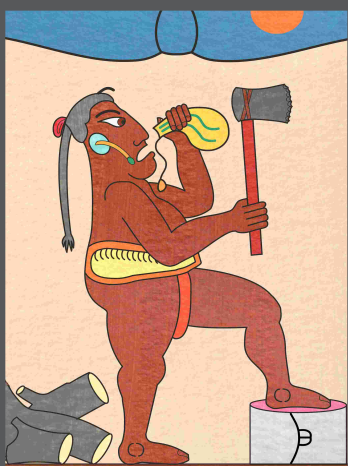


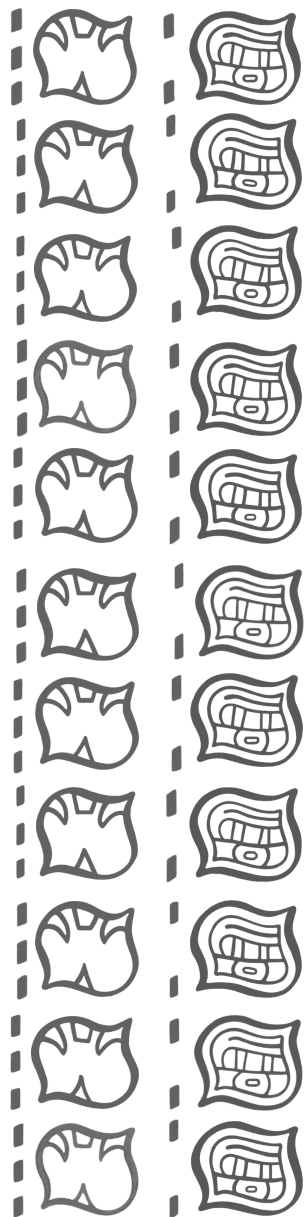
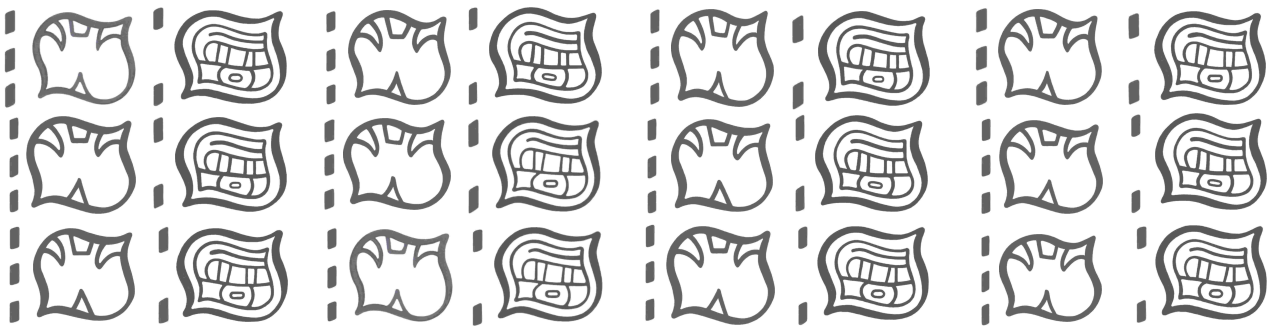
Ashes

The lords and ladies of time do not pause for anyone in this world, or their troubles. Three years have passed since the killing of the priest and the end of my life in the village. When I recovered from my madness I returned to the city, and that is where I live now, like a spirit in the temples of our fathers. Building a hut was not possible for one man, I found an old place that was still strong, in the south of the city, it was only cleaning and a new roof that was needed. This I had done with my brother's hut, and though it was not easy, I completed the work. Food is simpler, there are many old milpas close to here, and many fruit trees in the jungle. For the first year I stole what was not mine, from the fields of my uncles, but after this I kept seeds and planted my own rows in the plazas of our ancestors. In truth the maize and squashes and beans are juicy and satisfying, there are fat pumpkins, everything that is delicious comes from the good earth.

The hunters do not look for me anymore, though they were in the jungle many days after the destruction of Puksik'al Tok. No one comes into the city except perhaps his work-son, Akbal Nik is the new priest now, but I have not seen him here. It is to my ancestors that I speak, when I need to be heard, it is to the gods and goddesses that I pray, and sometimes I return to my village to hear the people in their lives, as I said in the beginning. Only one person has come here since I died to my people, the storyteller Tijun came one year after the killing. How she arranged this I do not know, and she did not say. She came with two men from her lineage and hunted until I was found, and she gave to me a large tablet bearing many images, and many words.

"Every picture-word for every necessary sound is here," was what she said. "The signs for these images contain everything you need to read and write the old words." I agreed to this instruction, and she taught me the signs and their meanings. Forty days was



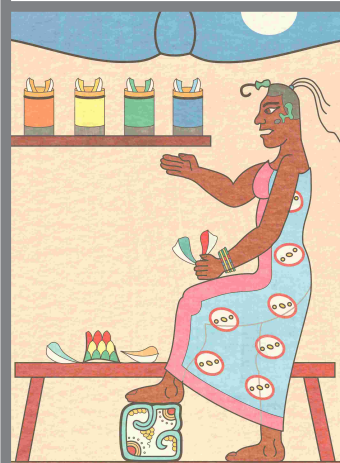


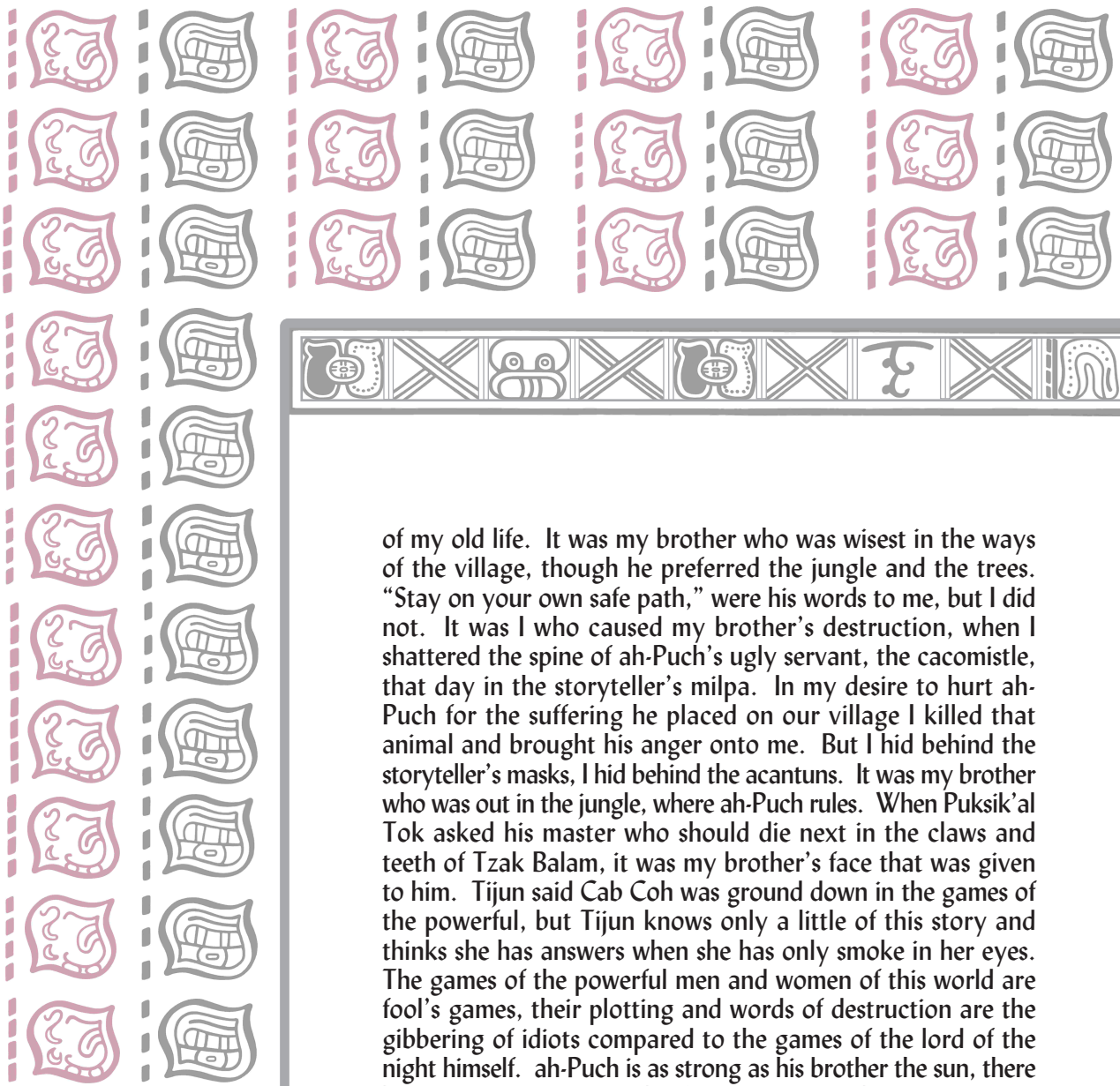
the length of time she and her cousins were in my hut, learning the symbols was not difficult.

When Tijun first arrived in the city I asked her why she had come, and she said that it was not just, what had happened to my brother and to me, because of the struggles of others. Atlatla had told her of my interest in the old ways, and so she decided to find me and teach me the writing of our fathers. This, she said, was her payment to Cab Coh for her part in our destruction. In truth I do not trust this woman or anything she says, and I do not know why she offered to teach me anything or who it might have been that sent her if it was not her own troubled heart. If the powerful women of Chacwitz and the powerful men of my old village are seeking a new game, they must play without my assistance.

Here are a few words about more important things: the second burning of my brother was on the day 11 Sek 7 Cimi of my sixteenth year. When the rains were over I built a pyre near the seven-roomed tomb, and upon this I placed the bones of my brother and the mask that was made for him. Though I wanted to keep this thing, it might have held him in this world, and so it went onto his pyre. When the flames leaped high through his ribs I blew into the conch shell I had found inside the broken temple, I went back into that place and retrieved it for the burning. With this sound, and many prayers, and by incinerating good things for sacrifice, I called my brother through his pyre a second time. And though I did not see him or hear him or smell his scent, after this he did not appear in my dreams again. Soon I will burn those other bones from the crypt, the other five killed by the priest's servant Tzak Balam. I told the powerful men about that place, but no one from their lineages came into the city to find their murdered ones, and I will pray and try to release their souls from the cold misery of the stone tomb.

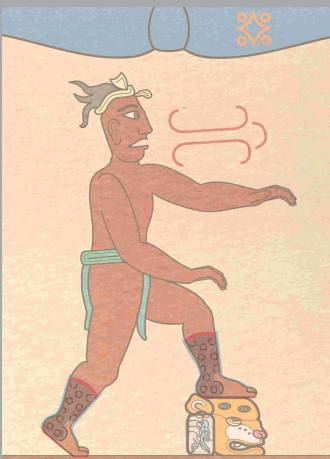
These are my last thoughts, my last words about this matter





of my old life. It was my brother who was wisest in the ways of the village, though he preferred the jungle and the trees. “Stay on your own safe path,” were his words to me, but I did not. It was I who caused my brother’s destruction, when I shattered the spine of ah-Puch’s ugly servant, the cacomistle, that day in the storyteller’s milpa. In my desire to hurt ah-Puch for the suffering he placed on our village I killed that animal and brought his anger onto me. But I hid behind the storyteller’s masks, I hid behind the acantuns. It was my brother who was out in the jungle, where ah-Puch rules. When Puksik’al Tok asked his master who should die next in the claws and teeth of Tzak Balam, it was my brother’s face that was given to him. Tijun said Cab Coh was ground down in the games of the powerful, but Tijun knows only a little of this story and thinks she has answers when she has only smoke in her eyes. The games of the powerful men and women of this world are fool’s games, their plotting and words of destruction are the gibbering of idiots compared to the games of the lord of the night himself. ah-Puch is as strong as his brother the sun, there has never been a man who flicked a dart at him and did not come to grief.

I was: Maxam Cab Coh
 Having served our ancestors faithfully
 Having served ah-Puch truly and well
 Having ended the killing of the lineages
 Today is 17 Ch’en 4 lk
 I am 19 years old, like my brother, Atlatla





And this is the wheeling
of the Milky Way

Tumbling end over end
a canoe, it sinks

Knocks loose the dewy white blossom
spiraling down to this world

This woman, my mother
separates liquid from air

A new CabCoh boy enters the creation
it is true, everyone speaks of it

I will cut my own heart out
to water this sprout

I swear this under Father Sun's face

