

THE MIST CLUB



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First printed edition in Peru in 2019 by Editorial Bruno

Edited by Tony & Vanchi

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HUACA PUCLLANA (1/2)



HUACA PUCLLANA (2/2)



CHAPTER 1

The morning was not yet warm on that cold winter day, and a thick blanket of mist hung between the trunks and treetops, significantly reducing visibility. From Roberto's apartment window, the park's opposite buildings were barely visible.

"The perfect weather to get together," the recent fourteen-year-old exclaimed. He has a slim build and wears oversized glasses with a slight tortoise shell frame.

He took his cell phone and sent his two best friends a WhatsApp. They both lived near another park a few blocks away.

Alejandro's response didn't take long to appear on Roberto's cell phone screen: "I'm on my way. I think Felipe will take a while."

"Hurry. Today we must discuss the situation for the new ones. See you in twenty minutes," Roberto wrote.

"And Veronica?" Alejandro asked.

"She returns from her trip tomorrow. We'll have to decide without her." Before closing the window of his room, Roberto looked around the corner; the ancient Santa Cruz Huaca was almost not visible due to the mist.

According to one of the club's bylaws, the majority had to make the most critical decisions on a misty day, such as new members' entry. That morning was timely for the vote. During the summer, we could dispense with this condition because the mist was rare.

"Good morning!" Roberto greeted his parents, waiting for him in the kitchen. His mom had just served breakfast.

"Good morning, son. Are you hungry?" The woman inquired affectionately.

"You always make everything so delicious, Mom. But I am in a hurry."

"Are you in a hurry?" his father asked. "You must eat well," the man added, elegantly dressed in a jacket and tie. Roberto's father was a lawyer; his mother was a successful graphic designer working from home.

"I know, Dad. But today, we have something significant on the club's schedule."

"I know how much you like meeting your friends at the treehouse," her mother exclaimed affectionately. "Come on, finish your breakfast, and then you can go out," she added while his dad gave him a knowing look.

Some modern buildings surrounded the park, other older ones were now remodeled, and the occasional house still maintained its original architecture. The sea was not far from there, so mist was familiar during winter.

Roberto lived on the third floor of a large, modern building that previously occupied two houses. This street ended in a small oval bordering one of the entrances to a large and beautiful park. In the center of that green area, decades ago, one could find a concrete structure, a kind of play castle.

The structure was removed several years ago, and today, the park presents another aspect, perhaps more orderly, with some games for the little ones and signage according to modern times. At the opposite end of

that street, one of the Santa Cruz Huaca sides in the adjoining block served as an insurmountable barrier.

Roberto's father had lived in one of the houses that preceded the building in which they now resided. As a child, he had played in that same park, so he told his son about how he and his friends had fun outdoors on more than one occasion. As children, they enjoyed every time the municipal gardener let the water run and filled the small furrows and channels that crossed the park. Everyone hurried to put paper boats in the tiny but swift current at that precise moment. The one who managed to make their small floating objects travel the farthest emerged victorious.

There were plenty of soccer balls, bicycles, and roller skates available in those days, but they didn't have aligned wheels; instead, they had one pair in front and one behind. Some even started skating with simpler ones, made of metal tied to their shoes by a couple of thin straps.

Another popular game was that of marbles. Everyone was striving to accumulate as many as possible. Inside each player's bags, one could find cat eyes, comets, sunbursts, watermelons, and endless marbles with designs and colors that made the little spheres so desirable to collect.

Roberto's father also told him about a man who appeared in the park occasionally and sold some powerful slingshots that he had made. The fork, or frame, was finely worked in wood, and at its upper ends, two thick rubber bands were tightly tied, which were joined at the other end to a leather base that was where the projectile was housed— in this case, any stone of the right size that one could collect from the park.

The slings were of outstanding manufacture, so every time that artisan visited the neighborhood, all the boys and some older ones hurried to browse or buy one.

“Be careful and do not hurt someone with that thing. It is somewhat worn, and I think one of the garters should be changed, but it can still hurt,” his father warned him once he found him rummaging through the old things he kept in a worn trunk.

“Don’t worry, Dad. I do not intend to use it. I’m just admiring it,” Roberto replied with his customary composure.

While most teens today spend much of their spare time with video games and smartphones, some parents try to make them appreciate past decades’ options. The trunk contained toys and objects from Roberto’s father’s childhood. Each time his curious son examined an item, it allowed him to share a story or anecdote from his youth during the Mist Club era. Even though he was no longer a child, opening and checking the interior of that old trunk always turned out to be a magical experience for Roberto, one that could hold a particular mystery from time to time.

Roberto finished his breakfast quickly. “We have several things to discuss at the club. We only have a few days of vacation left.”

His parents did not have to remind him that there was little time to go before classes at school would resume and the third semester began.

Roberto kissed his mother on the cheek and another on his father and ran out of the apartment. The mist persisted at that time of the morning, and the imposing presence of the main tree was barely distinguishable from the rest of the trunks, branches, and leaves that populated the park. Sometimes, the mist made everything look beautiful, and sometimes a little lugubrious.

As Roberto got closer, the shapes of the house on the tree became more noticeable. It was a small, stable, and comfortable structure raised in the leafy and robust tree crown. Inside, it could hold up to eight people,

and even though it was in its early thirties, it was still in perfect condition. It had been designed and built by the Mist Club's founding members, including Alejandro's parents, Roberto and Felipe.

The club members used a rope with knots every half meter to climb. In this way, the club members could climb until they reached a thick, horizontally arranged table, which, as a solid rest, allowed them to stand with a minimum balance. You needed a key to open the door; only Roberto and his friends had a copy.

The house was rectangular, almost square, and only three windows pointed toward three of the four cardinal points. As the walls rose far from the trunk on which the house rested, it was almost impossible to access the windows unless one had the agility of a monkey or a squirrel, as had been well established in the club's statutes, in the section on security. However, not long after its construction, cross-shaped bars were added to the windows to increase the impenetrability, a modification also included in the statutes.

"Are you coming?" Roberto wrote on his cell phone.

At that moment, he heard a very peculiar sound from outside the treehouse: a high-pitched screech. He immediately knew it was Alejandro, who had been insisting for days on setting up a call for club members to announce when they were going up to the house. Alejandro's call was intended to resemble that of a predatory bird.

"I know it is you, Alejandro!" Roberto yelled. "Get on at once!"

“You must respond with your particular call,” his friend demanded.

“I don't have a calling, and your hawk impersonation isn't working. It sounded more like a raffle chicken.”

Far from being offended by his friend's words, Alejandro appeared with his usual smile. He is a slightly shorter boy than Roberto, with a thicker build and noticeably short hair. When asked, he said he liked to wear military-style ones.

“Do you know anything about Felipe?” Alejandro asked.

“You told me he was going to take a while.”

“Yes, but I thought he would already be here since it took too long.”

“He'd better hurry,” Roberto exclaimed, “the mist is starting to dissipate, and if it disappears completely, we will not be able to vote.”

At that moment, they heard a kind of growl that came from below and pretended to be very fierce.

“Is that Felipe?” Roberto asked, shrugging.

“Yes. His call is that of a gray bear,” Alejandro explained. “You are not going to tell me it doesn't work out.”

“I have to admit that it comes out a lot better than you, but I am not so sure if it sounds like a bear,” said Roberto.

“Since when have you been a wildlife expert?” Alejandro asked. “Did you know that watching Animal Planet is not enough to learn the sounds of all animals?”

“Hello friends,” Felipe appeared at that moment. “Neither of you answered me, but I knew you were here. I can hear you arguing from a

distance." Felipe played basketball for his school's team and was a big Manu Ginobili fan.

"We will talk about animal calls later," Roberto seemed to complain. "We have little time to vote."

"Very well. We are meeting three of the four members," Felipe took the word. "As long as there is a majority, we can start the club session."

"What are the most critical points on the schedule?" Alejandro inquired, fully aware of the crucial points on the schedule, yet he preferred to uphold the solemn atmosphere in which each session was conducted.

"First of all... ah, yes. "It's still uncertain whether we can maintain the treehouse," Felipe expressed with evident concern.

"Roberto, what did your dad find out?" Alejandro asked.

Before answering, he adjusted his glasses as if he were going to read something.

"He gave me the terrible news this morning. The city council will not let us continue here," Roberto exclaimed with a heavy voice. "The tree is part of a park, considered a public space, so they will not permit us to keep the house. They plan to disarm it and recover the tree."

"But it is a vital part of the club's tradition!" Alejandro exclaimed, excited. "Our parents are the founders, and they built this house. The city council can't take it from us. There must be something we can do."

"Well, I can't think of anything," Roberto confessed.

"Wait, did not Veronica say she had an idea?" Felipe asked.

"Yes, I think she said something like that before traveling," Alejandro replied. "We will have to wait until tomorrow when she returns from Egypt."

"I agree," Roberto stated, "We don't discuss these things on WhatsApp. She has traveled far! I would also like to visit Egypt. The Pyramids of Giza, the Great Sphinx."

"What are the pyramids called?" Alejandro asked.

"I know, I know," Felipe said, "Cheops, Khafre... and Manicure."

"Hahaha! You mean Menkaure," Roberto intervened.

"Well, I was close," Felipe apologized.

"Let us move on to the next point," Roberto continued. "Two applications for admission have been submitted."

Alejandro asked, "Who are they?" He did know who they were, but we already knew he liked formalities.

"Raquel and Ramon, twins. They will be fourteen in a few months," Felipe explained. "They had just moved a block from the park and claimed they were former club members' nephews."

"Do they have proof of what they say?" Roberto inquired.

"Yes, a photo of his uncle with our parents," Felipe showed them the picture on his cell phone.

The three of them didn't take long to recognize their parents in their teenage versions. They laughed and made some jokes for a moment due to their parents' youthful appearance. Only one face was unfamiliar to them, supposedly that of the applicants' uncle Raquel and Ramon.

"Look, Alejandro. Your dad, at your age, had more hair than you," Roberto exclaimed.

"And now he is almost bald," Felipe added. "When you grow up, your cap would also unstitch."

“How hilarious you are!” Alejandro replied. “Well, we still need to find out if our parents knew Ramon and Raquel’s uncle and if he was indeed a club member. Let us move on to the next point. What are their skills?”

“Well, Raquel is a swimming champion,” Felipe explained. “She has won multiple medals and holds records in at least two styles.”

“Very impressive!” Alejandro exclaimed. “It fully meets the requirements for academic or sports excellence. And her brother?”

“That is the problem,” Felipe shrugged. “Ramon doesn’t stand out for his grades, nor in any sport. I have confirmed that he is pretty good in History but not so in the other courses.”

“Have you dug well?” Roberto asked.

“Yes, and I still have not found anything that would allow him to enter the club, at least not directly, like his sister,” Felipe said. “According to the statute, if an applicant doesn’t stand out in his grades or sports, he must prove that he is capable of an act of extraordinary courage,” he reminded them.

“We know the rules well,” Alejandro exclaimed.

“We have the quorum to vote, but it would be best to wait for Veronica to return from her trip before making such an important decision. There is no precedent for twins applying to the club,” Roberto said.

“According to this new application installed on my cell phone, up to four days of mist are forecast for next week,” Alejandro intervened.

“When did you download it?” Felipe asked. “It looks cool!”

“Recently. I was looking for an app that would keep me updated on the world’s weather, and I found this one. It is called Quick Weather.”

“Let me see...” Felipe said.

“It’s very intuitive. And it looks awesome,” Alejandro added.

“You are right. I think I will download it, too.”

“Are you finished?” Roberto interrupted, sometimes losing patience quickly.

His two friends replied almost in unison, “Please continue.”

“Good. Therefore, next week, we will have no problem holding the voting session. As we revisit the treehouse matter, please consider how we might preserve it. It is the club's heart and a tradition we cannot afford to lose.”

“Agree! I am writing it down on the schedule right now,” Alejandro said.

Felipe stood up. “If there is no more to discuss, for now, I declare the session of the Mist Club adjourned. Let us repeat our oath.”

Alejandro and Roberto also stood up, and the three spoke aloud:

We are the proud members of the Mist Club. Let’s always be true to ourselves, our colleagues, and our statutes. Let’s always lend a hand to others who need it and love and protect pets and all animals. Never let the mist that protects us from our enemies cloud our judgment so we can always make the right decision. Long live the Mist Club, and long live Peru!

The mist had dissipated entirely, the day was warming up, and the park was filled with children, pets, and the occasional stroller.

“I will tell Raquel and Ramon that they still have to wait a bit,” Felipe said. “I will explain that this is the first time two applications have been submitted together, and it is taking longer than usual.”

“Good!” Roberto exclaimed. “See you later? We had planned to go to the movies.”

“Yes, we are going to see the terror one,” Alejandro exclaimed. “When is Veronica coming back?” he asked again.

“Tomorrow. I think after lunch,” Roberto said.

“According to my new application, there will be no mist tomorrow. But there is no rush,” Alejandro added. “We will have several days to meet next week.”

“Okay, see you in a few hours for the movies,” Felipe said.

The three said goodbyes with a special handshake, the famous greeting from the Mist Club.