

Coffee Addict

Chapter 20 – Jaimie’s House

‘The phones were out, landlines and cell phones. The military system still worked, though it too seemed affected by the infamous plantation phones bug. It was better than nothing and the police system worked on the same network. Messages came in all the time, good news and bad news. Julie Yago and her husband had survived an attack on Hacienda Yago.’

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Jorge Alvarez had received a request for help from someone at Jaimie’s house; whoever had taken the call hadn’t been good at getting a name for the caller. The caller had said that if things were becoming desperate in the village, could they at least rescue Teresa Correa, Julie Yago’s daughter and get her to a place of safety. Jorge had passed the message on to Mateo Rodriguez; only to have it bounced back at him an hour or so later. Olie had tried to call Jaimie, but the line to the house was now dead, as was just about every civilian cell phone in the district. The phones could be like that, the plantation was infamous for its unreliable phones.

“Not content with grabbing every special ops cop.” Said Jorge. “Mateo now wants us to see if we can help Jaimie. His house is under attack by the creatures and it’s rumoured that Julie Yago’s daughter is there. I suspect where we find her daughter, we’ll find our Lidia Fernandez.”

“Yeah, everyone knows about those two.” Said Olie.

Jorge was working out of one of the mobile command units, which Mateo had graciously loaned to the local police service. One or two Sunday warriors, volunteer cops; were out patrolling. The rest of his available force were there, sat on uncomfortable chairs, or leaning against the walls. It wasn’t much of a force and the Sunday warriors tended to be retired ex-cops. Good some of them though, still better with a gun than the new young recruits. Jorge’s wife was there, Gabi. Officially she was there to offer first aid as required; she had a tin box full of bandages. Unofficially she had a shotgun and knew how to use it. He’d tried to talk Gabi out of being there, but it was their village, their home for many years. If they didn’t protect it, who would ?

“I know Olie and Julian will volunteer to help Jaimie and his guests.” Said Jorge.

“Yeah, we’re both crazy and will volunteer for anything.” Said Julian.

“Me too.....I’ll be going.” Said Gabi.

Three of his wife’s coffee morning buddies were there, the housewives from hell as Gabi referred to them. They all volunteered to go to Jaimie’s place, as did about half a dozen retired cops, all armed with relatively antique weapons. Everyone had volunteered; everyone was going.

“Use your own vehicles, or travel in the command unit.” Said Jorge. “I’ll stop about half a mile from Jaimie’s. We’ll then work out a plan for rescuing the people in his house. Nothing too complicated, we’ll get in and get out as quickly as we can. Get those we rescue into the mobile command unit and head back to town.”

“Is Teresa definitely there ?” Asked Gabi.

“I’m not sure.....We’ll work on the assumption she is.” Said Jorge. “It’s worth remembering that Lidia is likely to be there too. She’s one of us, a local cop.”

“Do we have any of the super weapons ?” Someone asked.

“Just mine and I promise to put it to good use.” Said Jorge. “Come on, get moving.....Follow me and stop when I do. We’ll finalise our plans about half a mile from Jaimie’s house.”

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Captain Sánchez was pleased that the current attack on the village, seemed to be over. There were quite a few dead cops and far too many dead civilians; so many that it might take a while to collect and identify the bodies. On the plus side, there were quite a few dead creatures; most of them killed by grenade launchers and the superguns. In the end though, it felt as though the creatures had been recalled in some way. Many of them had left together, heading towards the wetlands.

“I shouted at him to run.” Said Chad. “What could we do against this brute ? I told him to run for home, but his family haven’t seen him.”

Chad was a useful addition to his team, but he was only there because of Craig; the guy who ran V-Boom Radio. Guilt can motivate and Chad was blaming himself for leaving Craig to get home on his own. No one was sure where Craig was, but there was a good chance he was under the rubble of the V-Boom building. As for the dead creature that looked like a huge mole ? The volunteer fire department were cutting it up with chain saws; aided by many locals. Once it was out of the way, Main Street could be reopened for traffic. Everyone was armed now; everyone he saw looked jumpy.

“No use blaming yourself.” Said Sánchez. “If you’d stayed in the radio station, we’d probably be looking for your body too. Anyway, for all we know, Craig is alive, well and still hiding from the creatures.”

“I hope you’re right.” Said Chad.

The phones were out, landlines and cell phones. The military system still worked, though it too seemed affected by the infamous plantation phones bug. It was better than nothing and the police system worked on the same network. Messages came in all the time, good news and bad news. Julie Yago and her husband had survived an attack on Hacienda Yago. Michelle Thorpe had been there, armed with one of the latest superguns. According to Gustavo, his wife and Michelle had strode around the Yago estate, like avenging Valkyries. Julie with her strange Muisca Sword and Michelle with her pocket howitzer. Gustavo claimed to have helped, but everyone was hoping the government gave Julie and Michelle, some kind of civilian medal for heroism.

There was very little news coming in from Jaimie Gosse, but his avocado plantation and hacienda were a long way out of town. It was the phones again, nothing civilian was still working that far out. One army patrol had called in to mention two huge wolf like creatures; attacking Jaimie’s house. A lightly armed patrol, they’d been on their way to somewhere else. Since then there had been no news at all.

“Over here.....There’s a hand under some plaster.” Someone yelled.

“Be careful; don’t bring more rubble down on them.” Shouted Sánchez.

The hand looked a little pale for its owner to still be alive. There was also no movement as two young women cleared away the remnants of a plaster ceiling. Chad came running, as if Craig was a member of his own family. Guilt again, it was a huge motivator.

“Is it Craig ?” Asked Chad. “Please.....Tell me it’s not him.”

“Oh, the face.....Best not to look.” Said one of the women. “Looks male though.”

“Is there any ID in his pockets ?” Asked Sánchez.

The skin of the man was so pale, as the women pulled his jacket up, away from the debris. One of them found a wallet in a pocket, which made her look upset. She gave the wallet to him and Sánchez must have looked upset, as he looked at various bits of plastic it contained. Plastic was relatively

new. When his father had died in the street from a heart attack, they'd identified him from his spectacles of all things.

"Sorry Chad.....No doubt about it, it's Craig." Said Sánchez. "I'll ensure his parents get his personal belongings."

A grieving Chad would have been difficult to deal with, but there was no outward sign of sorrow. Chad looked angry and Sánchez almost pitied the next to face Chad and his supergun; even if it was one of the megafauna.

"Please release me from being one of your team." Said Chad. "It's obvious the creatures have retreated for now. I wish to go to Jaimie's and help them deal with the beasts. With luck, I might be able to rescue Julie's daughter."

"It might all be over by the time you get there." Said Sánchez. "We haven't heard from them at all today."

"I need to try.....These fuckers owe me a little payback." Said Chad. "I hardly knew Craig, but I owe him a little vengeance"

Sánchez remembered those kinds of feelings; they'd nearly landed him in jail as a young man. He thought it was going to go one of two ways for Chad Hudson. By the end of the day he was either going to be dead, or the hero who'd rescued the Yago girl. In such circumstances, there was never an easy middle option.

"Very well, you may go to Jaimie Gosse's house." Said Sánchez.

"Can I borrow one of your vehicles ?" Asked Chad. "Anything will do.....Kate borrowed mine, so I have no idea where it is now."

"I can't let you have one of our cars." Said Sánchez. "I think a blind eye can be turned to you stealing a vehicle of some kind. The ordinary laws don't seem to apply to these times. I'm guessing you know how to steal a car ?"

"Oh yes, I can steal most makes of cars." Said Chad.

"Then go with my blessing.....Hurry, Chad." Said Sánchez. "With luck and speed; you might be able to save young Teresa and Lidia."

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Everyone seemed to think that Jaimie Gosse was a bit of a wild guy. A house constantly full of rowdy male buddies and bored female divorcees, looking for a little fun. It was true that he did have regular parties, which could become a little interesting. On the whole though, he was just a guy with a steady lady in his life and a few good friends. There was also his avocado business to run. Most weeknights Jaimie lived a life, more or less, the way everyone else lived their life. A meal, some TV and then bed at a reasonable hour. Despite rumours, he hadn't invited Teresa and Lidia to one of his wild parties. They'd gone to see him about renting one of his unused barns. They'd just been unlucky in picking the day the creatures decided to attack.

"We should run to my car; Jaimie told us to." Said Izzy.

Isadora was Jaimie's steady girlfriend and everyone knew her as Izzy. Running for a car had worked for one of the men employed at the avocado plantation. Lidia thought his name was Red, or some other name that sounded the same. Teresa knew everyone, but Lidia had never met most of the people at Jaimie's house. She'd definitely never met Izzy before. Jaimie's housekeeper hadn't made it; her blood still stained the ground in front of her car. Lidia fancied better odds than fifty-fifty, before she ran the twenty yards to her car.

"You run, I don't want to end up like Yolana." Said Teresa.

"We've got to try something; we can't crouch here forever." Said Izzy.

Yolana had been Jaimie's huge dog, his fierce trouble deterrent. More than one local hoodlum had been carted off by the cops, with Yolana's tooth marks in their backside. The massive dog had tried to take on a wolf like creature the size of a barn. Jaimie wouldn't be having to buy dog food in bulk anymore.

"I think you killed one of them, Lidia." Said Teresa. "Can't you keep shooting this one until it dies?"

"My standard cop gun never killed it." Said Lidia. "Maybe Jaimie got lucky with his hunting rifle.

Otherwise its death is likely to remain a mystery. If I start firing, I'll just remind the second brute where we are."

The three of them were crouched behind a heavy metal trough; it looked as though it was made from stainless steel. A left over from when Jaimie had experimented with a few cattle. He'd hated being a cattle farmer, but he'd liked and kept the trough. Teresa had said he could be a little eccentric.

One of the huge wolf creatures had died, probably killed by Jaimie, but the jury was still out on that. There had been two of the lizard creatures, neither of them fully grown. Lidia thought her shots had killed one of them, but who had killed the second? Probably Red before he'd started his car and hurtled off into the distance. That just left one very much alive wolf creature. The thing had to weigh close to two tons. For some crazy reason the wolf had taken a dislike to Jaimie's old and heavy plantation truck. It was toying with it, the way a cat plays with a half dead mouse. Better than coming after them though; it was welcome to the truck. Bits of metal were flying off the old Dodge truck. Lidia was worried what the brute might do when it considered it had killed the truck.

"You two can stay here.....My car is so close." Said Izzy.

The car Izzy had been pointing at was a fairly old Toyota Corolla. Its top end speed was probably fairly low, but the roads around Jaimie's place were fairly rough anyway. The Corolla could probably accelerate pretty well, which just might save Izzy's life.

"No.....You'll die." Said Lidia.

Lidia tried to grab her, but Izzy was gone; running towards her car like a hundred metre runner at the Olympics. She had her car started before the wolf creature obviously thought she looked more appetising than the old Dodge truck.

"Fuck, it's going to eat her." Said Teresa.

"Keep your voice down, or we might be next." Said Lidia.

The huge brute was after her, but for a few seconds, it was caught up in truck wreckage. When it did get free, Izzy was turning right onto the lane which linked Jaimie's place to the main road. Not that main road meant anything that fancy; there were still lots of potholes. Mud too when it was rainy, but the weather had been dry recently.

"Crap, I can't watch." Muttered Teresa. "Tell me when it's all over."

Lidia was still concerned about Teresa's health and definitely wasn't going to let her try to run away. If she had to, she was happy to drag the girl to the ground. She'd been unconscious for a while after the wolf near her home had collided with her; too long according to Luke. He was only their stand in doctor, but the guy knew his stuff. No more bangs on the head for a while, or Teresa might suffer brain damage; she might even die.

"I'll whisper a blow by blow.....Just stay where you are." Said Lidia.

Izzy was having some good luck, which was just as well; her far from new Corolla was coughing a little. So keen on chasing Izzy, the wolf collided with a large tree. Not a rotten tree, or one still growing. It was a very solid tree; which had probably been around for a few hundred years. It didn't break, or bend and the wolf ended up as a heap on the ground.

"The wolf just tried to head-butt a tree." Whispered Lidia. "And.....It lost."

Teresa gave a very quiet giggle.

The wolf wasn't in a tangled up mess for long, before it was up and chasing after Izzy. Too late though, the lane was dry; the road reasonably straight. The Corolla was hardly a dragster, but it could accelerate pretty well on a nice straight road. The wolf gave up chasing after about thirty yards; probably realising it would never catch Izzy. Lidia hoped it would carry on with its personal war against Jaimie's truck. The beast turned back towards the house and must have noticed them. It gave a deep and very threatening growl.

"What is it doing ?" Asked Teresa.

"Stay where you are.....I'm sure things will work out." Lied Lidia.

Teresa was right up against the side of the trough, with her head held in her hands. As the wolf charged the trough, the poor girl screamed and not just once. They say to always count rounds in a gunfight. Lidia should have known better, but there had been several enemies at one point and her gun had been reloaded a few times. She aimed her gun at the wolf's face, with no idea how many bullets she had left to fire.

"Come on you bastard." Shouted Lidia.

"Don't provoke it." Said Teresa.

Provoke it ! The brute was heading at them like a runaway express train. It was obviously angry about Izzy escaping and was determined to taste the flesh of the two annoying women. Lidia kept firing until she heard the click and knew there were no bullets left to fire. Not that she seemed to have slowed the wolf down. It leapt and a couple of tons of wolf hit the very solid, incredibly heavy trough. There was a loud clang and then a scream from Teresa, as the trough was pushed back a couple of feet. As the creature shook its head, Lidia caught a glimpse of its bloodshot yellow eyes. There was hatred there, genuine and intense hatred. There was also an intelligence in those hate filled eyes; an intelligence beyond that usually seen in animals.

"Can I look ?" Asked Teresa.

"No." Yelled Lidia.

No leaping, it had learned that was likely to lead to pain and a sore head. The wolf crept up and mounted the trough. It looked down at Lidia, as if telling her it had won.

"Remember.....I love you, Teresa." Said Lidia.

Maybe he'd been waiting with a loaded hunting rifle, or maybe he'd been hiding deep in the bowels of his house. Jaimie was there, just as Lidia was preparing to meet her maker. She was hoping meeting dead relatives again wasn't compulsory; she'd loathed some of hers. There was a huge bang and the wolf gave an unhappy screech. There was a bright red flame on its face, which it was trying to get rid of with its paw.

"Back away slowly.....Back to the house." Yelled Jaimie. "I've only got three incendiary rounds; so each one has to count."

Lidia had heard rumours about someone trying to ship in incendiary rounds, but there had recently been a lot of weird rumours. The rounds were probably illegal, but she'd never inform on Jaimie. As Lidia pulled at Teresa to get her to move towards the house, there was another loud bang. The creature was screaming and trying to rub away the flames in its left eye. Lidia couldn't help feeling a little sorry for the beast. On the other hand, it did seem intent on eating them.

"One round left.....Come on, pick up the pace." Shouted Jaimie.

"She's heavier than she looks." Yelled Lidia.

Teresa wasn't exactly a dead weight, but her bravery had vanished after seeing the open jaws of the beast. Lidia had pulled her to her feet, but was having to almost drag her up to the house.

"Come on, Teresa." Said Lidia. "We need to get inside the house before it recovers."

"Why ? It'll break into the house then." Said Teresa. "We can't win.....It's going to kill us."

"Imagine what your mum would think.....Hearing you talk like that." Said Lidia.

That comment didn't exactly transform Teresa's attitude, but she did start walking without being pulled along. Halfway to the house door and there was that loud bang again.

"The last one.....Better start running." Yelled Jaimie.

Teresa started to put one foot in front of the other with some determination. Not running, but she was at least putting some effort into it. Lidia didn't turn to look, but the screeches told her the huge wolf had been hurt. Not hurt enough though, it was obvious the incendiary rounds might annoy it, but never stop it. A lucky hit in the other eye might have done the trick, but Lidia could hear it clambering over the stainless steel trough. Its claws made a loud scratching noise over the metal. Like chalk on a blackboard; the sound was setting her teeth on edge. She risked a look over her shoulder. Fuck, it was close.....Too damned close.

"Come on.....Really run now." Said Lidia.

"I don't think I can." Said Teresa.

"Run girl.....Or it will eat you." Shouted Jaimie.

It was no good, the brute was almost on them and Jaimie had no more of his incendiary bullets.

Teresa was too terrified to run in a straight line and Lidia was beginning to panic. There was a loud bang, even louder than Jaimie's hunting rifle. The wolf creature began to scream.

"Keep running.....Chad's here." Yelled Jaimie. "Did you hear me ? Chad will kill it."

Instead of running, Teresa collapsed; as if the problem was now dealt with. Lidia looked around and there was an expensive looking car not that far away. It looked like a Mercedes, but the bushes in the way made it hard to see. There had been so much going on, that Lidia hadn't heard the car arrive. Chad was there, holding one of the superguns. He'd fired once and huge wolf was actually backing away from him.

"Keep down; I'm going to fire a few rounds." Yelled Chad.

He fired five times; Lidia counted each incredibly loud bang. Each bullet split into several pieces as it hit its target, though she couldn't remember how many. Like hollow points designed for megafauna, the rounds all hit the wolf's face. Each must have been doing it massive amounts of damage. There was a lot of screaming, followed by some whimpering. Eventually the beast collapsed and Lidia assumed it was dead.

"Stay where you are.....They've learned to play at being dead." Shouted Chad.

He walked up close to the wolf and fired two more shots into its head. It didn't move or whimper, which Chad seemed to consider proof of it no longer being a living threat.

"That's the end of this one." Shouted Chad. "Are there any others to deal with ?"

"There were, but this was the last one." Shouted Lidia.

"We killed a wolf and two of those lizard things." Added Jaimie.

"I'll admit it.....I'm impressed." Said Chad. "I was worried you'd all be dead."

"A few are." Said Teresa.

It seemed something trivial, but the car Chad had arrived in had to have cost someone half a million dollars, maybe a little more. When he was close enough to talk to without yelling, she had to ask.

"Not being rude, Chad.....But that car....."

"Yeah, I got a free pass from the cops on stealing a car." Said Chad. "Be honest.....You'd have stolen the best you could find too, wouldn't you ?"

"I would have." Said Jaimie.

"Surely you must have to return it ?" Asked Lidia.

"I guess so.....But no one actually mentioned that." Said Chad. "Have you seen the local cops ? I was told they might be on the way over here."

"No, haven't seen any sign of them." Said Jaimie.

"You saved us." Said Teresa. "If I had my way, you'd get to keep the car."

He was her hero for that moment; Lidia remembered Teresa hugging Cesar in a similar situation. It felt weird to see Teresa hug Chad, even if it was in a non-romantic way. Lidia felt a little jealous, which she knew was absurd. Especially considering Teresa's self-admitted track record with quite a few men.

"Have you got a vehicle that still runs, Jaimie ?" Asked Chad.

"Yeah, I've a Lincoln out the back.....It'll do a few thousand miles yet before it packs up."

"Alright.....Get anyone still alive into the Lincoln." Said Chad. "Then follow me into the village. You can't stay here, there's bound to attack again. They're setting up a defensive perimeter in the village."

"I never thought I'd hear that where I live.....Damned monsters." Said Jaimie.

"Can we go with you, Chad ?" Asked Teresa.

"No, sorry.....Not an insult; my car will be in the lead." Said Chad. "I need to only worry about myself if I get attacked."

"I can see that." Said Lidia.

"Yeah, I suppose." Said Teresa.

Lidia was feeling ridiculously happy that Chad had refused to take them in his car. It meant going to the village in a rather rattily old Lincoln, but she'd happily suffer every bump in the road. Silly school girl jealousy of course, but Lidia was a long way from being a school girl.

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Yoon Choi had looked out of the window and seen a dead body on the grass. It was really Kate's apartment, but as all the phones seemed dead; telling Kate about the body seemed impossible. Early morning, the sun only up for about thirty minutes. Seeing a body in the front garden wasn't normal. Yoon didn't need a focus group, or a working internet link to check it with Google. A dead man lying half over a plaster windmill wasn't even slightly normal. She could have ignored it of course; leaving it to be sorted out by someone else. It had to be far safer in Kate's apartment, than it was out in the garden. Her mother had been strict about civic duty and had often reminded her that it was no good waiting for someone else to sort out problems.

"You are someone, Yoon." Her mother would say. "You are someone."

Of course her mother had taken it to the extreme. She'd been burned while trying to help a neighbour put out a small kitchen fire. The fire people had easily dealt with the fire; but her mother would have a scar for the rest of her life. Yoon tended to have a more pragmatic attitude to civic duty, than her mother.

"Still.....The body can't be left there." Muttered Yoon.

First action was to put on a jacket, shoes and go and have a look at the dead man in Kate's garden. Yoon left the door open and even shoved over the night bolt so it couldn't be closed by the breeze and lock her out.

"I should take some sort of weapon." She muttered.

No baseball bat behind the door, no heavy sticks to be seen. She went into the kitchen and straight to a very trendy looking wooden knife block. The cleaver would do, though she didn't expect anything to attack her in the built up area of the village. Back outside, still hoping a neighbour might have turned up, with a plan about the body. Sadly she still seemed to be the only person brave enough to go outside, though she did see a curtain twitch a couple of times. Yoon looked at the body, which showed signs of being nibbled at.

"I'll get you into the utility cupboard." She muttered. "I might even cover you up.....But that'll be it until things get back to normal."

The dead man looked middle aged, probably someone's husband; maybe even a father. She thought the least she could do was get him out of the garden and away from the public gaze. There didn't seem to be any bodies in the other front gardens she could see. It was her problem, so she'd deal with it. No looking through pockets for an ID, the proper authorities could do all that. If she had a name, she'd have to find the guy's family; it was how she was wired.

"At least you don't look heavy." She mumbled.

Dragging him wasn't too hard, though her back would ache later. Into the utility cupboard he went, along with the rotary grass cutter and assorted garden tools. Yoon used the green plastic cover from the mower to cover him over. He'd soon begin to smell, but hopefully the authorities would have taken him away by then. A few words ?

"I'm sorry you're dead." She muttered. "Whoever you worship; I hope they're now looking after your essence."

Despite trying to be alert, She never heard the rat moving towards her. When she did see the creature it obviously wasn't an ordinary rat. Bigger than any rat she'd ever seen and it wasn't running away. That was what rats did, they ran away unless cornered. This one was moving towards her with its jaws wide open. Yoon remembered the hands of the dead man; they'd looked nibbled at.

"Shoo, go away." Yelled Yoon. "Come closer and you'll feel my cleaver."

There was a technical name for how rats were, though she couldn't remember it. They avoided conflict and any kind of risk, unless it was completely unavoidable; much like a couple of the recent men in her life. This one was still getting closer. There was that intelligence in its eyes. Along with its size there could be no doubt. It was no humble clearer upper of human garbage, the rat was no rat; it was yet another form for the creatures. As it tried to bite her, Yoon hit it over the head with the sharp side of the cleaver. It died; instantly and began to be surrounded by its own blood.

"Hey, you weren't too tough." She muttered.

The hissing sound made her turn around. There was another one of the rat creatures; jaws open and ready to bite. Behind it was another and that one was actually snarling. They obviously weren't that tough, but she wasn't going to be able to cope with an entire pack of them. Yoon began to have an inkling about why she was still the only person out in the street.

"Fuck." She muttered.

Yoon didn't swear often, but if ever there was a situation that required profanity; it was the situation she was in. Another of them felt her cleaver across its head and died, but two more arrived out of next door's garden. Yoon began backing towards the front door she'd left open. Supposing some of them had got into the house.....Supposing lots of them had.

"Keep clear.....I will kill you all." Yelled Yoon.

The gunshot came from her left and one of the rat creatures died in a small explosion of blood and fur. Another shot and another dead mega-rat. Yoon looked and her saviour appeared to be an elderly lady with a rifle.

"You can't leave the body near your apartment." Yelled the woman. "It encourages them.....There'll be too many of them to kill by tonight."

"What should I do?" Asked Yoon.

"Pull the body out onto the street." Said the woman. "I have a can of petrol and can help you burn the body."

Yoon's mother would have given her a lecture about civic duty, but the woman had mentioned helping her; and she had a can of petrol. With luck, the body would soon be a pile of ashes on the sidewalk. As for explaining it all to the cops.....The cops weren't there.

"Yes, we'll do that." Said Yoon.

The woman was an excellent shot, in a nation where gun ownership wasn't as wide as many think. She shot another two rat creatures, before helping her drag the dead guy across the grass and onto the street. No use talking to the woman in Korean, but Yoon's Spanish was getting better all the time.

"I know him.....He lived two streets away." Said the woman.

Yoon hoped no name was mentioned for the poor man; a name would make it all too personal. She'd find herself trying to trace his family and offer her condolences. Even worse, she might feel the need to tell them about the petrol. They did get his wallet out of a jacket pocket, which Yoon promised to give to the authorities, when they turned up.

"Now we burn him." Said the woman.

Petrol all over him, Yoon emptied most of the can over the dead guy. Petrol head to foot, he went up like a firework when the woman dropped a match on him. There was the awful smell of burning flesh, but Yoon was pleased they'd dealt with his body. The thought of hundreds of rat creatures, maybe thousands.....Of course, despite telling herself not to, Yoon looked at the name in the wallet. Not a Colombian name, but half the people she knew back home in Seoul; seemed to have come from somewhere abroad.

"Gunter Nielsen.....You're right, he lived quite close to here." Said Yoon.

"Gunter, I knew him." Said the woman. "Nasty piece of work, he once swore at my six year old daughter."

For some reason it would have felt worse if they'd been burning the body of a nice guy. Yoon wondered how many others in the village, were using cremation by petrol as their preferred method for disposing of the dead. She also wondered how long it could go on for, until the local society began to disintegrate. Knowing people would help of course, no one seemed to really know their neighbours anymore, even in the village.

"My name is Yoon."

"I'm Valeria."

Valeria shot one more rat creature, as Yoon carefully added more petrol to the burning body. Faces appeared at windows, sometimes parents with their children. One man even waved at them.

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Mateo Rodriguez hadn't expected the early morning call, the local phones had all been dead when he'd put his head down for the night. A cot in the mobile command unit, it might be days until he saw his own bed and that was just a rented apartment in the village. They'd parked for the night on a road that went around the perimeter of the Yago Plantation. Mateo had slept surrounded by his

best special ops officers, all sleeping in their armoured SUVs. The creatures were tough, but as Julie Yago had once pointed out. They couldn't chew through metal. It had been a noisy night, lots of gunfire coming from the village. It seemed that when the cop settled down for the night; the civilians took over the fight against them, the creatures; the beasts. One of his junior officers was nudging him.....

"Sorry to disturb your sleep, Sir.....I've Julian on the line. He says it's urgent."

Julian, who the hell was Julian ? He blamed his ever advancing years. It took him a few moments to remember Julian as the cop who seemed to shadow Jorge Alvarez everywhere he went.

"When did the phone lines come back ?" Asked Mateo.

"About five this morning, Sir.....Shall I put him through ?"

"Yes, I'll talk to him." Said Mateo.

The line was noisy in a worrying way; Mateo could hear a lot of shouting and a man softly crying. Wherever Julian was, Mateo already felt sorry for him. Someone was yelling for a clean trauma pack. It was bad at that end of the line, very bad.

"Julian.....This is Mateo Rodriguez. Are you there ?"

"I am, we need help.....Urgent help." Said Julian.

"What happened ?.....I heard you never made it to Jaimie's place." Said Mateo.

"The driver took the wrong road and something huge attacked us." Said Julian. "The lead vehicle was turned over and everything went crazy. I've never seen one of them as huge as the brute that attacked us. We lost a lot of people in the dark. We need help, especially medical supplies."

"You can have everything we can spare." Said Mateo. "Is Jorge alright ? Can I talk to Jorge ?"

The line was hissing, never a good sign. Mateo could hear Julian asking someone if Jorge was fit to come to the phone. It seemed that the answer was no.

"We lost Olie and Jorge was injured." Said Julian. "Jorge will be alright, but his wife....Gabi was killed; crushed when the vehicle went over. If I can get Jorge to the phone, I can't guarantee he'll be talking sense."

"I understand, Julian." Said Mateo. "Give me your location and tell Jorge we're on our way."

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