga* – ‘Persevere’. Lara nodded in agreement and tucked the boat carefully into her backpack. That one was definitely a keeper, for more reasons than one!

Lara backed out of the water and took another look around the room. She was sure happy that Brian and his crew hadn’t seen the treasure. She would have to make sure though, that if he did make it to the room that he wouldn’t be able to get out with any of it, and Lara knew just what to do. She reached out and picked up one of the gold bars. A rumble instantly boomed throughout the room. She went to replace it but had second thought. Might serve as a nice paperweight! With a small grin she put it in her backpack, and ran behind the statue where she pulled a lever, and fell through a trap door.

The rumbling grew much louder as she slid down a large slope. She pictured the room above her starting to collapse. She needed to get out quickly just in case the whole place decided to fall apart. When she reached the bottom, she heard another rumble, and instinctively side rolled just in time from being run over by a huge bolder. She hurried to the other side of the small room and pushed open a door. A long empty hallway stood before her. She lit a flare so she could see better, but didn’t see any danger ahead. Of course, she knew better than to prance right on in. With her free hand she extracted the bead necklace from her backpack, and broke the string. Several beads fell onto the floor, and she kicked them down the hall.

A blade instantly came to life with a shriek and began chopping the air furiously. She did a running jump overtop and stopped. She threw another bead ahead, and this time the blade was at the level of her head. She ran forward and dove underneath. A chill hit her back as she passed by the blade. She continued the process until she ran out of beads. Unfortunately for her, she was only halfway. A sudden ticking sound alerted Lara. She whipped her flare in front and beside her but didn't see anything. Then, she nodded with a smug look on her face.

“One of *these* ones.” She looked up, and sure enough it was what she had expected. A huge steel cage with razor sharp five feet long spikes descended from the ceiling. The points sparkled from her flare. Suddenly the whole cage dropped five feet! Lara bolted forward, running and jumping blindly. Her flare reassured her she was traveling in a straight line but did not warn her of the other blades ahead. She jumped up, and a blade shot out from the wall underneath her. Next she rolled and felt the breeze of another on her back. She glanced up quickly and saw the spikes were coming down even faster. She still had over a quarter of the way to go and had no idea what was ahead.

She continued on quickly, but not fast enough so that if she had to react quickly, she'd be moving too fast to do so. The pattern seemed to be jump, roll, jump, roll. She was almost at the end and the spikes were dangerously close. She threw her flare forward, and two blades lashed out from the wall. Without any hesitation she jumped and rolled through the middle landing on her bad leg. She cried out and fell to the floor. The blade thrashed at the air very close to her. Above her, the spikes were only inches away from complete destruction. She rolled on her stomach and made it through a small door just in time. The door slammed behind her and a loud click informed her that she wasn't going to be able to get through it again. She felt her backpack to ensure her goodies were still safe, then continued on. The room she was in offered one exit, a

pool of water. With a deep breath she plunged into the water and lit a flare as she swam down the shaft.

She reached the bottom a couple seconds later and found herself being blocked from a closed door. She rolled around and discovered a lever behind her. With her free hand she pulled it down and was suddenly pulled hard from behind. A powerful current grabbed her body and dragged it through a tunnel. Lara waved her arms and kicked to turn herself around. She was going faster and faster through twists and turns. Her air supply was diminishing when she got to the final stretch. Up ahead three evenly spaced blades thrashed through the water. Lara's eyes widened at the ugly premonition which flashed through her mind. She had to act immediately. She let go of the flare and tried to swim towards one of the walls. The current fought hard but she managed to get close enough. At the last second she kicked herself off the wall as hard as she could. The current grabbed her and she was pulled in an arc, passing the blade. The last blade was longer, therefore not permitting the same move twice. She whipped her head up, desperately looking for anything that could help her.

She was getting even closer and was moments away from being completely sliced in two. An idea came to her suddenly, but it didn't seem probable. She retrieved the gold bar from her backpack and held it out in front of her, with her elbows slightly bent to help absorb the shock. Three feet away...two feet. She didn't think it was going to work.

"Ugh!" Lara grunted as the blade smashed into the block. She was pushed back but pulled herself forward with all of her strength and the current shipped her overtop and away from the blade. "*So much for the paperweight*", she thought. Her lungs began to burn, a feeling which brought back bad memories. Suddenly the tunnel ended and Lara was forced out of the water.

She gasped and took in a mouthful of air then realized where she was. She fell down the side of a waterfall and plunged into the salty water below.

After surfacing once again, she treaded water as she looked around. Brian's boat was within sight with the blaze of the setting sun behind it. The salt stung her leg so badly her vision blurred momentarily. Lara swam to the shore and made her way up onto the sand. She slowly walked along the beach towards the boat. She could take it and make her way partway home before stopping to catch a flight the rest of the way. She was halfway to the boat when someone yelled at her. She looked into the forest beside her and saw a bunch of armed men running towards her. She stopped and rested her hands on her pistols. One man in front made his way eminently over to Lara. She raised an eyebrow and nodded at him.

“Something I can help you with?” she inquired shortly.

The man introduced himself and stressed his so-called high ranking in Aparri. “What have you been doing?”

“Swimming, obviously,” she replied.

“What else have you been up to?” he demanded, staring at her leg.

Lara shook her head. “Nothing.”

One of the armed men whispered something in his ear then grinned at Lara.

“Apparently you were trying to find the Yamashita Treasure. Were you successful?”

Lara held her hands out in front of her. “Doesn't look like it, does it?”

“Tell us!” he yelled.

Lara sighed as she watched as every gun was pointed at her. Clearly a little trigger happy moment was imminent. She looked around at the guards and decided eluding was probably not an option. She looked back at the leader with a sly grin.

“What if I had found the treasure?”

He glared at her, bearing his teeth. “You would have to show us where it is,” he declared.

“Too bad I’ve got a flight in a couple hours,” she said as she tapped her wrist, then proceeded to walk by the group towards the boat.

“MAGPAPUTOK!” he roared.

Lara had no idea what that meant, but she was able to comprehend the basics: it wasn’t good. Immediately she back flipped and rolled around in the air to face their direction. She grabbed her pistols and fired several shots at them before they had even shot half a dozen bullets. She side rolled to the left, shooting down several men. She continued to shoot as she jumped from side to side then back flipped a couple of times. Bodies lay sprawled all around and few remained alive. Lara winked at the three men left who had started running toward her. Seconds before they went to fire again, she forward jumped overtop of them, doing a roll on the ground behind them. She shot them all as they turned to face her. Lara holstered one pistol as she stood up and turned around to face the leader.

“W-wait a second,” he stammered, holding both hands up in front of him. “We can t-talk about this!” he pleaded.

Lara pointed her gun at his head, and turned it sideways. She bit her lower lip and a moment later nodded at him.

He let his hands drop to his sides and let out a sigh of relief.

“Magpaputok!” she yelled as she fired two shots into his body. He crumpled to the ground and fell face first into the sand. Lara frowned as she looked down at his body. “Guess there isn’t anything else to say, is there? Sleep tight.”

Lara gazed at the beautiful sky while she sat on a comfortable reclining chair on the boat. The sun was setting and the sky was pierced with radiant orange and pink streaks. She reflected on her visit to the tomb as she watched Aparri slowly fade out of sight. She was the only person who knew the truth about the legends, and had a small souvenir to remind her of her journey. She steered the boat with her feet as she held fast to her small gold boat. She looked back at her raft which bobbed along faithfully behind the boat. If there was one thing she had learned and was able to practice during her trip, it was to always persevere.

*Premonitions*

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### Lara's Tagalog Dictionary

Tagalog Word	English Translation
Bayad	Pay/Fare
Dos	Two
Hindi	No
Kisame	Ceiling
Kumusta ka?	How are you?
Lechon	Roast pig
Lumubog	To go down
Mabuti ako	I'm fine
Magkano ito?	How much?
Magpaputok	To fire a gun
Magpataas	Raise
Magtiyaga	Persevere
Mahal	Expensive
Mahulog	Fall
Mamaya	Soon
Mangadang gabi	Good evening
Mura	Cheap
Ngayon	Now
Oo	Yes
Pancit	Noodles
Para	Stop the bus
Pumatay	Put to death
Yaman	Riches/treasure