

Coffee Addict

Chapter 7 – The Mother Is Alive

“Strangely for a village where just about everyone relied on coffee for a living, there was only one decent coffee place. ‘Coffee Crazy,’ cafe loco, had been in the same building for twenty something years and was likely to be there for at least another twenty.”

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It had been a breakfast meeting and he hated those. David had heard the suggestion from Colonel Hernandez and it had sounded crazy. There had been an impromptu meeting about Doc Perez and like all quickly announced, impromptu meetings; half of those invited, hadn't turned up. It seemed Doc hadn't respected the chain of command, one of the worst crimes imaginable to the colonel.

“Started telling weird tales to anyone at the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, who'd listen to him. We can't tolerate that David, he had to go.” The colonel had said.

Not chucked out to live in the gutter, Doc Perez had been offered retirement on full pension, or a court appearance for various issues in his past. Not that David had been told any details about those issues. Being a sensible man at the end of his career, the Doc had accepted retirement. He'd gone to live with an unmarried sister in Barranquilla. The most bizarre decision to come out of the authorities in Bogotá, had been about how Luke Walsh was going to fit into the medical facilities in the plantation and the surrounding area.

“I received a message from the ministry.” Luke had said. “I do have a doctorate and I am one of the most qualified medical men you'll ever talk to, but.....And this really matters, Colonel. I am not that kind of the doctor; not the kind who signs death certificate and prescribes antibiotics to kids with a sore throat.”

David had watched the colonel screw his face up. There was no saying no to Hernandez, even if he was suggesting something absurd. Tessler Coffee Holdings wanted to be operating in Colombia for decades to come. That would mean keeping Hernandez happy, whether David liked it, or not.

“You have a doctorate, Luke.” Hernandez had said. “I'm told you're famous in your field and.....I thought you'd like getting Doc out of the equation. I Hope you're a team player.....I really was hoping you'd be happy about this.”

David had read the colonel's file, or at least the version Julie had managed to get hold of. Anyone who didn't agree with Hernandez was usually described as not being a team player. Often not being a team player was punished by being assigned to a distant wild outpost of the army, or the police.

“The health ministry are happy for you to sign the documents.” David had said. “Anything Doc used to sign, can now be signed by you. Not a rare occurrence in times of war, so they're treating the strange deaths as acts of war. Calgary are happy too, Luke. I'm hoping you will begin signing death certificates.”

“The dead need burying.” Hernandez had added.

“To be clear.....My duties will include running the general practise for the village ?” Luke had asked.

“Yes, but only until the dust settles.” David had said. “A new doctor for the plantation will be hired, but politically.....The dust has to be allowed to settle.”

"Which leaves the matter of personal liability." Luke had said. "As I've said a few times now.....I'm not that kind of doctor."

Hernandez was screwing his face up again. Julie had offered to call people she knew in Bogotá. Getting rid of the gratuitously bad tempered colonel might be impossible, but she had offered to trim his claws a little. Something had to be done about him. David had been authorised by his board, to offer Luke a pretty good get out of jail for free, card.

"Calgary have offered to pay any and all personal liability, Luke." David had said. "If you get into trouble because of anything you sign, or anyone you treat. Calgary will pay up.....No limits. I can give you that in writing."

"Then I'll be your best and most cooperative team player."

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Jorge had decided to meet his team in person. Telephone calls were fine, but there was nothing quite like seeing someone's reactions when asked about their past. Lazy people were hard to spot, but if there was someone with anger issues among his five new officers, he'd spot them. The entire existing plantation police department were going with him, Olie and Julian. Strangely for a village where just about everyone relied on coffee for a living, there was only one decent coffee place. 'Coffee Crazy,' cafe loco, had been in the same building for twenty something years and was likely to be there for at least another twenty. Good coffee and lots of things to nibble, though the prices were a bit high. A big plus was that unlike one of their rivals, no customer of Coffee Crazy, had ever needed medical treatment for food poisoning. A large place too, there were tables where Jorge could get everyone sat around and keep a modicum of privacy. Jorge was even picking up the bill for all eight of them.....

"Wow, this is really nice." Said Lidia. "Is this a regular thing ? I hope it is."

Lidia was the only female recruit so far, which made her name easy to remember. Jorge had a list of their names with a date and place of birth. Lidia was a native of Barranquilla. He'd decided to remember just their first names. If Julie hired another dozen cops, Jorge had decided to give up remembering names and give them all a number.

"No, this is definitely a rare treat for the village police." Said Olie.

"How large is the local police force ?" Asked Simón, from Santa Marta.

His parents had probably named him after the famous Simón Bolívar; there had been a lot of that in the eighties for some reason.

"You're looking at us, all of us." Said Olie. "Just me and Julian."

"I'm Julian and he's Olie." Said Julian.

"We've always managed to get the job done." Said Jorge. "It's just that with recent events, there was a need to expand the plantation police force."

Julie Yago had arranged for uniforms for the new recruits, there hadn't been time to go through the usual glacial official channels. Weapons too, each of them had a good quality automatic, provided by another contact of Julie's. Cable ties instead of proper handcuffs, but the five new plantation cops sat around the table, looked impressive. Hopefully they'd make the village population, feel better protected.

"I was told that our main focus will be on protecting the local people." Said Lidia.

"Well, our motto isTo Serve and Protect." Said Cesar, from Medellin.

Cesar was a little older than Jorge would have preferred, but according to the agency doing the hiring, Cesar was perfect in every other way. Jorge had decided to accept everyone at face value, for now.

"Yes, most of your time will be spent protecting the people of the village." Said Jorge. "I don't see that as a bad thing. You'll get known by the general population and importantly, you'll get to know them.....Now, order anything you like. Everyone knows a cop who isn't chewing, must be hungry. Order whatever you like.....I'm paying."

That made them all look happy, especially Lidia, who ordered a huge slab of cake. Jorge could just sit back and listen, picking up more about the five new recruits, than talking to them for hours. Cesar had already mentioned his family being tailors, for about the last hundred years.

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Colonel Hernandez found his day being organised for him, which he hated. There had been a breakfast meeting with David Sullivan and Luke, which should have been followed by a quiet morning; almost a free period, as the college kids called them. Julie Yago had claimed his day, without even trying that hard. Not that she'd be there with him and his cops from Bogotá. She'd made one phone call to where the colonel was staying and that one call was enough. There could be no upsetting Julie Yago, she knew far too many influential people. Her call had arrived and been recorded at just after midnight.....Phone calls in the dark after midnight, always seemed the clearest.....

"Colonel, I'm at the old Wilkins place with Jorge Alvarez." Julie had said. "We came to get a general feel for the place and take a look at the famous burrow. Something is here.....Jorge has found some of its droppings. There are fresh signs of it being here.....The mother of those eggs is alive, colonel. I heard it now.....There's something in the trees....."

After that, the local phone service did what it was good at and cut out. There had been a few panicky calls first thing in the morning. For a moment the recording was implying something truly nasty, but no, Julie and Jorge were both unharmed. Scared maybe, but physically undamaged. Julie Yago had been invited to accompany the colonel and his well-trained cops, but she'd declined. Jorge it seemed, had business elsewhere.

"People who call their important buddies." Said the colonel. "The type who leak sensitive information to the press. All cowards once there's a real danger to stand up to."

He meant Jorge and Julie of course, which Captain Sánchez would understand.

"In a time of sanity, we'd be arresting them." Said Sánchez.

Back at the old Wilkins place, which the colonel thought was becoming far too popular. People seemed to be coming there for a night out, as though it was safe and harmless. As their vehicles came to a halt near the large barn, the colonel made a decision. No one else was going to risk their lives, to see the damn burrow.

"Did you bring plenty of explosives?" Asked the colonel.

"Enough to level the entire barn." Said Sánchez.

"Good."

They'd use cables rather than radio controlled detonators. The radio and telephone reception in the area was strange and perverse. It made some transmissions impossible, but increased others. A construction crew in the village to build the new senior school, had used wireless detonators when blasting. They'd lost three people in the same premature detonation. After that, they'd used cables for everything. First though, there'd be one last examination of the area.

"Spread them out, captain.....Make sure we haven't missed something stupid." Said the colonel.

While his experienced cops from Bogotá gave the old Wilkins place a last look over, the colonel had a look inside the large barn. It still looked useable, though a leak in the roof seemed to have once caused a minor flood. It had been relatively dry for a while though, or at least dry for that part of

Colombia. The barn looked solid and dry enough to still be used. Not that the colonel would let that get in the way of turning it into a large pile of rubble.

"Fresh droppings.....Just as the Yago woman said." Said Sánchez.

"A pile of small droppings.....More like possum muck, than a huge wolf."

Best to bring the place down, before everyone in the area began seeing something sinister in possum droppings and heard strange voices in the trees. The safe thing was to wait for some of his cops to return, but Hector Hernandez hadn't wanted it to take all day.

"We can give the burrow one last look." Said the colonel.

"I have the explosives.....Might as well get them in the right place." Said Sánchez.

"Yes, then young Garcia can wire them up."

It smelled bad down there, even with the new masks sent from Bogotá. There was the possibility that the colonel didn't want to think about. If the mother of the eggs was alive, she might have come back to check on those eggs. Sánchez had an assault rifle, but that was unlikely to kill one of the creatures plaguing the area. When they reached the bottom of the burrow, the nest was still there, but unoccupied.

"That's a relief.....No wounded mum wondering where her eggs are." Said Sánchez.

"We'll put these explosive against the far wall." Said the colonel.

His hands were actually trembling, as the colonel pushed several packs of explosives, against the wall. Human monsters he could handle, but creatures which weren't killed by bullets.....He wondered if he really was getting too old for the job.

"That'll do it." Said Sánchez. "With the explosives upstairs, there'll be nothing left of the barn."

"Probably a large enough bang to flatten a city block." Said the colonel.

Back to the surface and it seemed his driver had discovered something. The call of nature had taken Sgt Moreno to a quiet group of trees, quite some way from the Wilkins Farm. Sgt Moreno was a veteran of numerous fights against the cartels, but it seemed he liked to pee in privacy.

"This way, Sir.....You have to see this." Someone said.

Muddy ground and men who seemed to be treating it as some kind of childish surprise. When the colonel saw the dead creature though, he understood. It was one of the huge wolf type creatures, probably the one Jorge had shot in the face.

"Dead a while.....Jorge said it had probably died the night after he shot it." Said Sánchez.

"Use the satellite phone." Said the colonel. "Luke will need to dig out the bullets to confirm it, but it seems that this is the mother of the eggs in the burrow."

"The mother is dead after all." Someone muttered.

Then again, the eggs had seemed very reptilian. Colonel Hernandez knew his limitations and science wasn't his strong suit. The experts could decide if the huge dead creature had laid the leathery eggs, or if.....There was something else out there.

"Luke is on his way, with a borrowed flatbed truck." Said Sánchez.

"I hope it has a hoist." Said the colonel. "Even dead; this thing must weigh close to a ton."

Everything seemed so normal, as everyone looked at the decaying creature. A few even took pictures, which the colonel ignored. If a few pictures sent home gained them their fifteen minutes of fame.....They'd earned it. Everyone was there, apart from young Garcia, their demolitions expert. Not that the colonel was worried, Garcia was keen. He was probably already back at the barn and cabling furiously.

"We don't want to be here all day; Luke will find the dead beast." Said the colonel. "Back to the barn.....There are explosives to place and cable up."

"I could stay and wait for Luke." Someone said.

"Fine.....Fine." Said the colonel.

Less than a minute later, there was a huge explosion at the old Wilkins place. A blast so big, that the colonel felt the ground vibrate, through his boots. There was a flash and what looked like fire; rising up into the sky. After the first blast, there was a second. Twinkling shards of glass, could be seen rising up with the hot air. There was actually a mushroom cloud rising up towards the clouds. They'd used enough explosives to do that, but it was still weird to see a mushroom cloud over the farmlands.

"Fuck.....Who set that off ?" Yelled Sánchez. "We're all here !"

"Maybe Olie did it, or Julian." Someone said.

"We're not all here.....Garcia is missing." Said the colonel.

Young Garcia wasn't that young, he was an experienced guy, a long way from his trainee days. He was just younger than many of the other cops the colonel had chosen for his team.

"Shit.....Did we just lose Garcia ?" Someone muttered.

Sánchez was trying his radio and seemed to be picking up nothing from Garcia. He was shaking his head at him, as if to say there was nothing at all coming from their explosives guy. There were the vehicles too, which hadn't been moved away from the farm. It was likely they'd need to call Jorge and ask to be picked up. As the colonel thought it through, everything seemed to get worse.

"No assuming we lost anyone." Yelled the colonel. "We go back to the farm and do what we're good at. We sort out the mess and behave like professionals."

"Yes, Sir." Someone said.

Sánchez quietly told him that all their comms appeared to be down, phones and radios. Just part of life around the plantation, but if their vehicles had been destroyed ? It was a long walk back to civilisation. Did Young Garcia have a family ? Of course he did, everyone had family.....He remembered Garcia once talking about a long term girlfriend.

"He'll be fine, Sir." Said Sánchez. "You wait.....He'll be sat in one of our vehicles, looking at us as if to ask what all the fuss is about."

There wasn't much left of the Wilkins Farm and just a hole in the ground where the large barn had once stood. Their vehicles were just ordinary four wheel drive trucks, with no armour or toughening of any kind. One might run again after a while in the repair shop. The others were right offs. The colonel's expensive and fool proof satellite phone, was still refusing to connect with anything.

"Jaimie's house is about twelve miles away." Said Sánchez. "He's an old friend of Julie Yago. That is the closest place I've heard of and Jaimie is old school.....He has a telephone landline."

And if a few of his cops hadn't been invited to parties at Jaimie's place, they'd all be staring at paper maps covered in hatched lines, and wondering where the hell to walk to. It was a shambles, a complete and utter shambles.

"Send two men, captain." Said the colonel. "You choose who goes.....They use the phone and wait at Jaimie's to be picked up."

Colonel Hernandez was fairly sure his career was over. Being aggressive and cutting corners was fine, if you were fighting cartels and getting results. The people in Bogotá were unlikely to forgive him for getting young Garcia killed. The guy was a brilliant cop, who looked to have a brilliant future. Now he was gone, blown to bit by the explosives he was supposed to be cabling up. There was one piece of good news though.....About an hour after two of his people had jogged off towards Jaimie's house, Luke arrived in an enormous flatbed truck.

"Damn, I'd forgotten he was on the way." Said Sánchez.

"The beast can stay where it is." Said the colonel. "His truck can take us back to the plantation." The colonel yelled at Luke about a change of plans. Another night out in the open wasn't going to do the rotting carcass any further damage. A flatbed truck over some rough roads, it wasn't going to be fun. Better than a night in what was left of the Wilkins Farm though, much better.

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Michelle Thorpe liked Luke; he'd started the rumour about her, that she found solutions for problems paperwork couldn't solve. A strange compliment on the face of it, but it had done her career no harm. If Tessera Coffee needed someone who thought outside the box, they tended to send for Michelle.

"The beast is actually quite friendly." Said Luke. "The colonel scared it, I think. Not that it did him that much harm. A dressing and his finger was as good as new."

A baby whatever it was, the text books had nothing like it, or the online sources of biological information. Luke had taken to calling it Rocky, because it obviously liked a fight. Michelle stroked the back of its head, very, very gently.

"Like that, don't you rocky." Michelle muttered.

"Never aggressive if treated gently." Said Luke.

Definitely nothing to do with the wolf like creatures, that much had been agreed on. Like a lizard, there were even tiny residual wings on its back. It was hoped the wings might grow as it got older. Nasty looking claws of course and wicked teeth. It had bitten the colonel, but so far.....It seemed to enjoy her petting it. As for being a boy or a girl ? After an early decision that Rocky was a girl, the consensus was now unsure. The general feeling was to wait and see how the creature matured.

"Did you see.....Rocky kissed my finger." Said Michelle.

"Probably tasted some of your breakfast." Said Luke.

Every hour or so, Michelle discovered something new about the baby creature. It had flaps on its face, which were colourful when it flapped them. An iridescent green colour, which stopped when the flaps weren't being..... Flapped. Every new discovery, just brought home how truly weird and alien, the tiny beast was.

"Good boy Rocky." Said Michelle.

"You thought she was a girl this morning." Muttered Luke.

"It was acting more like a girl.....Now he's more boyish."

Michelle was beginning to be genuinely fond of the exotic looking creature. Puppies and kittens as a child and even an aggressive raccoon in her teens. Michelle had developed feelings for some strange animals and a few fairly strange men. As Rocky rubbed his head against her finger, Michelle gently stroked his back. A head appeared around the door of the trailer. David Sullivan of all people, she hadn't seen him in several days.

"They found it, the creature Jorge shot at." Said David. "Some of the colonel's people found it, not far from the derelict Wilkins Place."

"Are they bringing it in ?" Asked Luke.

David handed Luke a piece of paper with a telephone number on it and a few directions on how best to get to the Wilkins place. Luke actually seemed pleased at being given the job of bone collector, for the plantation and its environs. David went away, leaving a very excited Luke.

"They found it, Michelle.....Will you be alright ?" Asked Luke. "I have to go, they're expecting me."

"I'll be fine.....I'll play with Rocky for a while." Said Michelle. "I'll put him back in his cage before I go."

"I still think it's a girl."

"In the right light.....So do I." Said Michelle.

Michelle kept petting Rocky and at one point, he opened his jaws quite wide. He, or she, held her finger quite hard in its jaws, but never actually bit her. Maybe after all, the colonel should have trusted the six inch high beast.

"Sometimes, Rocky.....life is all about who we trust." Michelle muttered.

Rocky was tired after a while and he crawled into the palm of her hand. Like a very spikey kitten, he curled up and seemed to fall asleep. Cuteness overload, it was all too much for Michelle. Holding the creature seemed to have been the colonel's fatal move, but Rocky looked to still be asleep, as she put him in his mobile cage. A bit like a cat carrier, but with tough steel bars.

"I'm not leaving you here on your own, Rocky." Said Michelle. "You can come home with me and get given back to Luke in the morning."

Teresa would like Rocky too; she could almost see her mouth drop open, as Rocky flapped his varicoloured flappy bits. Teresa was sensible enough to keep it all secret from her mother.

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Jess Fisher had picked up the vibe, rather than hearing any solid news as she got up and showered. David Sullivan had send a text at about seven in the morning; she hadn't realised he got into the office that early. A quick text saying that the trailers had been broken into during the night. Items had been stolen, so it didn't look like an attack aimed at Tessera Coffee's staff. More information to follow. Jess tended to agree, that the motive was theft.

"Local kids, I bet.....After a bit of beer money." Jess muttered.

She sent a reply to David, asking for more details as they arrived. She was the official media and PR person after all. Not knowing the details would look incompetent, if the local paper asked questions. No that the local press seemed that interested in anything other than the 'Creatures.' A text to Ana seemed a good idea.....

'Should be with you at about ten.'

Ana probably hadn't heard about the trailers being broken into, but if she had; the text gave her a chance to change the date. Jess just hoped that Ana didn't cancel the whole idea.

'I'll have coffee ready and some cake.' From Ana.

It had been noted that while the phones of the police and other parts of the authorities, were often unreliable; the phones of the local population in the village, seemed fine most days. Jess had considered starting her own conspiracy theory about it, but that was almost certain to annoy David. Jess checked her bag, the way she always checked her bag before leaving home.

"Second phone.....Maps with notes.....Herrera's epic tome on Muisca....."

It went on until she'd looked at, and sometimes touched, every item in her bag. Her mum had done the same and despite a lot of jokes about it at family gatherings; Jess had never forgotten anything she needed for a meeting. The Herrera book had cost her serious money, but was said to be the best book available on the ancient religion of Muisca.

"Car keys and out.....Let's get rolling for the day." She muttered.

Her car had been changed recently, to something larger and more solid, with a lot more horsepower in the engine. Chad's idea, good old Chad. He thought she needed a car with a bit more Oomph, his word, in case her duties took her off road. Being their official bodyguard, Chad's words carried quite a bit of weight. Her new vehicle was a hefty four by four, with chromium plated bumper bars across front and rear. Jess already loved it. Another text from Ana.

'Bring the Herrera book.'

'It's in my bag.'

The screen on her phone flashed a few times, it sometimes did that. Her new car started first time, it always did. Jess even enjoyed the way the tyres rumbled over the uneven roads in the village. Ana wasn't far away, all being well, she'd be there before the coffee got cold. Someone waved at her, so she waved back. That was beginning to happen; now the locals were getting to know them. It'd last until the local paper began to blame Tessera Coffee for everything since, and including, the Boer War. Her phone rang and it was Luke. He might ask her to go into the office, to deal with fallout from the overnight thefts. Jess ignored the call.

"Sorry, Luke.....I'm not cancelling seeing Ana Moura." She mumbled.

Ana was home again, sorting out the affairs of a dead sister and a dead mother. There had already been talk of officially giving up the house the Moura family had lived in for at least three generations. Some houses had been bought, but Ana lived in one tied to employment by the plantation. Ana opened the door before Jess had locked her car.

"Come in, Jess.....I've already poured the coffee." Said Ana.

If she'd heard about the thefts from Tessera Coffee's trailers, she never mentioned it. Ana asked if she was allergic to carrot cake, which as far as Jess knew, she wasn't. The big table in the back room was covered in Ana's books and notes. Jess placed the Herrera book on the table and sat down, while Ana brought her coffee and a slice of carrot cake.

"Do you like Herrera's book?" Asked Ana.

"I'm told it's accurate.....At around seven hundred pages, it's definitely thorough."

"Not exactly light reading." Said Ana, grinning at her.

They'd arranged the meeting after agreeing to make sure the expedition to the high plateau actually happened. Godfrey's Plateau, as some of the locals called it. Godfrey had been a missionary, which meant some hated him, while most treated him as some kind of grand historical figure. Someone was banging on Ana's front door.

"Damn, we've barely sipped our coffee." Said Ana. "I'll get rid of them."

The sound of Ana talking to another woman, who sounded quite agitated. Ana was soon back at the table, nibbling her slice of carrot cake.

"That was Dilma; you met her at your affirmation." Said Ana.

Jess smiled and nodded, but there had been a lot of new faces to put to a lot of new names. Jess really had no recollection of being introduced to a Dilma.

"She sounded a little stressed by something." Said Jess.

"It was your company's trailers." Said Ana. "One was actually ripped apart in the night. Metal torn open as easily as an egg box. If you need to go to work? I will understand."

The plantation wasn't like her home in Toronto. Turn on the TV and you wouldn't find a news update on the wrecked trailer. Life in that part of Colombia moved at a more relaxed pace than in Toronto, which could be nice.

"No, we've had this arranged for a while." Said Jess.

As if daring anyone else to interrupt them, Jess covered the table in paperwork from her bag. There were notes from Jorge and Julie, both of them agreeing to take part in the expedition to Godfrey's Plateau. Julie Yago had even offered to finance the entire enterprise.

"That is useful.....Did she mention a specific sum of money?" Asked Ana.

"A sum sufficient to hire vehicles and all supplies required.....Yada-yada." Said Jess. "Julie is talking here about hiring a helicopter. This is going to be a serious amount of money."

"Good..... It shows Julie is taking it seriously." Said Ana. "Is Chad still keen on going?"

"Try stopping him.....I think he'd claw his way to the temple, with his fingernails." Said Jess.

There might be an issue with Chad being too keen to spray the plateau with defoliant. Chad was obsessed with the temple on the high plateau. He seemed to have lost the idea that the temple was sacred to the local religion. For now Jess nodded at Ana, who nodded back. Eventually they'd need to have a long talk with Chad, regarding religious boundaries.

"David Sullivan invited himself, so he can have the job of calming down Chad." Said Ana.

There'd be others going of course, those from the local church of Muisca, eager to see the temple hidden in the jungle. Some would want to come to ensure there was no sacrilege inflicted on the ruins, no treating the holy altar with disrespect. Not too many could go, there were space constraints if they decided to go by helicopter. They'd also be spending Yago money and Julie might object to half of the plantation heading for Gregory's Plateau.

"I don't think either of us is ready, should it happen." Said Ana. "There have been strange happenings at the temple in the past. Julie Yago saw an angel, or so she claims. Are you ready in case something happens while we're there?"

"Oh yes, more than ready." Said Jess. "I hope we do see something.....Mystical."

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Luke had a logbook, containing details of anything Rocky was given to eat. Somethings he loved, while other foods were left untouched. Not exactly a long list, he hadn't been hatched out of an egg for that long. Ironically he loved eggs, boiled hens' eggs. Michelle had borrowed the logbook, when she'd brought Rocky home in his cage. She didn't have eggs in her pantry, or any of the other things the young creature liked to eat.

"Tinned hot dogs.....Everyone loves those." Michelle muttered.

She'd put them in the book, just in case Rocky had some kind of reaction to them. He was a tough beast though, who could probably eat anything, maybe even a few things never intended to be eaten. There was Julie's hacienda kitchen, but it was a bit early to start raiding the fridges. After heating the hot dogs in a pan, she sliced one into tiny slivers of tasty looking meat.

"I used to love these as a kid." Michelle said. "I hope you love them too, Rocky."

He was out of his cage by now and seemed to have no problem with being handled. Michelle lifted him off the armchair chair he'd been exploring and placed him on her kitchen table. He didn't need the idea of breakfast explaining to him, Rocky actually leapt at the sliced up hotdog.

"Well.....I think we tick five stars for loving hotdogs." Said Michelle.

Her cell phone rang, which happened about every other morning. Someone's car had stopped working, could she pick them up on the way to work? Another favourite was Luke, asking her to pick him up coffee and a bagel from Coffee Crazy. There were a few other standard reasons to call her, but the call from Teresa was different.

"Hi Teresa, where do I have to pick you up from?" Asked Michelle.

"You know me too well." Said Teresa. "I did actually stay with someone last night, one of the new cops my mum hired."

"I bet it was Cesar?.....You and your thing for older guys."

"Hmmmmmm.....Actually I went home with Lidia." Said Teresa.

"Yeah, she seems nice."

The only decent looking female cop within miles and Teresa had her as a new notch on her bedpost. How did the girl do it? Michelle was beginning to suspect low level witchcraft.

"I'm hiding in her shower.....I heard some cop talk, that I don't think I was meant to. It's bad, Michelle.....The trailers you guys use were wrecked last night. Someone stole the eggs of that thing. And it looks like they took the baby one."

“They didn’t.....I brought Rocky home last night.” Said Michelle. “He looked so lonely....I had to bring him home.”

“A monster in our house.....Don’t tell my mum, she’ll go nuts.” Said Teresa. “As usual, your secret is safe with me. What you decide to do with Rocky, is your own concern. Save up and put him through Harvard if you like.”

There were a few more witty comments, all at her expense. Michelle didn’t mind, as long as Teresa didn’t snitch on her. The call ended with Teresa saying she had another date with Lidia that night. Michelle noticed Rocky had found the tin with two hotdogs in it and was now eating one of them, cold.

“Cold hotdogs.....You really will eat anything.” Said Michelle.

There was an impasse about to arrive and Michelle knew it. She was so tempted to let them think Rocky had been abducted by person, or person unknown. She’d then keep Rocky as probably the world’s most exotic pet. The problem was when he grew of course and began to drag home the remains of peoples’ pets. He might even drag home the bodies of tiny children. As for when he reached sexual maturity.....No, Michelle couldn’t face coming home one night, to find a dozen leathery eggs, stuck to her closet door.

“But I can’t let them experiment on you.” Said Michelle.

She kissed Rocky in the centre of his head and he blinked. Two eyelids, just as the colonel had noticed. It looked funny to see him blink, so she kissed him several more times. Her weird pet actually made a different sound, after blinking a dozen times.

“Is that you laughing ?” She asked him, knowing there’d be no reply.

Michelle knew she couldn’t keep Rocky, but she wasn’t going to give him to the science guys, to dissect, or whatever they wanted to do. Rocky slid out of her grip and straight down the top of her blouse.

“Oi.....I like you tiny weird creature.” Said Michelle. “What the hell am I going to do with you ? Everyone probably thinks you’re dead by now.”

She scooped him out of her cleavage and placed him on the table. Like an over tired kitten, Rocky curled himself up into a ball and went to sleep.

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