

Coffee Addict

Chapter 1 – Star-Crossed Lovers

“Chad Hudson was a bit of a mystery to her too, though she wasn’t about to admit it. Office rumours mentioned him being from Chile, which might well be total crap. He’d been met by a messenger at the airport, who’d given him a gun in a carry case.”

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Bea had chosen the place for their picnic. Beatrice really, her mother was quite religious and had named her after Saint Beatrice. It sounded an old fashioned name to Bea, so she’d begun to tell her friends to call her Bea. Only her mother and grandmother, still called her Beatrice. They were currently walking north along Plantation Road 4, on a glorious Sunday afternoon. Alex was trudging along behind her, while carrying most of the makings of their romantic picnic.

“There, behind the trees is a dip in the ground.” Said Bea. “No one uses this road at weekends.....We’ll be able to enjoy ourselves in peace.”

“It looks a really nice place.” Said Alex.

Bea would be eighteen at her next birthday, but that was six months away. If everything went as planned, Alex was going to be her third lover. Her mother probably still thought she was a virgin, but times had changed, even in rural Colombia. Compared to many of her female friends, Bea was a good girl. They’d brought blankets, mainly to cover the crab grass and make the ground more comfortable. Bea smoothed out the blankets and began to empty the bag Alex had carried all the way from the village.

“You’re right.....No one on the road will be able to see us.” Said Alex. “How did you find this place ?” In other words, had she been there with the last man in her life ? It was that thing about men. None of them wanted a girl with no experience, but no one wanted to date a girl with too high a mileage. It was all a game and Bea was still young enough to enjoy the game.

“Elena and I found it.....When we were at school.” Said Bea. “We came here a lot; sometimes we brought a bottle of beer.”

“Wow, you villains.” Said Alex.

Alex was nice, which was why their kissing and touching, had brought them to her favourite place in the coffee plantation. Bea saw no reason to go out with unpleasant men, when there were so many nice ones in the world. Alex was about a year and a half older than her and he too worked for the plantation. Everyone still called it the Yago Plantation, but it had been bought by a large food and beverage company in Canada. That had happened the year before Bea had left school and like everyone else in her village, she’d gone to work on the plantation.

“Everything is a bit warm, but I chose food that doesn’t go off that quickly.” Said Bea.

“Oh, warm beer.....I expect we’ll survive.” Said Alex.

They’d kissed a lot over the last few weeks and there had even been some heavy petting. The main event though, as she thought of it; was going to happen after they’d eaten warm sandwiches and consumed warm beer. If they did eventually die of food poisoning, they might at least die with a smile on their faces.

“Did you bring.....You know; the things ?” Bea asked.

Her catholic upbringing made it almost impossible for her to call them rubbers, or condoms. She could use quite vulgar names when drunk, but she was currently just about sober and feeling a little nervous.

“Yes.....I bought a whole box full.” Said Alex.

“I’ve never seen a box full.....Show me.” She asked.

An excuse really, to move really close to him. The large box of Duo condoms was purple and she really had never seen such a huge box.

“Wow, Alex.....Talk about being prepared.” Said Bea.

She leant in towards him and gave him an open mouthed kiss; tongues and everything. No holding back, not today. Bea was fed up with the whole list of the things nice girls didn’t do. She was nice, or at least no one had ever suggested she wasn’t. She just wanted to enjoy sex with her new boyfriend. Her hand undid the belt on his jeans and Alex actually moaned a little. His hand went up under her skirt and a finger went behind her panties. Bea was moist, actually already quite wet. And much to her relief, Alex knew where to use his finger.....

“Sorry, did I hurt you ?” Asked Alex. “I tried to be gentle.”

She’d not frozen because of anything Alex was doing. She could see what he couldn’t. There had been weird rumours about creatures in the woods next to the plantation. Mole rats someone had called them, or things that looked like mole rats. Bea had never seen a mole rat, but she was sure they weren’t the size of whatever was watching them. It was near where they’d arrived, yet she was sure it hadn’t been there. How could anything so huge, move without being heard ?

“I’m so sorry, Bea.” Said Alex. “Talk to me.....Are you alright ?”

Her throat had constricted out of fear, but she could feel it relax a little. She pointed behind Alex, at where the plantation road left the trees. It was there, crouching amongst the undergrowth. Her voice when it came, was broken but probably understandable.

“There.....It’s watching us.” She said.

Alex turned and gasped, as he saw the massive creature amongst the trees. Larger than the horses from Julie Yago’s stables, much larger. How had it managed to get so close to them, without making a sound ? Did it intend to hurt them ?

“What the hell is it ?” Asked Alex.

Its fur was black and as it opened its mouth, Bea saw a row of large yellow teeth. Whatever it was, it wasn’t a mole rat. When it moved, it moved very fast. It was on them and Bea saw blood everywhere and felt immense pain. Mercifully the pain didn’t last long. Just a few moments of agony; before she felt nothing at all.

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Julie Yago still ran the plantation, pretty much the same as she’d always run it. The local people knew her and their families had worked for her family for at least a century. They knew her and a food conglomerate in Canada meant nothing to them. Many thought she’d take the huge amount of money she’d made from selling the plantation and move to somewhere luxurious, comfortable and maybe a little exotic. Julie liked that part of Colombia though and, on the whole, she liked the people who lived there. The only people who treated her differently after the sale were lawyers and bankers and she didn’t give a damn about them. Yes, it did feel weird to send a weekly report to a boss in Canada, but the Canadians rarely bothered her.

“When you said it was bad, Jorge.....I had no idea you meant this bad.” Said Julie.

Jorge Alvarez was the local head of police, which consisted of just him and two fairly junior officers. A professional cop, there were no elected local law enforcement officials in rural Colombia. He had

to be about forty now and like Julie, his family had lived in the area for a very long time. They were stood in a fairly small shed, which wasn't that far from where Bea had spread out her picnic with Alex.

"Been bitten and partly eaten by something." Said Jorge.

"Do we know them, Jorge?" Asked Julie. "I expect we do.....Someone who doesn't work for the plantation, is a rare find."

"Both of them worked for you." Said Jorge. "They had bank cards on them.....Just as well; whatever nibbled at them seemed quite keen on eating their faces. They'd brought a picnic with them and.....A huge number of condoms."

"Poor bastards.....I hope they had a little fun before it happened." Said Julie.

Whatever had eaten bits of them, had devoured a weird mixture of soft tissues, bone and even a few of the couple's teeth. She was just a week away from her fifty fifth birthday, and Julie had never seen anything like it.

"What does Doc Perez think?" Julie asked.

Dr Juan Perez was their local medical guy, who dealt with everything from childhood diseases to care for the elderly. He was close to retirement, but had been close to retirement for quite a while. Not the most reliable medical guy Julie had known, but Doc Perez was all they had.

"He hasn't seen the bodies.....I haven't even told him about them." Said Jorge.

"Oh, come on Jorge." Said Julie. "We both know the Doc is a problem, but there's no easy answer. You can't cut him out of the loop. Doc Perez has to sign a death certificate, or they aren't official dead. No certificate and their families can't get them in the ground. So.....Get your guys to send these poor star-crossed lovers to the Doc."

"Star-Crossed?"

"The advantage of my parents insisting I took English Literature at college, especially a little Shakespeare." Said Julie. "It's from Romeo and Juliet and refers to two young lovers who are kept apart for some reason.....Finding the reason these two were permanently kept apart, has to be a priority. Oh, and take lots of pictures of the bodies, before giving them to Doc Perez."

"Everyone likes the Doc, but we need help with this, Julie." Said Jorge.

The rule was Julie if it was a private conversation, but Miss Yago if anyone else was present. Two of Jorge's officers were in the shed, but she decided to let it go. Jorge was stressed and out of his depth. The two junior officers were the only officers he had.

"Call Bogotá and they'll descend on us like locusts." Said Julie. "I can still remember the two dead girls and all the nonsense about a serial killer. Everyone gets paranoid and the detectives from Bogotá will want to go through every file we have. The so called serial killer turned out to be a crazy dad who was a little....Over friendly with his daughter. That ended up in the national press. No, Jorge.....You're not calling Bogotá for help."

"How about Tessera Coffee Holdings, the people in Canada?" Asked Jorge. "They must have offices full of experts on animal life.....People have seen things. They might have investigators too and trained security officers. I can't do this on my own, with just two officers. Both of those are still officially in training. Please call the people in Canada."

The problem was....The people from Canada were likely to be just as intrusive as the senior cops out of Bogotá. They'd arrive with their own agenda and report to the head office in Calgary, before they reported to her. On the other hand, Julie was looking at two dead young people, who were already beginning to smell bad; it was that kind of climate.

“Fine Jorge, I’ll call Canada.” Said Julie. “Get the bodies to Doc Perez and tell him to issue a death certificate as a matter of urgency. Take those pictures though, lots of them.....The team from Calgary will need to see them.”

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David Sullivan had been sent to Colombia as team leader, though his normal job was head of security for the entire Tessera Coffee Holdings group of companies. Julie Yago had specifically asked for experts, biologist who might have an idea what was going on. Why had he been chosen to go to Colombia ? Mainly because he was fluent in Spanish. David had been told to emphasise his team leadership roles, rather than his years as head of security. Only at the plantation for less than a day and he was already missing his wife and his comfortable office in Calgary.

“Their families had to get them buried.” Said Doc Perez. “We’ve no facilities to store bodies properly. There isn’t usually a need for something like that.”

“Not long in the ground.....We could get them exhumed.” Said David. “We need samples.....The usual blood and tiny pieces of vital organs. There must still be something we can use.”

Doc Perez looked almost traumatised. Mind you, he’d have to be the one to tell two sets of parents, that their kid’s bodies were going to be exhumed.

“But they were killed by some wild creature.” Said the Doc. “I agree samples would be nice, but they’re hardly essential.”

“We have no definite cause of death.” Said David. “Supposing the creature carries some kind of pathogen in its bite, or a venom gland like the duck billed platypus. We need those samples; so sadly, we need to dig up the bodies.”

“Beatrice and Alexander, known to most as Bea and Alex.” Said Doc Perez. “Julie started it and they’re now thought of as the star-crossed lovers. That will help you.....A lot of people who work at the plantation want to know what killed them.”

“Great.....But we really need those samples.” Said David.

“I assumed you would.....I’m not a complete fool, young man.” Said the Doc. “The freezer is probably the oldest you’ll ever see, but the samples will still be viable. Come.....I’ll show you where they are.”

The Doc was right, the freezer in the back room of his surgery, did look as though it had once been owned by Methuselah. Not that age mattered with such simple devices. As long as the motor ran, it might outlive everyone in town. There it was, rattling away as it kept everything inside it, frozen. David opened the door and found shelves with dunes of ice covering them. On one shelf were sample bottles marked Bea and Alex.

“Blood and tiny pieces of heart, kidneys, lungs and liver.” Said Doc Perez. “Should be everything you need.”

“Thank you.....I hadn’t really wanted to upset their parents.” Said David.

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Julie Yago usually had breakfast with her husband, which gave them a chance to talk over the key issues affecting the plantation. Her husband Gustavo, took care of the day to day running of the Yago Plantation. He was Gustavo Correa, but Julie still used her family name for most things. Their four grown up children had all been given the name of Correa. Sometimes there were looks from solicitors called in to draw up legal documents, but on the whole.....Being a Yago worked well for Julie. Schools had been the worst. One head teacher had called to query if Teresa Correa was really her daughter. Julie had politely but firmly told her that her children’s names were none of her damned business.

"The woman from Toronto is still sat on the veranda." Said Teresa.

Teresa was the youngest of her children and the only one still living under her roof. At twenty five, she'd always worked for her mother and seemed to enjoy life. Some might have called Teresa a party person.

"She turned up unannounced, so she can wait until we've finished our breakfast." Said Julie.

"In all fairness, my angel." Said Gustavo. "You did call them and demand that a full investigation team had to arrive as soon as was humanly possible. It seems they're all arriving."

Julie squeezed her husband's arm and drank what was left of her second cup of coffee.

"You're right.....Teresa, has our guest been fed?" Asked Julie.

"Yes.....She said how good the food was."

"Good."

Michelle Thorpe was sat on a comfortable chair on the veranda. The table in front of her had several plates on it and most of the food on them had been eaten. Two fairly young women ran the Hacienda Yago kitchen and what they lacked in skill, they made up for with speed. They could provide a breakfast in time for Julie to get to her office at the plantation, by nine. There were also the remains of freshly baked bread in a basket. Michelle obviously enjoyed her food, despite being quite slender.

"I can see you've been looked after." Said Julie. "Did you enjoy the food?"

"Yes, it was all wonderful." Said Michelle. "Much better than I usually manage to make most mornings."

There had been an idea in Julie's head, that had become a plan over the course of breakfast. Michelle smiled a lot and seemed to have a pleasant temperament. Her home town was Ottawa, which sounded like the quietest city on the planet. There had been hints in the information emailed from Canada, that Ms Thorpe's temperament wasn't always warm and pleasant. Perfect for what Julie had in mind.

"I know the human resources people at head office, have arranged lodgings for you. I was wondering though....Would you like to live here, in the hacienda?" Asked Julie

"WowYour daughter mentioned there's even a pool."

"Two actually.....And the food is always good." Said Julie. "Please say yes?"

"I was in the military for years." Said Michelle. "Always looking for cons rather than pros I guess, but why? Why invite me into your home?"

"My husband is always busy and walks about with ten things, at least, on his mind. My daughter lives here and being honest, she's a little wild." Said Julie. "I received an email from the director who hired you at Tessera Coffee Holdings. After the usual HR box ticking, which was very good by the way.....He went on to say you were extremely good at dealing with problems paperwork couldn't solve. The hacienda is close to where those poor kids were half eaten and; I'll sleep better with you living under our roof."

"Then yes.....I'd love to live here." Said Michelle.

"Can I assume you've some firepower on its way?" Asked Julie.

"Yes.....Never by plane of course." Said Michelle. "Some countries can be.....difficult about such things, but not Colombia. I will even inform your local police when they arrive."

"You'll get no trouble from Jorge Alvarez." Said Julie. "He's like one of the family."

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Luke Walsh had arrived a day later than the others, on a plane from Toronto. Telling his wife he'd be in Colombia for a while, hadn't gone down well. Then there was his twenty year old son, Walter.

He'd had a traffic accident when he was eight years old. Young Walter and his bright red bicycle had collided with a Datsun hatchback and the Datsun had won. His now grown up son, would need a lot of care for the rest of his life. Luke had hired a nurse to help his wife; Tessera Coffee Holdings were even picking up the bill. It was just that Lisa, his wife, didn't like having strangers in the house. It was awkward and there'd be a lot of phone calls home, but Luke was determined not to head back home, after the first teary phone call from Lisa. Luke had the pictures of the dead local couple, spread across a table in the back room of the Docs surgery. Luke was forty five and as he'd just told Doc Perez.....

"I've been around and seen things you'd think were a lie." Said Luke. "I once worked for a company who'd asked me to examine a monster caught in a Peruvian lake. That brute had been huge; it took the arm off a fisherman. In the end though.....It was big and nasty, but it wasn't a monster. Nothing supernatural, or preternatural; just a big fucking fish. When we find this supersized mole rat; that too will be just a huge mammal of some kind. Nothing weird, or alien.....I guarantee it."

"I looked up mole rat on Google." Said the Doc. "Bald and a bit pathetic looking. Whatever bit the face off poor Bea.....It wasn't a huge mole rat."

Luke tended to agree, but he'd been told to rule out nothing until the final report was written, or someone managed to kill one of the damned things. Anyway, Luke didn't like to muddy the water. The big fish he'd examined in Peru had been truly massive. Despite what was in the final report, Luke never had been happy it was simply a big fucking fish. Mind you, that was why Luke didn't run the head office laboratory, but had been stuck in the number two role for years. His approach was too much Mulder and not enough Scully, or so he'd been told. Not that Luke minded being number two in the lab; it gave him more time with Walter.

"Depends how big it grew.....Their front teeth look quite ferocious." Said Luke.

"Seriously?"

"No, of course not.....When I get an idea that even slightly holds water; I will share it with you. In the meantime, can I get some help with sending out samples?" Asked Luke.

"Yes, of course. This kind of excitement is like Christmas come early." Said Doc Perez.

"Really?"

"No, of course not, but I will help with the samples." Said the Doc. "How are you sending them?"

"Air freight out of Manizales City." Said Luke. "I know there can be delays from the old airport, but we're paying enough to avoid any holdups."

"How about restrictions on potential bio-hazard materials?" Asked the Doc.

"Depends who is asking for the rules to be relaxed." Said Luke. "We've got some very important people on our side."

They began, cutting thin slices of human organs, into even thinner slices. The blood was easy to put in containers, but potentially contaminated slices of hearts and livers, had to be handled with extreme care. One cut from a scalpel that had been used on a diseased live and.....Luke had heard of lab techs dying in agony.

"I didn't know you'd taken samples of grey matter." Said Luke.

"Ahhh, yes.....The brain material." Said Doc Perez. "Whatever enjoyed their other organs, seemed to dislike brains. It never even took a mouthful. Normally I wouldn't bother sending it, but the fact that our monster dislikes it.....Might make brain matter significant."

"I agree, we'll send it to our head office lab." Said Luke.

Once there were lots of containers waiting to go in an airfreight box, there was one last favour needed from the Doc. He wasn't employed by the plantation, at least not directly. Julie Yago might

give him some kind of regular retainer, but there was no guaranteed method of coercing him into signing a pile of certificates.

“Alright.....All in a box and you can buy me lunch.” Said Doc Perez.

“Actually.....I need you to sign each one.” Said Luke. “Sorry, but only you can sign to having kept them in the correct conditions. Only you can sign that these are samples from the two young people.”

“Yes.....And one day I might end up in front of a government committee.” Said Doc Perez.

“Sorry.....But without your signature, they’re just random bit of human tissue. A clever solicitor could argue that I made the whole thing up. I’d be left in court with just my dick in my hands.”

“You can be quite foul mouthed, Luke.” Said the Doc.

“Fucking right I can.....I need that favour, Doc.” Said Luke. “Me personally.....I need you to sign the certificates, or I might end up looking for a new job at forty five.”

If he had to, Luke was quite prepared to mention his wife being highly over anxious. He would even tell the Doc about his eight year old son and his failed attack on a Datsun hatchback. Sending samples without signed certificates, was the same as throwing them in a dumpster. Luke had to get them signed.

“You’re asking a lot.” Said Doc Perez.

“I give you my word.....If we do end up in front of a government committee, I won’t stab you in the back. If we end up trouble.....We’ll be there together.” Said Luke.

“Fine.....As you would say.....Let’s get these fucking things signed.” Said Doc Perez.

Just under an hour later, the courier van arrived. It was white and covered in bio-hazard signs and notices about transporting live human organs. So much for trying to keep it low profile. There’d be no trouble at the airport though. No one wanted to upset Julie Yago.

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Kate Doyle had arrived straight off a plane from Calgary. Not a direct flight of course, she seemed to have been bounced around every airline hub in South America. She’d got there though and her bags were in a fairly clean looking boarding house in the village. She’d been offered a choice of helping Luke slice up samples of human organs, or help in the search of the area where Bea and Alex had been found. After thinking about it for all of a nanosecond, she’d chosen to help in the search for....Whatever it was they hoped to find.....

“So, Kate.....What is your area of expertise ?” Asked Jorge Alvarez.

Kate was sure Jorge wasn’t trying to be cute, he didn’t seem the type. There had been one comment about her bright red hair, but it had felt like a compliment. He was the head cop for the area, but didn’t seem to have an official title. The two cops with him, simply called him ‘Boss.’ There had been hints from head office that Jorge was a little lazy and incompetent. Kate was willing to ignore the hints and see how things went.

“Expertise.....My mother says I need to settle down.” Said Kate. “I’m twenty eight and still trying to finish my PhD. Officially I work for Luke, but he tends to leave me to my own devices. I’m the ideas and solutions lady at the company lab.”

“What kind of ideas ?” Asked Jorge.

“The kind that needs solutions.” Said Kate. “I’m guessing I’ll be here for a while.....You can work out your own idea of what I do.”

“How about your friend.” Said Jorge, while nodding in the direction of Chad. “The guy has only spoken twice since we arrived here and once was to moan about the heat.”

Chad Hudson was a bit of a mystery to her too, though she wasn't about to admit it. Office rumours mentioned him being from Chile, which might well be total crap. He'd been met by a messenger at the airport, who'd given him a gun in a carry case. No one seemed to know who'd sent the gun, even David Sullivan.

"That's Chad, he's our body guard." Said Kate. "I got him today, because we're going to be in an area of potential danger. I've never had a bodyguard before.....It feels comforting. Let's be honest, Colombia can be a dangerous place."

"What is he, ex-military?" Asked Jorge.

"Chad is Chad, Jorge." She said. "Usually he's a nice friendly guy, but sometimes.....He can be not so friendly, or so I've been told. Best to leave him alone."

"Fine."

One of the women in accounts had dated Chad and said he was alright. The only time he'd given her a bit of attitude was when she'd asked about his past. Chad had admitted to being in his thirties and once in the military. Who's military? That was when Chad had developed an attitude. They weren't alone, the two other cops had joined Jorge and several locals had been sent by Julie Yago. Everyone was walking with a purpose, while using sticks to move dead branches out of the way.

"There.....It's the dip in the ground where they were found." Someone yelled.

Jorge mentioned Bea's mother being there, which had to have been a bad idea. It hadn't rained in a while and there was still a lot of congealed blood at the bottom of the dip in the ground. There was a lot of muttering, by unhappy voices; before Jorge gave everyone a specific area to search.

"Was that the girl's mother?" Asked Kate.

"Yes, she found them.....Came out looking for her daughter." Said Jorge. "The poor woman has already seen the worst thing she's ever likely to see in her lifetime."

Kate was there to do the clever stuff with whatever the lab work turned up. She was wondering though, if anyone from head office had interviewed the mother. First on the scene, probably using a flashlight in the dark. It would have to be done gently, but she might have seen something she didn't realise was important.

"About Bea's mother." Said Kate.

"Fine, but I insist on being there." Said Jorge.

"For what?" Asked Kate.

"You want to interview the mother.....Makes sense." Said Jorge.

Slow and incompetent huh? Kate had a feeling the local police chief was putting up a constant smoke screen. Why did he need to? Kate hoped to work that out, eventually.

"Fine, but you can arrange the time and place." Said Kate. "You know her, but she'll see me as some busybody from head office."

"Alright.....I'll arrange it." Said Jorge.

Jorge had decided it, he and her were going to search the plantation road the two lovers must have used. It was hot, too hot really for someone fresh off the plane from a Calgary with a high of twenty for the past two weeks. Kate was sticky, breathing hard and not finding anything wasn't helping her mood. The gunshot when it came, was behind them and over to their right.

"A large gun with high velocity bullets." Said Jorge. "Has to be your guy, none of my guys are carrying that kind of weapon."

Chad wasn't her guy, but the second shot stopped her arguing the point. The third shot had them both running towards where the gunfire was coming from.

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Chad Hudson really was called Chad Hudson on his birth certificate. An American dad with a little Native American in his blood. Add on a mother from Santiago in Chile and a chance meeting in a night club, and.....Chad had been born into a family who could swear perfectly in English and the Chilean version of Spanish.

“What were you firing at ?” Asked Jorge, the local chief of police.

“Did you hit anything ?” Asked Kate.

“I never fire unless I have a target.....And when I shoot, I rarely miss.” Said Chad.

He still had the gun in his hand, the one delivered by a friend in the embassy. Not the Canadian embassy, or the embassy of a nation the west would call friendly. Chad had needed a gun that wasn't huge, but was capable of bringing down a charging rhino. He'd called in a favour from a cultural attaché, at an embassy he'd probably never visit again. He knew he'd hit the creature at least twice, yet its body wasn't lying on the ground. It was.....Very peculiar.

“Nice looking weapon you've got there.” Said Jorge.

“It'll take oversize rounds with maximum loading.” Said Chad. “The barrel is strong enough to take all that, without blowing apart. Best of all, it'll still fit under my jacket.”

“Well.....I hate to say it, but you don't appear to have hit anything.” Said Kate.

Chad liked Kate, but she might well get taken off his Christmas card list, if she carried on like that. Mind you, Chad was thinking much the same thing.

“It was huge.....Lots of black fur and a massive head.” Said Chad. “It was sort of crouching when I saw it. The brute jumped up fast, so the first shot might have gone wide. The next two went right into its rump, I'm certain of it. The damn thing should be dead.”

“Let's see if there's any sign of this huge beast.” Said Jorge. “We have Jaguars in Colombia, Chad. I believe they're a protected species. You might have been firing at one of our much loved big cats.”

“It was big, Jorge.....Bigger than a Grisly bear, much bigger.” Said Chad.

“Something has been disturbing the bushes.” Said Kate.

Kate might not have recognised the smell of death, the putrefaction of human tissues. Chad did though and he could see Jorge recognised it too. There were bodies in the undergrowth and they hadn't been there that long. Just long enough to begin stinking.

“Christ.....There are two bodies here.” Said Kate.

“One has been dead longer than the other.” Said Chad. “Trust me.....I know the different aromas of the dead.”

“You must have a missing persons list, Jorge.” Said Kate. “Do you know who they are ?”

“Both males.....One about twenty and the other might be his grandad.” Said Chad.

“We've nothing, no missing persons.” Said Jorge. “I'd know if there was, we're quite a small province. Whoever these two men are.....They're not locals.”

Everyone had moved towards the sound of gunfire. There was soon quite a crowd, all determined to see the bodies, yet retching at the stench when they got too close. Everyone agreed, there were no missing locals. Jorge sent his men back to get a four wheel drive vehicle and some body bags. With time to spare, Kate had obviously decided to carry on ferreting about.

“You hit something, Chad.” Shouted Kate. “There's blood on the ground over here, quite a bit of it.”

“Do you have anything to get a sample of the blood ?” Asked Jorge.

“No, but I do have a satellite phone in my backpack.” Said Kate.

“They never work here.” Said Jorge. “You might as well join two tin cans with a piece of string.”

“Mine will work.” Said Kate.

Chad was a little envious; no one had offered him a satellite phone. As for whether they worked in that part of Colombia ? Kate was soon talking to Luke Walsh and asking him if he had time to see two new bodies....And bring her a few specimen containers. From what Chad could hear, Luke was on his way. The dreadful finds weren't over though. As Chad leant against a tree and tried to get a quick five minute nap, one of the civilian searchers was shouting....

"Another.....There's another body over here. This one looks like a woman."

"Shit.....Most of her chest is missing." Yelled another voice.

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Jess Fisher was twenty five and the youngest member of the team sent to investigate the problems at the plantation in Colombia. One of the first to arrive, there weren't that many connections on her journey from Toronto. She'd arrived on her feet and running, which was essential in her role. Jess had a good degree in one of the humanities and a desire to change the world, for the better. She'd chosen a career in public relations and marketing, because her father had suggested it.....

"I have to ask, Jorge.....Why weren't these other bodies found sooner ?" Asked Julie Yago.

Jess tended to agree, it did look like laziness and incompetence. The whole area was supposed to have been looked over after the bodies of the local couple had been found. Maybe not a thorough search, but three dead and decaying bodies.....They should have been noticed. Not that Jess was going to stir the pot. Her job was to deal with local media and officials, to keep bad press to a minimum. Usually by charm and force of character, as she often joked with her sister. In reality it usually came down to setting the politicians against the local officials. She'd already spent some time going through five years of news items involving the Yago Plantation. In rare cases, her job involved a little bribery. There were just the three of them in Julie Yago's office on the plantation.

"Chad Hudson is special services trained." Said Jorge. "He saw movement well away from the search area. If he hadn't been there.....Those bodies might never have been found."

"That sounds like an excuse and as you know.....I hate lame excuses." Said Julie.

It was time for Jess to enter the conversation, following a brief call to her boss in Canada. They wouldn't like what she had to say, but what the hell. Jess was used to being hated by the locals, no matter where she was sent. No softening it with an apology, that just made the job harder. Her Spanish wasn't perfect, but she'd get the job done.

"My head office are insisting that the Policía Nacional de Colombia are now brought up to speed. It's time to get in touch with the authorities in Bogotá." Said Jess.

"I still think that would be a mistake." Said Julie.

Jess was young, but she was well used to getting the stink eye from those she was helping to get out of a jam. The locals might still think of Julie Yago as the boss. In reality she now owned very few shares in the plantation that still bore her family name. She was invited to meetings in Calgary out of politeness, but in reality; she couldn't say no to orders from head office.

"She's right.....I need to call them." Said Jorge.

"They probably won't come here.....Not for three random deaths." Said Julie.

"You don't get random deaths, I checked." Said Jess. "Your unexplained mortality rate is lower than the national average. These deaths are a serious anomaly and they've occurred on plantation land. Imagine the press if we try to avoid telling Bogotá. Imagine the press if they're just the beginning of something far worse."

"Listen to her Julie.....She's right." Said Jorge. "And we really could do with their resources."

Again the stink eye. Jess knew the plantation had fallen foul of the law a few times, though nothing that serious. If Julie said no, Jess would immediately call her boss.

“Alright.....Very well, Jorge. Call the big guns in Bogotá.” Said Julie.

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