



“It’s thirty dollars for the round trip right?” I ask. “Yes. Thirty dollars, but that is not including my tip” countered the taxi driver. I was fairly confident in his grasp of the English language, but I wanted to be certain he understood. “Of course,” I say “but you will be bringing me back right?” I grasped at my breast pocket as if feeling for the reassuring outline of the cell phone I hadn’t brought with me. Screw the roaming charges. Why did I decide to venture off the resort alone, just as the Caribbean sun was plummeting toward the western horizon with reckless abandon? With good reason (as we shall see), but what could I do now if something went wrong? Before leaving the resort I had purged myself of all valuables as a precautionary measure before venturing into a strange city on my own at night. Now I was wishing I had not been quite so zealous in my caution.

Leaving the heavily guarded resort district of Playa Dorada we turned onto the Avenida Manolo Tavaréz Justo (named after a 1960s revolutionary) and “merged” with a jumble of motorcycles, cars and trucks. “You are a police man or a lawyer” the driver remarked. I looked down self-consciously at my light grey suit, then up at those moving about in the area wearing comfortable shirts and shorts more suitable to the climate. Curious eyes peered back at me - my pale skin together with my manner of dress no doubt drawing their attention. “I am not a police man or a lawyer” I replied; without volunteering anything further. He studied my face for a moment looking doubtful.

‘BUT WHAT COULD I DO NOW IF SOMETHING WENT WRONG . . . ?’

As the street grew more narrow and crowded, the buildings too began to press closer together and press higher one or two (sometimes precarious) stories. We came to a traffic circle and veered to the right into the tangle of narrow streets that make up the downtown of Puerto Plata.



‘THEIR EYES LIT UP WITH IMMEDIATE RECOGNITION. “MASÓN!” THEY EXCLAIMED’

I began to memorize the turns we took. I had no map. In fact, I had no address of where I was going - only the name of a lodge of Masons called Logia Restauracion Numero 11. I had made contact with the Master of the lodge some weeks before when I was planning my trip to the

Dominican Republic. His name is Aoun Mohamad, a soft spoken medical doctor and urologist who moved to the Dominican nearly two decades ago. I called him the day I arrived at the Gran Ventana Hotel just as quickly as I could throw down my suitcase, pull back the zipper and tug out the piece of paper on which I had scribbled his number. He sounded polite, but not friendly. Yes, he told me, I could visit the lodge on Friday. He instructed me to wear a suit and to be there at 6:30 in the evening. I inquired as to how I should get there. The response was that I was to get a cab and to say the name of the lodge; the driver would take me there. I pressed for more. What if the driver didn't know where the lodge met? Was there an address for the building that I could give him? I was assured that the only piece of information I required was the name of the lodge.

“So where would you like me to take you?” asked the driver as though we had never discussed the topic before. We were now entering what seemed to be an older and slightly derelict part of the city. “I'll take you to the police station” he offered confidently, as though he had just solved the pressing and puzzling problem of what to do with me. “No! I'm going to the lodge, the Freemason lodge!” I protested, sounding rather perplexed. He pulled over rather abruptly to the left curb and began to discuss the matter with a group of local men. They decided it was a lawyer I was looking for. Frustrated, I held up my right hand and pointed to the Master Mason's ring on my finger. Their eyes lit up with immediate recognition. “Masón!” they exclaimed and gestured to a building just visible around the corner.

A group of local youth began to call out and run toward me as I paused for a moment across the street taking in the beautiful neoclassical architecture of the temple, its graceful arches and Corinthian columns painted a soft golden hue with blue accents. I slipped through the front gate under an imposing archway and pediment supported by six Corinthian columns and into the courtyard, where a number of handsome palm trees rustled in the soft breeze coming off the ocean just a dozen or so meters away. The front doors of the temple were ajar so I moved quickly up the steps and slipped inside. Several men who were engaged in quiet conversation stopped and looked up as I entered. I smiled broadly as I walked toward them and was met with expressionless but engaging looks. I gripped hands and



introduced myself clumsily in Spanish. One of the group, a tall and distinguished looking gentleman with broad shoulders gestured to a row of chairs lining the wall across the room. I obediently went and sat patiently as a number of men began to enter and prepare for the lodge meeting.

The master of the lodge arrived presently and introduced himself. He was polite and cordial, as were all the other members of the lodge, but I felt a distinct sense of cautious politeness - apprehension even. I presented my dues card from The Beaches Lodge No. 473. It was inspected briefly by the Secretary and

**GENERAL LUPERÓN'S  
PERSONAL SWORD HAD BEEN  
USED BY THE TYLER AT EVERY  
MEETING'**

handed back to me. A young man then introduced himself as Ernesto, and told me that he was assigned to be my translator for the evening. He handed me a piece of paper and a pen and asked me to write down who I was. I sat and waited patiently while the members went into the lodge room and closed the door.

Now it was just the distinguished gentleman and I sitting in the large foyer across from each other. The evening breeze coming off the ocean wafted pleasantly between the wooden slats in the window frames and through the room. He reached out with his left hand and patted the seat next to him. I obediently crossed the room and sat next to him. "I don't speak English, do you understand me?" he said in Spanish. I replied that although my Spanish was not fluent, I could understand him. He then told me proudly that this lodge works all 33 degrees of the Scottish Rite, and that 23 of the 33 active Inspectors General of the Dominican Republic are members of Logia Restauracion No. 11 - including himself.

He then began to tell me the history of the lodge. It was founded in the year 1867 by General Gregorio Luperón. This was the famous Restoration in 1863, winning Dominican Republic from Spain. portrait of the General hanging on personal sword had been used by recently when it was stolen, along artefacts, in a break-in.

The temple had been built as a Temple. He took me back out count with him the paces from the steps as we ascended, we gave the left and the other on the right of then stopped me and had me look mosaic pavement I hadn't noticed He then took me back inside and with original artwork from each of on tables. A very large replica of Supper almost completely covered process of restoring the building



General who had led the War of independence for the then colonial He stood up and gestured to a the wall. General Luperón's the Tyler at every meeting until with a number of other precious

replica of King Solomon's into the courtyard and had me front gate to the steps and the names of the pillars - one on the the porch-way or entrance. He down. We were standing on a it when I first entered the temple. showed me an adjoining room the degrees temporarily lain out Leonardo da Vinci's The Last the far wall. They were in the and were currently working on



this room. They were taking painstaking care to ensure that they kept everything original and of the highest craftsmanship down to the finest detail. On the other side of the Sanctum Sanctorum he showed me another door that was sealed shut. This was the Masters' lodge room he told me. Unfortunately he

**'WE DO NOT HAVE SEASONS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, AND YET THEY ARE PAINTED ON THE CEILING WITH SPRING STARTING OVER THE WORSHIPFUL MASTER'**

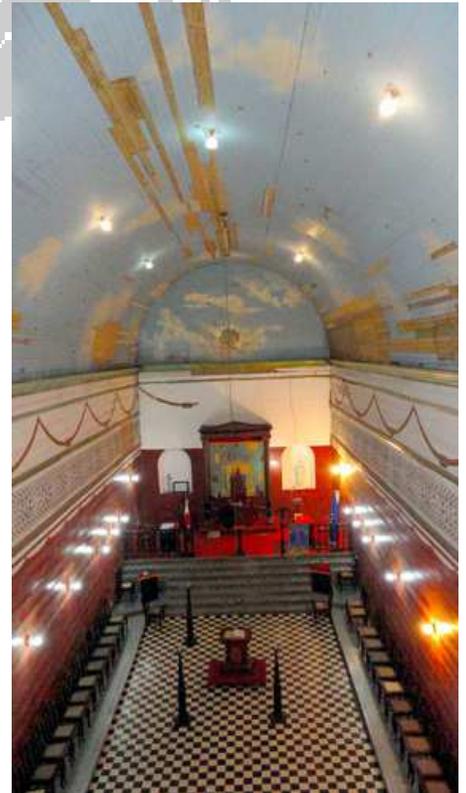
would not be able to show it to me as it was currently in such a state of disrepair that it was not safe to enter. They hope to repair this room soon as it is one of the most beautiful. He then showed me a winding staircase leading to the orchestral loft for the main lodge room: it has exactly 33 stairs.

Finally it was time for me to enter the lodge and the Inner Guard beckoned me through the door. As my eyes adjusted to the dim

lighting I was duly impressed by the beauty of the room. The entire floor is a mosaic pavement. A single row of padded hardwood chairs line the north and south walls on a raised step. The richly painted curtains of the Tabernacle which enclose the room lead up to an intricately carved latticework high above, through which the sweetly scented ocean breeze slips into and cools the room. In the east, seven stairs rise up to the chair of King Solomon on an impressively imposing dais. Niches on either side of this display classical sculptures. Covering all of this is a barrel vaulted ceiling that has been beautifully hand painted in a celestial canopy.

Ernesto, my assigned translator, sat beside me and whispered an explanation of the proceedings. This of course was not strictly necessary as it was all immediately recognizable, though executed in slightly different ways than I am used to. An example of this is the duty of the Senior Deacon. When we open lodge in Ontario we hear that the duty of the Senior Deacon is to carry the messages and commands of the Worshipful Master to the Senior Warden. In our lodges this is not done, save when opening a Fellowcraft lodge in collecting the modes of recognition from the brethren present. In Logia Restauracion the Senior Deacon has a velvet pouch that he carries behind his back and into which the Master and his Wardens place and take notes as he goes between them.

I was graciously given the opportunity to address the lodge. I spoke briefly of how my own belief in the Wisdom of Solomon had led me to begin my journey in the Craft, and that I therefore found it of particular interest that the founders of this lodge had fashioned their temple after that of King Solomon. Following a discussion on this topic, I was given quite a detailed and most interesting account of the restoration project currently under way. It was pointed out to me that the vaulted ceiling was painted not only with a representation of the solar system, but also of the seasons. "We do



not have seasons in the Dominican Republic, and yet they are painted on the ceiling with Spring starting

‘THE TEMPLE HAD BEEN BUILT  
AS A REPLICA OF KING  
SOLOMON’S TEMPLE’

over the Worshipful Master in the East, progressing to Summer over the Alter in the Centre, and finally to Winter in the West over the Senior Warden.”

Ernesto pointed out other things I had not noticed, such as the large light fixture over the Junior Warden which was turned off at the time. “This represents the moon” he told me, “when the lodge is opened is turned off, and when the lodge is closed it is turned back on.”

As soon as the lodge was duly closed the brothers wasted no time in pressing me in the tightest bear hugs imaginable. I was quite taken back by their change in demeanour. One after the other could barely begin to release his embrace when the next was pulling me from the other side. They were thanking me for coming to visit, they were telling me about themselves, and they were telling me of their travels in the Craft. I truly felt as though these were my long-lost best friends.

We talked, we shared stories, and we exchanged invitations for future visits.



At the end of the night Ernesto drove me back to the resort. “That’s what brothers do” he said. His enthusiasm for more Light in Masonry was quite infectious, and we enjoyed a lively conversation on the matter along the way.

‘ONCE YOU SIT IN LODGE  
WITH SOMEONE, HE IS NO  
STRANGER’

Masonry is worked in different ways by different cultures of the global village, and yet it is the same

wherever you go. The beauty of travelling in the Craft, of visiting other lodges - whether in your own district, or in another country and in a different language, is that once you sit in lodge with someone he is no stranger; he is well and truly your brother.



## The Restauration Project

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