

Coffee Addict

Chapter 4 - Muisca

“It wasn’t that Teresa was a kid; she was an adult of twenty five years of age. It was just that Julie treated her like a wayward teen, mainly because of past mistakes. There had been married men with angry wives and at least one married woman with an angry husband.”

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Jorge Alvarez had noticed his wife Gabriela, was becoming used to him leaving home early and getting home late. No weird looks, no grabbing his phone to look for female names he might be calling. Gabriela knew that he was ridiculously busy, and anyway.....She knew she could trust him. Or at least he hoped she knew that. They were currently having breakfast just as the sun was rising. “Oh, those poor kids.” Said Gabi. “The stories in the village..... Some are saying it was a party that got out of control. They’re saying the girl was raped before being killed. Not that I listen to that sort of crap.”

“All nonsense.” Said Jorge. “We have a few ideas about what happened, but no girl was raped. People need something to fill in the gaps in what we know. For some.....They seem to enjoy filling the gaps with complete garbage.”

“The Mendoza’s youngest boy is saying Maria was beaten by drunken boys.” Said Gabi.

No one knew and Jorge wasn’t keen on spreading news of huge creatures roaming around in the jungle close to the plantation. For the locals, it was easier to believe in drunken boys going on the rampage. That had actually happened in the past, though mercifully not that often. There were a lot less cases of rape in the village, than in most large cities.

“Just when we were trying to be gentle when talking to Maria.” Said Jorge. “There were no rapes, no drunken kids on the rampage. Just four decent kids and two of them never came home. I don’t expect you to talk for me, but if you could nudge the conversation a bit.....With your friends.”

“I’ll try, but once a wild story takes root in the village.....But I will try.” Said Gabi. “The colonel arriving didn’t help.....Now everyone thinks there’s a huge conspiracy.”

“Colonel Hector Hernandez is really trying to help.” Said Jorge. “You tell the gossips that.....He could make all the difference.”

“I will.....I am on your side.” Said Gabi.

A quick hug from behind and his wife was off, collecting the breakfast things. There had always been a crossover with the army and the police in Colombia. The colonel was quite famous; he’d captured or killed a large number of drug cartel sicarios. Getting on a bit now, but still clever and full of a need to serve his country. Bogotá had sent the colonel to lead the police task force in the village. It was nice to have a senior guy who had the authority to make decisions. On the other hand, it was a bit daunting to have a clever colonel, who outranked him, by a long way.

“I’m off.....I’ll be late, as usual.” Yelled Jorge, as he left.

“Good luck.” Shouted Gabi.

Jorge’s father had told him a few truths when he’d only been about fourteen. There had been instructions too and his father’s secret to a happy life.

“Find a good woman and.....Don’t lose her son. Treat her like the most precious thing in the world.”

Much of what his father had told him, had drifted into one ear and sauntered out of the other. The bit about finding a good woman had stuck. When Jorge met Gabi, he knew he'd found her. The hard part had been persuading her to marry him.

"One thing for sure.....Kate is too good for him."

Jorge muttered as he drove away from his home in the village, though most of his neighbours called it the town. Village, plantation, or town. He'd noticed that what people called it, tended to depend on their socioeconomic group. His area tended to be middle income professionals, who lived in the 'town.'

"She hardly knows the guy." Mumbled Jorge.

Not that it was his business who Kate Doyle dated, but she seemed so nice. On the other hand, Chad Hudson was the loud, flashy type, who Jorge despised. Now there were rumours that they were sleeping together. If you wanted Chad and he didn't answer his phone, try Kate. That had quickly become known to everyone on the investigation team. None of his business, but Jorge became angry just thinking of Kate and Chad being an item. Gabi would kill him of course, if he seemed to be getting obsessed with the pretty young woman from Calgary. Was he obsessed.....?

"She's just so nice.....And Chad is an arse."

Chad lived in the part of the village closest to the plantation; a long way from where Kate lived. Jorge had been told to go to Kate's place in the north of the village. Why go there ? There had been the promise of something worth its weight in gold. His car bumped the curb as he pulled up outside Kate's rented apartment, they'd know he'd arrived. Kate came out to meet him.

"Sorry to drag you all the way over here, but Chad said you needed one." Said Kate.

Involve the locals and the entire village would know the same day. At least with the team from Canada, there was still some privacy. That would change as they gained friends at the plantation, but for the moment, the locals were giving the Canadians a wide berth.

"Chad made them sound as rare as unicorn droppings." Said Jorge. "I was amazed when he called and said I could collect it today."

"A contact at the embassy was all he told me.....Definitely not our embassy." Said Kate.

The building where Kate had her ground floor apartment, was a fairly recent conversion from a large wooden structure from the early days of the village. It had been a schoolhouse, but now the kids had a purpose built school. All paid for by Julie Yago and the plantation. Jorge followed Kate into her kitchen and made the almost obligatory comments.

"First time I've been inside since the conversion." Said Jorge. "Looks nice.....Lots of windows to let the light in."

"Yeah, it's alright.....I'll get us coffee." Said Kate. "He's in the lounge, with your pocket howitzer."

Jorge had decided it was either the South Koreans or the Israelis, but he had no real idea who was supplying Chad with advanced weapons. It might well be a friend in a local cocaine cartel, Jorge didn't really care. Chad was sat next to Kate's coffee table and he was putting a gun back into its carry case.

"I decided the police chief needed a bit of extra firepower." Said Chad. "Took a while to work you out.....But I'm now sure you're on our side."

"Whose side would that be ?" Asked Jorge.

Chad ignored him, of course he did. The gun in the case was identical to the one Chad had recently used to scare off a wolf type creature. Not easy when the wolf is the size of a horse and had the ability to camouflage itself. Chad admitted the gun hadn't killed it, but it had screamed and run away. That would do for Jorge. Her husband getting home alive at night would please Gabi.

"I've given you lots of ammunition, so get in some practise." Said Chad. "Not for use on people of course, unless it's a case of you or them. This gun will tear pieces out them and leave a very bloody corpse."

"Alright.....I get the idea." Said Jorge. "For use on huge monsters only. I take it you don't expect money for this gun ? I'm just a poorly paid local cop."

"No payment required." Said Chad. "If you run low on ammo, I'll supply more at no cost."

"You guys seem determined to keep me alive." Said Jorge.

"Of course we do." Said Kate.

Kate placed his coffee on the table, together with some warm buttered toast. Even though he'd only just had breakfast, Jorge enjoyed the toast.

"Any instructions, other than point it at the brute and pull the trigger ?" Asked Jorge.

"Hold it quite firmly, both hands if you can." Said Chad. "Got a bit of a kick.....But I've known worse."

Chad had heard that Jorge was going to help him get to the temple on the high plateau. Maybe it was an unspoken thank you, or maybe it was to help him stay alive until they got there. Whatever the reason, Jorge was happy to have a weapon that would actually hurt the creatures. Up close and between the eyes and it might even kill it.

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"I'm glad we were able to agree changes to a few procedures." Said Colonel Hernandez. "Only for the duration of the investigation. Then everything will revert to being as it was."

Doc Perez was nervous of the colonel; just about everyone looked on edge when the famous man talked to them. Hernandez had been tough, many would say too tough. There were even rumours of him using private militias to root out Narcos hiding in the jungle. Yes, the end might have justified the means, but Hernandez would never lose his reputation for being a dangerous man to get on the wrong side of. He was of course, the ideal person to be leading a monster hunting task force.

"The plantation laboratory will perform the autopsies now, I understand." Said Doc Perez. "I will use the cause of death they find, on death certificates. In extreme cases, I will authorise a burial before a cause of death can be given. A procedure used in times of war.....I did call Bogotá and it is legal."

"Good, everything has to be legal.....We just need to move more quickly." Said the colonel.

There had been a lot of praise, which were really thinly veiled threats. The colonel had laughed about him retiring early, of sunbathing all day on the beach at Cartagena.

"Maybe living in a condominium for the elderly." The colonel had said.

As if a doctor from a one horse town could afford that. It was do as Colonel Hernandez said, or they'd replace him with someone who would. Doc had called a few people he knew at the Ministry of Health in Bogotá. They'd reminded him of two fairly serious errors that could have led to him being fired. The general consensus was that he should be thankful for still being the doctor of a one horse town. How many children had he brought into the world ? How many house calls when he was feeling unwell himself ? None of it seemed to matter, when they wanted him to bend the rules or retire. Doc Perez had decided to go with the flow and agree to everything.

"It will be my name and signature on the documentation." Said Doc Perez. "There may be times when I need to verify results."

The colonel looked around the back room of the Doc's medical practise. The elderly freezer, the grubby tiles that were probably home to some exotic types of bacteria. There was a stool sample in a container, which had been on his desk for a while. It was a look that shouted a thousand insults, without actually saying a word.

“There can be no deliberate delays, Juan Perez.” Said the colonel. “If I suspect you’re holding things up to be awkward, things could be very bad for you, very bad. I hope you understand what I’m saying ?”

Doc didn’t not really, but he understood that the consequences wouldn’t include lying on a deck chair on the beach in Cartagena. One of his poor diagnoses had been a serious enough error to warrant a criminal investigation. Medical incompetence was no excuse, when someone ended up with having a limb amputated. There was no local prison, but the jail in Manizales was infamous for many things, all of them bad.

“I understand.....You will have my total cooperation.” Said the Doc.

Michelle Thorpe was living the millionaire lifestyle and loving it. A really nice set of rooms in Hacienda Yago, with all her laundry done for her. No less than two full length swimming pools, one indoors. Several refrigerators in the main kitchens, which were always full of nice things to eat. At least two cooked meals a day of course, three at weekends when she ate lunch with the family. Just by grazing fruit bowls around the hacienda, she could have eaten better than she often did in Ottawa. Michelle tended to eat junk food back home, and takeaways, which would catch up with her one day. The one drawback ? Julie Yago expected her to be sober and ready to defend the family, at any time of the day or night. Being permanently sober might be good for her, but it was driving her nuts. Michelle wanted a little booze and adult company. Teresa Correa wanted basically the same thing, though her mother didn’t trust her.

“If you say you’re going with me, my mum will let me go.” Said Teresa. “It’ll be a good party.....All Jaimie’s parties are really good.”

“Lots of booze ?” Asked Michelle.

“Oh yes, and lots of good looking guys.” Said Teresa. “We can both have a great night and mum never needs to find out.....Agreed ?”

It wasn’t that Teresa was a kid; she was an adult of twenty five years of age. It was just that Julie treated her like a wayward teen, mainly because of past mistakes. There had been married men with angry wives and at least one married woman with an angry husband. One accidental pregnancy was muttered about, though Julie never mentioned it. That pregnancy had been dealt with and Michelle had no wish to know the details. It was Julie’s fault though. By being overprotective she’d created a perpetual teenage daughter.

“Ground rules, Teresa.” Said Michelle. “No going off with a guy, you stay at the party and leave with me.”

“Awwww, I wanted some fun.” Said Teresa.

“You can have fun, at the party.” Said Michelle. “There must be spare bedrooms and quiet places to get naked.”

“Yeah, there are spare rooms.” Said Teresa. “I agree, we arrive and leave together.”

“No tantrums.....You go ballistic on some poor girl and I’ll drag you home if I have to.”

“Christ ! You sound like my mum.” Said Teresa.

“I’ve seen you in full bitch mode.” Said Michelle. “Agree and I’ll ask your mum.....We can be at the party in half an hour. Or, we can watch TV and put some popcorn in the microwave. Your choice ?”

“Alright, I’ll be nice.” Said Teresa. “I even promise to play nice with others.”

“Let me down and I won’t teach you how to use a gun.” Said Michelle.

“Stop nagging.....I will behave.”

Michelle quite liked Teresa, the way aunts can like a favourite eccentric niece. She'd already agreed to train Teresa in the use of firearms. They needed each other. Teresa needed someone her mum trusted, to take her places where she could enjoy drink and men. Michelle needed to look after Teresa to ensure her millionaire lifestyle didn't come to an abrupt halt. Plus there'd be guys at the party and it had been a while. Michelle had needs that hadn't been taken care of for a few weeks. "Put on your party frock.....I'll ask your mum if you can go." Said Michelle.

Was Julie Yago a little too eager to get her daughter out of the house for the night ? She definitely hadn't needed much persuasion to agree to Teresa going to the party.

"Just.....Keep an eye on her, you know what she's like." Julie had said.

"I will.....Both eyes most of the time."

No using a company car when there were several top end luxury vehicles in the family garage. The cars were another part of Michelle's millionaire lifestyle, which she was really going to miss. There was something about going shopping in an expensive Porsche. Not that Michelle would let Teresa drive, the girl was a lunatic driver. She could decide which car to take though.

"Which one, Teresa ?" Asked Michelle. "Arriving in the Maserati would create an impression."

"Too noisy and it might rain." Said Teresa. "We'll take the Range Rover mum uses as a run around. It'll cope with bad roads, mud and.....Comfortable enough to screw in the back."

Michelle was ten years older than Teresa, but there were times when she felt like the younger sister of a much more experienced Teresa. It was living on the plantation of course, men, booze and going crazy, were the only pass times.

"Alright.....Let's get to the party." Said Michelle.

Michelle didn't bother to try the SatNav; she knew the village pretty well by now. The SatNav was erratic at the best of times. The satellites were up there doing their thing, but the system needed details of what was on the ground. So far, no one had fully entered the Yago Plantation into the system. Michelle felt the need for a little small talk.

"Your dress is nice."

"I like it.....I bought it for my last birthday party." Said Teresa.

The chunky car had been a good idea; there was a long muddy section of road, despite there being no rain for at least three days. The four wheel drive handled the mud and wheel ruts with no problem at all.

"Do you have a guy ? Back home I mean.....Is there anyone ?" Asked Teresa.

"It's complicated." Said Michelle.

Teresa had the expression of someone who'd just found a cockroach in her burger. Michelle wanted the girl to trust her and trust worked both ways. Tell a little and then ask a little.....It was how women had been bonding for thousands of years.

"Just between us.....Alright ?" Asked Michelle.

"I never tell mum anything you tell me." Said Teresa.

"I was in the military for a while, being sent all over the place." Said Michelle. "No time for full time relationships and short term ones became all I wanted. There is a man I see regularly and.....One particular woman."

"Wow, cool.....I slept with a married woman." Said Teresa. "Only a few times, but my mum went nuts. You'd have thought I'd killed someone."

Michelle again had the feeling that she was sat next to a girl in her mid-teens. Spoiled all the time and smothered by an over protective mother. Poor Teresa was never likely to be allowed to properly grow up.

“At least your mum knows.....I still haven’t told my mum.” Said Michelle.

“Really ?.....It’s left at the next turning to get to Jaimie’s place.” Said Teresa.

No street lights and very dark, though the car had really good headlights. When Michelle saw a glow to her left, she thought it was a car on a side road. Not with lights like that though, it looked like a large glowing object of some kind.

“Idiot.....He’ll dazzle us at the turning.” Said Teresa.

“That’s not a car.” Muttered Michelle.

It came through the trees, which should have been impossible. The large glowing object must have come out of a field, before coming straight through the roadside trees and bushes. Michelle saw legs and a head, before it hit their Range Rover. Teresa screamed and Michelle was glad she’d got Julie’s daughter into the habit of always using seat belts. There was a screeching sound as the car began to roll over, side over side, towards a drainage ditch.

“Hold on.....Stay in the car when it stops.” Yelled Michelle.

Michelle had been given driver training while serving in the military. Nothing fancy, but an instructor who’d driven around a few members of the Canadian government. He knew from experience, which parts of by the book training were great. He also knew which parts were likely to get you killed.

“Unless it’s on fire.....Stay inside the vehicle.” He’d told her. “The metal shell can absorb much more punishment than your skin.”

How the car was rolling mattered too and the car was rolling side over side, which was good. Unless the Range Rover hit something hard, or burst into flames, they had a good chance of survival.

“End over end rolls are really bad.” The instructor had told her. “End over end at speed.....You’re pretty certain to die.”

The ditch was fairly dry, which was good. Their car rolled and collided with the far side of the ditch.

There was an agonising jolt which seemed to jar her entire spine.

“Fuck !” Muttered Michelle.

The car’s engine had cut out, but the lights were still on. Michelle left them on. If anyone was looking for them, having the car lit up like a Christmas tree, would help. Her next concern was Teresa, who looked to have been knocked out by the car hitting the side of the ditch. She was sort of hanging in her seatbelt. As Michelle went to check for a pulse in her neck, the girl’s eyes opened.

“Teresa.....That’s a relief; I thought you were out cold.”

“Has it gone ? Are we alright ?” Asked Teresa.

“I can’t see the glow anywhere.....Sit for a moment; I’ll see what your mum considers to be travel essentials.”

A gun would have been nice, or a flashlight in the glove box. Best of all would have been a satellite phone of some kind, any make would do. The Range Rover really was Julie Yago’s shopping car, the glove box contained about six months of receipts from the large supermarket in the village.

Tempting to look in the trunk, but that probably contained just one of those reflective triangles.

“Anything beginning to hurt ?” Asked Michelle.

“No.....Can we leave ? I’m scared it might come back.” Said Teresa.

Michelle was beginning to think along the same lines. The thing had been huge and might come back to finish stomping their car to death. Michelle’s door was jammed, rammed into the side of the ditch.

“Alright, we’ll leave from your side.” Said Michelle. “Get out slowly and if anywhere starts causing you pain, let me know.”

“How do we get back home ?” Asked Teresa.

“Being honest, I have no idea.” Said Michelle. “I’m seriously considering setting fire to the car. That’s likely to get someone’s attention.”

It was dark once they were beyond the car’s lights, very dark. Michelle was helping Teresa to walk, but she might have underestimated her own injuries. It was the jarring of her back, as the car had hit the side of the ditch. Michelle’s back felt as though it was on fire, just below her shoulder blades.

“We’ll get among the trees and have a think about what to do next.” Said Michelle.

“You’re walking weird.....Are you alright ?”

“Not really, my back hurts like fuck.”

“Burn the car if you like, it’ll be insured.” Said Teresa. “I’ll never tell anyone.....It can be one of our little secrets.”

She was employed by the people who owned the plantation; paid to investigate the weird goings on, as reported by Julie Yago. Destroying a very expensive vehicles was huge and definitely not the sort of thing she was supposed to be doing. It was dark though and hours away from dawn. The glowing monster hadn’t come back, but that didn’t mean it wouldn’t.

“Do you have a matchbook in your purse ?” Asked Michelle. “Or one of those disposable lighters ? I’ve nothing on me that could start a fire.”

“Here.....But bring it back.” Said Teresa. “It reminds me of someone a bit special.”

It was a genuine Zippo lighter, which produced a steady flame at the first try. It had a red enamel heart on the side and was obviously a gift from one of Teresa’s lovers.

“How close are we to Jaimie’s house ?”

“Close.....Everyone will see the flames as the car goes up.” Said Teresa.

“I’ll bring the Zippo back.” Said Michelle.

The walk back to the car felt longer than the walk to where Teresa was waiting among the trees. Michelle’s back had gone from a burning sensation, to a very painful throbbing. The glove compartment first, the supermarket receipts, would be easy to light. They went in a pile on the leather passenger seat.

“There’ll be all sorts of crap in the trunk.....Always is.” She muttered.

There was, including a huge pile of carrier bags. Julie Yago had probably been intending to put them in the recycle bin, for several years. The receipts mixed in with the bags, made the perfect start to a good fire. There were also a few cardboard cartons in the trunk, which went into the growing pile of flammable material.

“Please don’t explode too soon.....I can’t run.” She mumbled.

Michelle set fire to her pile of assorted crap and began to hobble back towards where Teresa would be waiting. Her back was getting worse; the hobble became a slow and painful trudge. For some reason her left ankle joint refused to move. Michelle was left walking flat footed, while in constant agony from her back.

“Why me ? She could have asked one of her friends to bring her to the party....Why me ?”

The flames from the expensive burning vehicle, were already lighting up her path. There was Teresa, waving at her from between two trees. Weren’t all car interiors supposed to be fire retardant these days ? They seemed to burst into flames for almost no reason, but that was in movies. Michelle carefully sat on the ground near Teresa, and watched the burning car.

“I thought it would have.....” Said Teresa.

The explosion was wonderful, a real crowd pleaser, if there had been a crowd. Julie tended to keep the gas tank full in her shopping car. Probably over twenty gallons of fuel, had just exploded like a

scene from a Tom Cruise film. The flames reached twice the height of the trees, filling the night sky with bright light.

“They must notice that, no matter how drunk they are.” Said Michelle.

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Early morning in the woods close to the village. Really early; the time when most were still waiting for their coffee machine to finish gurgling. Alice Santos was a rarity in the village, a Brazilian. Some would say moving from a country where most of the population spoke Portuguese, to Colombia, where most spoke Spanish; was an unnecessary complication in her already busy life. Her husband had died though and there were no children. At the age of fifty one, Alice had been running a drug store in São Paulo and looking for a fresh start, a complete reset of her life. Flyers for real estate were always arriving in the mail and on one fateful morning, Alice had actually read one of the flyers. Usually they went straight in the bin, but that particular one, had caught her eye. It was for the sale of a thriving drug store business in Colombia. It was in what the flyer called ‘the village,’ which had sounded nice. Alice had looked up the address and saw that the business was reliant on custom from employees of the Yago Plantation. More digging and it looked to be almost a monopoly, the only dispensing drug store in the village. Alice had bought the store and two years later, she didn’t regret it.

Learning Spanish hadn’t been that hard, though she’d still never describe herself as fluent in the language. It had surprised her though, how many in the village spoke passable Portuguese.

“Rusty !” Yelled Alice. “Come on boy, we need to go home.”

The dog was relatively new, mainly to give her an excuse to exercise every day. Walking about on her own had felt a bit weird, so she’d bought a dog from a breeder in Manizales. Why Rusty ? She’d had a dog as a kid, who’d been called Rusty. Her dog seemed to have something better to do than come running when she yelled.

“Rusty !.....Come here.....You nuisance.” Alice shouted.

Like many in the village, Alice didn’t think she was at that much risk of being eaten by the local bogeyman, or whatever it was. Rusty definitely hadn’t been bought for protection; her furry little mongrel seemed scared of his own shadow. Alice wasn’t one of them, the kids and young people who seemed to be getting into most of the trouble on the plantation. It was youngsters who were the problem. There was talk of a group of boys, getting drunk and aggressive. Rape had been mentioned, though Gabi Alvarez had said that was nonsense. Whatever the truth, Alice felt reasonably safe in the morning and close enough to the village to see rooftops through the trees. Her dog barked and he didn’t sound that far away.

“I bet he’s found another dead and decaying possum.” Alice muttered.

Rusty barked again and Alice walked towards the sound. Weren’t dogs supposed to come to their owners and not the other way around ? Gabi Alvarez had advised her to buy a cat, but a cat didn’t give her an excuse for early morning exercise.

“Rusty !” Alice yelled. “This is no longer funny.”

He’d come back muddy in the past and smelly. Her dog seemed to have a knack for finding noxious things to roll about in. Two more barks and Alice was sure she knew where he was. Whatever he’d found smelled of decay, of course it did; it was the kind of thing he revelled in. At first Alice thought her pet had found another rotting possum, but the dead creature was bigger than that, much bigger. She had to laugh, as her dog pulled at the brute’s black fur, as though he wanted to drag the carcass home.

“That is a bit big to bring home.” Said Alice.

Rusty was trying, though the dead beast had to weigh twenty times as much as he did, maybe fifty times as much. Alice had Rusty's lead in her bag. A quick click to attach it to his collar and there'd be no more running off, at least not that day. Rusty was snarling at the corpse.

"I think you found one of them, Rusty." Said Alice. "A dead one, but it might make you famous. Rusty.....Finder of the beast of the Yago Plantation."

About the size of horse, with the basic features of a wolf. It had the teeth of a wolf. Dangerous looking teeth that made Alice happy the thing was dead and decaying. What had killed it? Alice had no idea, but she was sure the police team from Bogotá would find out.

"Stop pulling at the lead, Rusty.....You'll choke yourself." Alice muttered.

Alice had a thriving business and two staff to look after it. The idea of being at the mercy of the crap cell phone reception in the village; was unacceptable. She had a satellite phone, a good one. A phone guaranteed to work when there was something like a dead monster to report. Alice petted her dog, forgetting he was quite smelly. Some dead creature goo was transferred to her hand.

"Oh, shit.....I should have bought a cat." Alice muttered.

Alice could have called Jorge, or the people from Canada. There was the official police presence too, the trailers and vehicles from Bogotá. Alice had been in the village for a while though; she understood the workings and politics of the place. She called Julie Yago.

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Jess Fisher didn't mind doing the hard work, if it seemed to be part of her remit. Mainly she saw herself as the enhancer of good public relations opportunities and a burier of bad PR. Above all, any bad press stories, had to be kept to a minimum, by fair means or foul. Not that any of that was in her six page contract and job description. Feeling like David Sullivan's unofficial PA; that definitely wasn't in her job description. Jess liked the guy though and he had a reputation for being loyal to his staff. As long as she could see a point to all the ancient religion research, Jess was willing to play along. She was sat at one end of a table in the main office of the Yago Plantation. Usually a meeting room, but the large and airy space was theirs for the duration of the investigation. They'd even been allowed to change the locks on the doors.....

"Sorry to dump this on you, Jess." Said David. "It started off as a bit of curiosity really, but now I've done some research; I think it might be significant and useful."

"I went online last night." Said Jess. "I get the basic idea of Muisca. Chiminigagua the supreme being, kind of like what most people would call God. Then, just to complicate things, there's a Sun God who is called Sué. The more I read, the more deities I discovered. My current favourite is Chibchacum, the God of rain and thunder. All fascinating stuff.....But I'm not sure what I'm supposed to achieve?"

Research for its own sake, had never been her thing. If it had been, she'd have probably stayed on at college, doing post grad studies until she was old and grey. Jess needed a purpose of some kind, an ultimate goal. Above all of course, she wanted to keep David happy. David dropped a file in front of her, with 'The Plateau' scribble on the front.

"What if I told you that the entire village, with a few notable exceptions, practice the ancient Muisca religion?" Asked David.

"Wow, that would be worth delving into." Said Jess. "Really practise, or just a few ritual acts, the way we send out Christmas cards?"

"No we, Jess.....You need to forget being part of your own religion and, as you said....Delve into this with an open and unbiased mind." Said David.

"Now it really does sound interesting." Said Jess.

Jess flicked open the file, to find notes in David's spider scrawl. Jorge was mentioned and Chad, which surprised her. There were aerial pictures of somewhere called the high plateau. Julie Yago's personal satellite phone number was in the file. That was supposed to be given out to no one, not even some of Julie's own family.

"There is a Muisca temple on the high plateau." Said David. "Chad is organising an expedition to go there. Julie Yago has promised her full cooperation. I'd like you to go, though it might be dangerous. You'd be a volunteer; I can't order you to go."

"I'd love to go..... Can I take a camera?"

"Yes, though they're not for posting on the likes of Facebook."

Jess knew the answer, but had to ask the question. It would give her the purpose and goal she needed to be at her best.

"You think the creatures are linked to the temple, don't you?" Jess asked.

"I suspect that might be the case." Said David. "I was going to hire in an expert on Muisca, all the way from Jerusalem of all places. They'd leak though, outside experts always leak. I want you to be our expert. By the time we're at the temple, I want you to know the significance of anything we find. It'll be hard work.....Will you do that for me?"

"Yes.....You have to take me now, or I'll get nuts." Said Jess.

"There will be your usual job too." Said David. "We'll still need you to get between us and the media, the hostile parts of the media."

"I can do both.....I promise I can do both jobs." Said Jess.

"Fine.....Go and become our Muisca expert."

Jess was happier than she had been in quite some time. Her knowledge of the family of Gods worshipped in Muisca was still a bit of a mess, but she could get the job done. Her favourite Muisca deity was Cuchavira, God of the rainbow. Jess thought all religions should have a God of the rainbow. On the slightly negative side, Muisca advocated human sacrifice. She hoped there wasn't too much evidence of that in the temple.

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Teresa Correa rolled over and looked at the bedside clock. It was showing five in the morning, but she knew what her dad was like. Nice of him to call to make sure she was alright, especially as no one else seemed to care. He was an early bird though, which meant she needed to get up, showered and dressed in the clothes she'd put on for Jaimie's party. She hadn't meant to wake Ziplock, but her elbow caught him across the jaw, as she clambered out of the bed.

"Hey.....Where are you going?" Asked Ziplock. "It's still the middle of the night."

Teresa had no idea why he was called Ziplock; a few of Jaimie's buddies had weird names among their friends. Ziplock had come to investigate the fire after Michelle had set her mum's Range Rover alight. Two vehicles had arrived to rescue them; Ziplock in an old truck and Jaimie's uncle in a BMW. After a lot of talk about the glowing beast, their saviours had taken them to the party at Jaimie's. It had been a pretty cool party, though Teresa had no idea how she'd ended up in bed with Ziplock, but he had, kind of, rescued her and Michelle.

"Michelle called my mum when we arrived." Said Teresa.

Thankfully, Jaimie was old school and had a land line phone that actually worked.

"My dad will probably be here by six." Added Teresa. "He can't find me naked, grubby.....And in your bed."

"Not my bed, but no one else was using it." Said Ziplock. "I thought your dad was cool and it was your mum who was a bit tightly wound."

“My dad is cool, he probably doesn’t care who I sleep with.” Said Teresa. “It’s just that.....I’d feel bad if he saw me.....You know.”

“No, Teresa.....I don’t get it.” Said Ziplock. “Oh, and Jaimie’s sister might have some clean clothes you can borrow.”

“Roberta is five inches taller than me and a hundred pounds heavier.”

No use, his head had touched the pillow and Ziplock was asleep again. Teresa wasn’t that worried about clean clothes, she’d always intended to spend the night at Jaimie’s. Who was Jaimie ? That was a very long story, but he was really an old friend of her mum. Teresa picked up her dress from the floor, though it took a few minutes to find her shoes and panties. Another look at the bedside clock.

“Crap.....Five twenty.....I have to shower.” She muttered.

A very quick rummage among the drawers and there was a large bath towel. It had the look of something not that dirty, but not that clean either. It would do. Hopefully there’d be shower gel in the upstairs bathroom, there usually was. Along the corridor and everything was silent. It felt as though she was the only person awake in the large house. Michelle would be in one of the rooms, maybe not on her own.

“Nothing stirring.....Not even a mouse.” Teresa muttered.

Michelle said that calling her mum had been a bit of an anti-climax after escaping the glowing beast. It seemed there were other dramas playing out in the plantation and a monster seen for a few seconds, just couldn’t compete. Everything would be revealed once they were back in Hacienda Yago. Oh and by the way.....Teresa’s dad would drive over in the morning, to pick them up from Jaimie’s. Teresa loved her dad, but she didn’t relish the idea of him seeing her in post party mode at Jaimie’s.

“Hey.....decent shower gel and shampoo.” She muttered.

An epic victory after a party night. Teresa stepped under the hot shower and instantly felt better. Curiosity began to set in.

“What the hell happened on the plantation last night ?” She mumbled.

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