

Coffee Addict

Chapter 12 – The High Plateau

‘There were a lot of questions, which Luke didn’t mind. One of the girls might turn out to be the next Dian Fossey. They were all so keen. It took three times as long as it should have, to get the first camera up on the tree. Not that Luke begrudged a minute of the time spent on it.’

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Julie Yago had waited until the helicopter had landed and the engines turned off, before getting the crew to open the sliding doors. An uncle of hers had told a story about a US army general during the Korean War. He’d insisted on leaving a helicopter with its rotor spinning. It was also a windy day. The rotor had been pushed down by the wind and.....According to her uncle, the general’s head had been found a long way from the rest of his body. Some in her family said it was a lie, but Julie believed it.

“Did I ever tell you about the helicopter and the general ?” She asked Jess Fisher.

“Yes.....It sounds a sensible warning.” Said Jess. “A story that may have been embellished over the years, but still has a message.”

The doors were slid back, allowing everyone to get out of the helicopter. All of them confident in the knowledge that no rotor blade was likely to collide with anyone’s head. Julie looked across the stony ground of the plateau, towards the seemingly endless jungle. Not today, but tomorrow she’d take a few of the expedition with her and take a quick look at the temple. A very quick look, but it would be good for morale. It would also give Julie a chance to refresh her memory about the secret paths through the jungle.

“Anyone seen my daughter ?” Asked Julie.

“She was waving hard as we left the plantation.” Said Jaimie.

“Waving hard.....Teresa is supposed to be with us.” Said Julie.

“I had no idea.....Assumed you knew she’d stayed behind.” Said Jaimie

“No.....I had no idea.” Said Julie.

Just like Teresa to jump ship at the last moment. Her daughter had probably decided to have some fun with a man twice her age. She did have a bit of history with age-inappropriate men. Or she’d be with Lidia, one of the new additions to the plantation police force. Lidia had excused herself by saying she had a sick relative to look after. It was probably Teresa she’d be looking after. Julie knew how to remove the bad vibes from her head.....She’d keep busy.

“Gustavo.....Where is my husband ?” Yelled Julie. “A truant daughter is one thing, but I can’t lose a husband.”

There was a voice she knew, right over near the second helicopter.

“Not so much lost, as getting my bearings.” Shouted Gustavo.

“We need to get the tents setup and erect the mess huts.” Yelled Julie. “At the very least everyone needs a bed for the night and a hot meal.”

“On my way.....I’ll bring Olie and Julian with me.” Shouted Gustavo.

Julie had noticed that just about everyone, her included, rarely had a good word to say about the two trainee cops. Actually their appointments as full time cops, were about to go through. Even Jorge had mentioned Olie and Julian not exactly being the A team. On the other hand, if there was a

job to do that mattered.....Everyone seemed pleased to see the trainee cops arrive to do it. They'd definitely done a first class job of the tidy up and make safe at the Old Wilkins place.

"Bring Sánchez too.....We need another strong back." Yelled Julie.

"He's with us.....I'll send him over." Yelled Kate Doyle.

To an outsider it would look and sound like chaos. To Julie though, it was how she organised things and it nearly always produced good results. Gustavo appeared trudging across the stony field, with Sánchez just a few feet behind him. By dusk everyone would have a safe, dry bed for the night. With luck, everyone would have also been well fed.

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Luke Walsh had intended to get the helicopter crews to help him. They were being paid after all, for every day they were on the high plateau. And unlike the people from the plantation, they'd all insisted in sleeping in the helicopters. It seemed there had been trouble once, in another South American destination. Now the crews slept, ate and largely, lived in their helicopters. Luke had mentioned them helping him get the cameras in place, but none of the crews seemed that keen. Whatever had happened in the past, had left them a little skittish. Of all people, it was Maria who became the hero of the hour.

"I have some friends among the Muisca brats." Said Maria. "We can help you.....Just tell us what to do."

The Muisca brats indeed; Luke doubted if that was an official title. With two large helicopters to fill, Ana had obviously relaxed her entry requirements for the expedition. It seemed that several members of the church had decided to bring their teenage children. One boy and three girls, besides Maria. Luke asked them to help him and unlike the helicopter crews, they said yes.

"We'll set up the camera traps and move them around most days." Said Luke. "If one gets a lot of activity, we'll leave it where it is."

"Why call them camera traps?" Asked Tilly.

Tilly was seventeen and had already wanted assurances that no wildlife was going to be harmed by whatever Luke wanted them to do.

"Just a name.....Nothing will be trapped." Said Luke. "No one has properly studied the wildlife of the high plateau. By using the cameras we'll get a good idea of what lives where. Motion activated, the cameras have infra-red and can work well on the darkest night."

"So.....Really, we're just taking a few pictures." Added Greta. "I've got no problem with that."

Greta was eighteen and not having a problem with things, seemed to be her philosophy on life. All of Maria's friends seemed keen on helping, once they realised traps didn't always mean something was being trapped. Ideally of course, the cameras would take pictures of the creatures who'd been attacking people on the plantation. Luke was still certain they were linked to the plateau and maybe the temple.

"We stick together.....That's really important." Said Luke. "No one wanders off alone."

"I heard you have one of the superguns." Said Alfonso.

Alfonso was the only boy among Maria's group of friends. Why three girls and just one boy? Luke had no idea, but all of them were quite capable of fixing camera traps to trees. Alfonso was one of Ana's nephews.

"I have one of the new versions." Said Luke.

It felt a little strange to show them the gun, but it might reassure them a little. Luke waved it about a little and there were several appreciative noises. It did look impressive, even Luke was a little in awe of the weapon he carried.

"Wow.....Who made the guns ?" Asked Tilly.

"Sorry.....That's confidential." Said Luke.

"Will it kill them.....The creatures ?" Asked Alfonso.

"I am assured that it will." Said Luke.

Two shots to the head should kill one of them, was all Chad had told him about the new generation superguns. No one actually knew who was supplying the weapons, apart from Chad. If anything happened to Chad ? It seemed there was a backup plan, though of course....Only Chad knew what it was.

"Are you ready to start putting up cameras ?" Asked Luke.

"Yes we are." Said Maria.

"Fine, let's do it." Said Tilly.

In theory, it should be just routine. The teenagers would need help with the first one or two, but then it should be a nice easy job. Looking at the pictures the next day was the bit that made it all worthwhile. Even if the results were lots of cute pictures of small forest mammals, the kids would love it.

"Here, the perfect tree." Said Luke. "Solid and by the look of it, at the centre of where several animal pathways converge."

There were a lot of questions, which Luke didn't mind. One of the girls might turn out to be the next Dian Fossey. They were all so keen. It took three times as long as it should have, to get the first camera up on the tree. Not that Luke begrudged a minute of the time spent on it.

"Alright.....I want you guys to decide where the next one goes." Said Luke.

"I can see the right tree from here." Said Geena.

The last of Maria's three girl friends on the expedition. Geena might have been a Jena, but it mostly sounded like Geena and anyway, it didn't really matter. The tree was in a good spot. Close to where a well-worn animal trail, came up the side of a small hill. All of the teens were getting the hang of nailing straps to trees and then fixing the camera to its straps. The cameras themselves were expensive; though luckily Julie had added them to what she would pay for. Full HD cameras with their own lighting. Add on built in image intensifiers and the resulting picture should be incredible. Should be..... Luke had learned to never assume things would ever go perfectly.

"Oh crap.....I saw something move in the bushes." Said Alfonso.

"Where ?" Asked Luke.

"The really green one." Said Alfonso, while pointing.

The really green one. Alfonso obviously didn't work for the plantation, or have ambitions in doing so. Maria was giving him the stink eye. Most of the local kids took pride in knowing the local flora and fauna.

"He means the marmalade bush." Said Maria. "Crap.....I can see something moving behind it."

It hadn't been that long, since several of them had died; Maria had actually seen two of her friends die. Then there had been the attack at the cemetery. Hardly surprising they were seeing monsters behind every bush. Luke was just as bad, he had the pocket howitzer aimed and ready.

"I was so scared.....It's just a long-tailed opossum." Said Tilly.

"We were ready and next time.....It might not be a harmless opossum." Said Luke.

Maria shouted at it and the opossum ran off into the bushes. Everyone was on edge, but on the whole, it had been a good thing. The next time they'd be ready if it was one of the creatures.

"I want to go back to the helicopters." Said Geena.

"We could.....Or we could put up a few more cameras." Said Luke. "I'll leave the choice to you guys. Do we go back, or move on?"

As Luke suspected, there was no vote. No one wanted to look like that person, the one who runs for home at the first obstacle. Maria liked the look of a tree that was a poor location for a camera trap. Luke didn't care; he had them fix a camera there anyway. That particular camera wasn't about getting pictures; it was about confidence and bringing the team together.

"Alright, now we can go back." Said Luke.

"No.....I'm sure we can manage to install one more camera." Said Geena.

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They do say that if you want to sell someone on a lie, a really huge lie, you first need to convince yourself it's the truth. Teresa had solemnly promised Michelle, that she wouldn't take Rocky outside, until she was back from the expedition to the temple.

"I know that if she plays up, I can't control her on my own." Teresa had told her. "You can trust me.....Our little buddy won't be going out while you're away."

Teresa genuinely believed it, because in her mind it was true. She was sure that Michelle had got on the helicopter, with no worries about Rocky terrorising the village. Yet Michelle was probably still adjusting her tent and Teresa was taking Rocky through a gate in the fence surrounding Doc's back garden. Rocky wasn't even in her cage, she was fluttering about in Teresa's arm.

"I knew you'd hurt yourself." Said Teresa. "You're big now.....It now needs the two of us to handle you safely."

Not that Rocky was badly hurt; she'd just got her wings caught up in her cage. A lot of noise and flapping about, but Rocky was uninjured. The cage was on the table in the garden. Teresa had sworn to herself that the damned thing would never be used again. As for Rocky? She was making the chirruping sound, which tended to mean all was well. Actually it often meant she was happy.

"No more cages for you." Said Teresa. "No one puts members of their family in a cage.....You're our family, Rocky. Are you still in pain?"

Rocky showed no sign at all of being in pain. Some might say Teresa was making a mountain out of molehill, but she was looking after Rocky on her own. Even Julie Yago had been known to comment on her daughter being a little prone to fantasy and over reaction. Rocky didn't bruise for some reason, but there was a tiny red mark on her right wing. That tiny red mark was fuelling the current crisis.

"We'll sit in the woods for a while.....I know you'll like that." Said Teresa.

Rocky made more chirruping sounds. Their pet still wasn't that big, but she was impossible to carry without it being obvious that Rocky was one of them.....One of the creatures. Luckily, few of the Doc's neighbours seemed to go for walks in the nearby woods. Michelle would have said Rocky had to be hidden from the public gaze, but Michelle was on the high plateau.

"Here.....the grass looks dry." Said Teresa. "We can sit here for a while."

It was sunny and pleasant, with enough of a gentle breeze to keep the sun from being too hot. Teresa could lose her focus sometimes, but she was far from being stupid. She knew that their enjoyment of the woods, needed to be quite short. The dog showing up was unexpected, especially as it appeared to be alone. A small short haired dog, with brown fur. Teresa guessed it was a terrier of some kind, though she wasn't certain.

"Leave it; Rocky.....We'll go back inside." Said Teresa.

The damned dog was snapping at Rocky, barking at her between bouts of making a deep growling noise. For her part, Rocky was hissing at the dog. Hissing was new and probably part of her defence tactics.

“Go away stupid dog.....Rocky might eat you.” Said Teresa. “And I’d let her.”

Teresa knew that if it came to it, Rocky would win the fight. The terrier was small and domesticated; probably owned by one of Doc’s neighbours. Rocky on the other hand was armed with sharp claws, wicked looking teeth; and she was a long way from being domesticated. Feral might have been overdoing it a bit, but the hissing was getting louder and seemed more urgent.

“Don’t kill the dreadful thing, Rocky.” Said Teresa. “Come on.....Back inside. There’ll be lots of treats for you.”

The small brown terrier sealed its own fate. It tried to bite Rocky and Teresa’s pet was armed with all those lethal teeth and claws. The dog actually screamed, as Rocky used her claws to hold it down, as her teeth bit into its throat. Very quickly, Rocky was hissing at a dead terrier.

“Shit !” Muttered Teresa.

Teresa Correa was used to facing problems of her own creation. How to avoid a woman who’d caught her in bed with her husband, avoiding yet another warning from Jorge, for possession. Teresa was good at going into defence mode; she’d had a lot of experience at it. A dead dog wasn’t that much of a problem.

“Doesn’t look like a creature got it.” Muttered Teresa. “Looks like it lost a fight with a bigger dog.”

When she’d been in her teens, her mum had owned a large German shepherd. A beast of a dog, who’d become more and more bad tempered as time went on. Jilly her mum called the hell beast of a dog. Jilly had killed another dog, but as in this case, no one had witnessed the act. Her mum only got rid of Jilly, when the dog was stupid enough to bite her. Rocky was still hissing at the dead terrier.

“Shushhh.....Nothing to do with us, we were never here.” Said Teresa.

Rocky didn’t resist, as Teresa pulled her away from her kill. Her pet was excited though, wings flapping and still hissing. Teresa knew she’d have to keep an eye out for anyone else between them and the gate into Doc’s garden; maybe two eyes.

“Quiet, Rocky.” Teresa muttered. “It attacked you, it was just self-defence. We just can’t explain that to anyone, ever.”

Would she tell Michelle about it ? That would mean admitting to taking Rocky into the woods.

Teresa decided that like all friendships, there’d be quite a few things she’d never tell Michelle. There was no one anywhere, or at least Teresa didn’t see anyone as she carried Rocky home. There were a nervous couple of hours, as Teresa waited for a knock on the door. It’d be the stand-in cops if anyone came, the military police who were looking after the plantation. No one did come, not even a worried neighbour looking for their small brown terrier.

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Michelle Thorpe was unaware of Teresa’s problem with Rocky and a dead dog. If she had been aware, it wouldn’t have surprised her. Teresa was one of those people who always seemed to find trouble. Michelle was currently helping Luke. They were quickly seeing what the camera traps had picked up overnight. It wasn’t rocket science, which was just as well. There had been noises close to their camp during the night. No attacks, nothing damaged, but Michelle hadn’t slept that well.

“I know you’ve done this before.” Said Luke. “Connect the camera to the laptop and move over the pictures. Then a quick look at what we have. You can’t have forgotten it.”

"I share a tent with three anxiety prone teenage girls." Said Michelle. "I got about an hour's sleep last night, if that. I will eventually wake up.....Trust me."

Luke was laughing, but it was alright for him. He was in a tent on his own. A quirk in the allotment of lodgings he was calling it. Michelle was wondering about trying to get a sleeping space on one of the helicopters.

"Alright.....Anything interesting on camera HL4 ?" Asked Luke.

It was the camera Maria had installed in a very unpromising position. No converging animal trails, no drinking pool close by. There was nothing to suggest there'd be any pictures taken that night. Maybe an opossum, if they were really lucky. Michelle didn't quite believe her eyes, when she saw several large animals in just about every picture.

"No.....This can't be right." Said Michelle. "Were all the cameras wiped before coming with us ?"

"Yes, cleared them down myself.....Why, what's on HL4 ?"

Handling a laptop was always a nightmare out in the wild. Michelle was always amazed at the relatively small number which were dropped and broken, or simply ruined by water in one way or another. Luckily, there was a fallen tree to use as a desk. She ran the on-board graphics programme, rather than using Windows to look at the pictures. HL4 had been busy during the night, there had to be over two dozen clear images. Not only clear, they were interesting.

"Wow.....Well, those aren't the creatures." Said Luke. "At least not any we've seen so far."

"These look.....I hate to say it, but they look cute." Said Michelle.

"Like rabbits.....Very large, furry and harmless....Rabbits." Said Luke.

"I did wonder, Luke." Said Michelle. "Ana has talked about it. There is no reason all these new creatures have to be aggressive carnivores. Some could be large plant eaters.....Like large cute rabbits."

She knew Luke had a theory that a bio-weapons facility had created the creatures. The current top suspect was either the USA, or China. Then again, they were always top suspect for anything like that. Russia would be on the list too, but everyone knew they were currently broke.

"Ruins my bio-weapon idea, but.....Ana might be right." Said Luke. "A few new evolutionary lines in the Colombian jungle. Logically some of them would end up as herbivores. Crap.....I just realised the scale you're using. These cute bunnies have to be twelve feet from nose to tail."

They really did look like a group of sooty coloured rabbits. Large rabbits.....Actually enormous was a better word. There was no bad vibe coming from them though. Even in still pictures, Michelle knew they were harmless plant eaters.

"Unusual for plant eaters to be so active at night." Said Luke. "Not unknown, there are night feeding herbivores in Peru. It usually signifies the presence of carnivores during the day. Carnivores that would just love to eat our cute twelve foot bunnies."

"Crap.....Do we tell the others about the bunnies ?" Asked Michelle.

"Not the idea that there'll be carnivores wanting to feed on them." Said Luke. "Mention nocturnal bunnies to the girls you share a tent with. If they think the bunnies are responsible for night noises, don't discourage the idea. You just might get a few nights of decent sleep. Show them the bunny pics if you like; nothing we do is top secret."

"Do you want me to lie to them ?" Asked Michelle.

"No, just be economical with the truth." Said Luke. "One thing we need to do, is to confirm that the bunnies really are harmless. We'll keep that quiet.....We'll trap one during the night and have a good look at it. No killing it.....Just a really good look at it."

Michelle wasn't a coward, but she had a picture forming in her mind. Just Luke and her, trying to trap a five hundred pound, twelve foot bunny.

"Just us, Luke ?" She asked. "It might end up trapping us."

"I was going to get Olie and Julian to help us." Said Luke. "I'll arrange a bit of a bonus for them."

"You too.....Jorge always complains about them, just as you do." Said Michelle. "Yet when you need help with something a little iffy.....They're your first call."

"Yeah.....Crazy huh ? I know it sounds weird, but I trust those two." Said Luke.

"That's exactly what Jorge says." Said Michelle.

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Julie Yago felt a little guilty about selecting just a few to go with her. Everyone would have loved a quick look at the ancient temple, but that would turn it into something resembling a school outing. Plus she was hoping for a little quiet time there, to get herself in tune with the place again. It was nice in so many ways, to have a large expedition party. On the other hand, it didn't make it easy to keep focused.

"Glad you're with us, Chad." Said Ana. "Anything that comes at us, or looks even slightly aggressive. Please shoot it.....Shoot it several times."

"Oh yes.....Shoot it until it dies." Added Gustavo.

"Ignore my husband." Said Julie. "Unless we're definitely being attacked, we'll treat all wildlife with respect."

Julie had added Chad to their small group, mainly because of his reputation as being pretty good with the superguns. Not that she wanted him to go all psycho on anything that moved. Gustavo had invited himself, after invoking the rarely used husband's perks agreement. Ana was there because.....She was the leader of their group. That was it, the full extent of their quick look and see at the temple. No one was sure if it really had started off as a temple to honour the deities of Muisca. Many scholars believed it had been built as a place of worship for something much, much older.

"How do you remember the way through the jungle, Julie ?" Asked Ana. "It's all so overgrown and.....Like a huge maze."

It felt like that to Julie, but the route was as clear to her mind, as it had been when she'd been shown it for the first time. Julie believed an angel had shown her the way that day. Saying that though.....There had been a lot of ridicule once and in her position, she couldn't tolerate ridicule. Julie had come up with a kind of half-truth, which was more credible than angels and ancient deities. Ana had heard the true story, as had her husband. It was just Chad who'd never heard about the angels she'd seen.

"We lost three people on that trip to the high plateau." Said Julie. "None of them caused by violence, though only one could be called due to old age. It felt at the time and still feels now.....As though the ancient Gods had decided to take them. Not in a bad way either, we all felt they'd been taken to a better place. We buried them there, in small wood near the temple. The morning after their burial, I knew the hidden pathways. Make of it what you will; I make no claims as to how I know the secret route to the temple."

"Are there other pathways you know ?" Asked Ana.

"A few.....If all works out well, I may show you one or two." Said Julie.

Knowing the pathway didn't make it shorter, or stop it being difficult to find in places. After an early start, it was mid-morning, before Julie saw the damaged roof among the jungle trees and vines. Ana

had suggested repairing some parts of the temple. They'd brought some materials, but to Julie; repairing somewhere so ancient, so holy.....It didn't feel right.

"There." Said Chad, pointing. "A roof among the trees. It must be the temple."

"It is, Chad.....You did well in spotting it." Said Ana.

The last part of the pathway was quite overgrown. Everyone had leaves in their hair, or on their clothes; by the time they reached the temple. A large place, some might call it huge. The temple was old and parts of it were in ruins. It was still an impressive building though. Such a huge temple in such an out of the way place. Some had said that it felt as though the Gods of Muisca had found somewhere to hide. Julie thought that might be close to the truth.

"I'm told I say wow too much." Said Chad. "But wow, this place is massive. I was expecting something far smaller and less impressive."

"Who built it ?" Asked Gustavo.

"I don't think anyone knows." Said Julie. "Get your lights out of you packs, we're going inside."

"Now.....With no setting up camera traps first ?" Asked Ana.

"Ana has a point.....Anything might have set up home in there." Said Gustavo.

Julie had times, when she wasn't the most patient person in the world. If patience was a virtue, it was one she'd never been blessed with.

"I expected the teenagers to get over anxious, but not you three." Said Julie. "I'm going inside and I'm sure we'll be safe. Do you all trust me ? If you do follow me. Otherwise you can wait outside."

"Hey, that's incredibly unfair." Said Gustavo.

Julie was sure Ana and her husband would follow her, but Chad was a bit of an unknown. He was dying to tell her not to be an arse; she could see it on his face. Upsetting the boss lady though....She wasn't that surprised when he dug a light out of his pack. The other two quickly did the same.

"Good.....We still have quite a way to walk." Said Julie.

"Another hidden path ?" Asked Ana.

"You could put it like that.....We won't need any guns today." Said Julie.

It was all in her head from many years before. The route she knew exactly, but why she had a need to be where she was taking them ? Julie had an idea, but it was all part of the jumble of memories in her head. Tell them that and they'd insist on going back. Julie walked at a good pace, while trying to exude a confidence she didn't always feel.

"Will we be back before dark ?" Asked Chad.

"Yes, we'll be back well before dark." Said Julie.

Even she was surprised that the route was taking them up. Not every ramp or set of stairs, but the general direction was up. A steep climb in places, but manageable for all of them. Some of the less mobile in the group might have fun, if Julie decided to bring them there. A collapsed ramp caused Julie to stop and stare for a while.

"Everything alright my dear ?" Asked Gustavo.

"I'm just trying to remember.....Yes, I know another way." Said Julie. "In Lugar de Descanso there is always another way."

"The resting place.....Is that the name for this temple ?" Asked Ana.

"One of many names over a very long period of time." Said Julie. "It's a name that will do as well as any of the others."

Getting back before dark was beginning to look optimistic, when Julie recognised a chamber in the temple, barely one floor below what had to be the top floor. There was furniture, the first they'd

seen. Fourteen heavy wooden chairs, set in a circle around an oil lamp, which looked like it hadn't been alight for hundreds of years.

"Sit in the chairs.....It doesn't matter which one." Said Julie.

"Furniture like this, out in the open." Said Gustavo. "It should have rotted away to nothing by now."

"You need to change all your assumptions, my dear." Said Julie.

Julie was the last to sit down and her sitting, turned the corroded oil lamp into a thing of beauty.

"I loathe the term magic." Said Julie. "There is real power here though, spiritual power."

"Are we safe here ?" Asked Chad.

"Nothing will try to eat us, if that's what you mean." Said Julie.

Julie's jumbled memories began to make more sense than they had. She knew where to touch and on which wall. Julie even managed to ignore the flash of light, which made Ana scream.

"Not long.....Then we can take it back with us." Said Julie.

"It's almost dark out." Said Chad. "We should spend the night here."

"Nonsense, you'll see." Said Julie.

Julie spat words out in a language she'd never heard before. There were a few phrases in old world Spanish and then her hands were rubbing along walls again.

"Lugar de Descanso you must remember me." Said Julie. "Lugar de Descanso you know what I'm looking for."

"Keep some of you here, Julie.....I can feel your soul drifting away." Said Ana.

"We need it.....Any risk is worth it." Said Julie.

"What are you so frantically searching for ?" Asked Gustavo.

"The Raiments of course.....The clothing of the angel." Said Julie.

"Which angel ?" Asked Ana.

"Quiet !.....Can't you see I'm busy ?" Yelled Julie.

Julie seemed to be sent to the far wall of the chamber. There it was, a dark area which it was likely, only she could see. Julie pressed her whole hand against the wall.

"Lugar de Descanso.....I see it." Said Julie. "Give me what I've found."

The chamber went dark, before becoming light again. On the floor, almost in the centre of the room, was a large silver breastplate. It was her armour, the breastplate of an angel. It had been left for someone to collect, though Julie had no idea who. She was merely a proxy because the intended recipient had left the land of the living.

"Help me carry this, Chad." Said Julie. "With both of us to carry it.....Should be easy."

"We can't go back in the dark." Said Ana. "If we're not eaten, we'll fall down a precipice."

"Nonsense, we're not travelling in the dark." Said Julie.

Julie yelled just one word in a language she knew was older than any other on the planet. Julie shouted 'Sident', which she knew meant 'so be it'. The next moment she was being helped by Chad to carry a large and very heavy silver breastplate. Her husband and Ana were looking around, as if trying to make sense of it all. Good luck to them thought Julie; no one else had ever made sense of the temple's shifted reality. There and only a short distance away was their camp and the two helicopters.

"We're back." Said Ana.

"And by the look of it, just in time for dinner." Said Gustavo.

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‘Unless otherwise indicated, all the names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents in this book are either the product of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.’

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