

Coffee Addict

Chapter 13 – Shooting At Shadows

‘Despite her reputation Teresa Correa could be quite fussy about whom she dated. Especially the women for some reason, which she’d never really understood. If she was at a party and a little intoxicated, she’d find a decent looking guy to sleep with. With women there had to be some positive chemistry going on. Not soul mates, or anything too deep, but there had to be something.’

Σ

Julie Yago realised somewhere more secure than a tent, might have been useful. Not that the rows of tents were without protection. Jorge and Chad were taking it in turns to monitor movement detectors at night. No massive alarms to frighten the crap out of anyone, the detectors were watched through very small and discrete cameras. So far the only thing the detectors had noticed, was Tilly giving Alfonso a very discrete kiss or two. Snogging round the back of the tent the girls shared with Michelle. It wasn’t surprising, it was natural. It was definitely preferable to seeing a huge wolf like creature near the tents. As for the animal sounds in the nearby woods ? As long as they kept to the woods, they weren’t a concern.

“A lock box, a big lock box.” Said Julie. “I should have brought something strong to hold any valuable finds.”

There were the helicopters, which were more secure than tents. Julie had no real information on the crews. The company hiring out the huge helicopters looked legally sound, which was good enough for her. But she wasn’t going to trust them with the Raiments of an Angel.

“It’s that thing about hindsight being twenty-twenty vision.” Said Gustavo.

“Yes.....If we ever do this again.” Said Julie. “I’ll have them carry a Humvee beneath the helicopter.”

Julie had also noticed that mentioning strange occurrences in the past, was a very different thing to strange things happening in the present. People she’d known for years were being different around her. Gustavo was blaming it on people reacting to being in a strange place and sleeping under canvass. Nonsense of course, but Julie wasn’t about to argue about it. If thinking she was weird meant them leaving the Raiments alone, then Julie wasn’t going to discourage the idea.

“By the way, I had an invite to join the bunny trapping gang.” Said Gustavo. “I think they just wanted someone else on their team, with a pocket howitzer under their jacket. Not that I intend to join the bunny trappers.”

“Ahhhh.....So the huge rabbit hunt is no longer a secret ?” Asked Julie.

“Still a secret.....So don’t start telling people.” Said Gustavo. “Maria’s teenage friends will go crazy if they think we might be harming the local wildlife.”

“Were we like that at their age ?” Asked Julie.

“No.....I can definitely say we weren’t.” Said Gustavo. “My life as a teenager revolved around girls, booze and.....Actually that was it.....Girls and booze.”

“Simpler times.” Said Julie. “Oh, besides boys and booze, I was desperate for my father to buy me a pony.”

“As you said.....Simpler times.” Said Gustavo.

"Too many weird ideas on social media." Said Julie. "It fills their heads with all sorts of nonsense."

The evils of the internet was one of Julie's favourite moans. It was her scapegoat in a way, something to blame for every attitude she didn't like. Not that she had a lot of time for scrolling through social media, which was probably a good thing. Doom scrolling Gustavo called it.

"We should leave the Raiments here, Julie." Said Gustavo. "Where they are, on a blanket on the spare camp bed. Everyone is too wary of it to even touch the thing."

"You're probably right, though I'm not sure about calling a holy relic.....The thing." Said Julie.

"Apologies.....No insult intended." Said Gustavo.

Ana had probably told everyone how the armour of an Angel had appeared out of nowhere. If that didn't stop them touching it, there was Julie's own reputation as someone it was best not to annoy. Even if someone grabbed the Raiments for a joke, there was nowhere to take it. They were in one of the most isolated spots on the globe.

"Fine.....I've thought it over and you're probably right." Said Julie. "We'll leave the armour here, on the bed."

~

~

Despite her reputation Teresa Correa could be quite fussy about whom she dated. Especially the women for some reason, which she'd never really understood. If she was at a party and a little intoxicated, she'd find a decent looking guy to sleep with. With women there had to be some positive chemistry going on. Not soul mates, or anything too deep, but there had to be something. With Lidia Fernandez there was a lot of chemistry. Dating a cop.....Some of her friends had already started teasing her.....

"If we're going to be regularly seeing each other." Said Teresa. "I need to know I don't have to constantly worry about what I say and do. As my mum says, I can be a bit wild."

Her mum was away on the expedition, which meant Lidia could spend the night in Hacienda Yago. Lidia was sat at Teresa's dressing table, while brushing her hair. Still only wearing her underwear, but Lidia always wanted her hair to look good. Long raven dark hair with lots of bangs over her forehead. Lidia was gorgeous. Older than her of course, Teresa hadn't dated anyone age appropriate since high school; according to her mum.

"Relax, Teresa." Said Lidia. "Tell me you've shot two people and plan to kill another and I'll get the cuffs on you in an instant. Anything else.....Like a little recreational drug use. I might join you and I'd never let the law ruin our relationship. Other cops are different, but I never inform on my friends." Teresa never thought Olie or Julian were likely to actually arrest her. Jorge might say he'd get her into court over recreational drug use, but he'd never actually done it. Part of it was Jorge being a bit wary of upsetting her mum. The other part was the plantation being a relatively small group of people, who relied on one another. No cop wanted to end up as the most hated man or woman in the village. It wasn't as if Teresa had ever been into anything heavy.

"How about secrets ? I've been known to mutter in my sleep." Said Teresa. "Can I rely on you to keep my mutterings secret ?"

"Unless you mutter about being a serial killer, you're safe." Said Lidia. "Seriously, Teresa; I can't see you doing anything I might be troubled by."

There was Rocky of course; probably the biggest secret Teresa had ever kept in her life. It would be nice to have a lover who knew about Rocky. Even better to have a cop lover who might help her keep Rocky secret and safe. Michelle would go crazy of course.

"Look.....Can you give me one free pass ?" Asked Teresa. "No matter what I tell you, or show you.....You agree to keep it as our secret. Can you go along with that ?"

Teresa knew Lidia had a thing about her. In truth Teresa was developing a thing about Lidia. It made it harder to betray someone if you cared for them, or lusted after them. Betrayal wasn't impossible of course, just more difficult.

"You're leading up to one big secret, I can tell." Said Lidia. "Alright I'll give you a free pass for one secret, or crime, or whatever it is. Though if it's too huge, it might break us up."

"One free pass.....You promise?" Asked Teresa.

"I promise." Said Lidia.

"Then we need to get fully dressed." Said Teresa. "We've a drive ahead of us. Not too far, we're going to Doc's old office."

"Ahhh.....Doc Perez, I've heard about him." Said Lidia.

Lidia was giving her an inquisitive looks as she dressed. Doc knew everything medical about everyone in the village. It had made life awkward on occasions. From when she'd first gone on the pill, to.....Well, a lot else besides. Teresa felt like saying her free pass wasn't to do with anything medical. No point really, Lidia would soon know the truth.

"You're lucky; I drove over here in an unmarked car." Said Lidia.

There was chatter about the weather in the car, even gossip about Kate still dating Chad Hudson.

"I never saw that one lasting." Said Lidia.

"Me neither.....He seems too fond of variety in his sex life." Said Teresa.

"Takes all sorts I guess." Said Lidia.

Despite the gossip, neither of them tried to get the subject onto Teresa's free pass. They were parked just down the road from Doc's, before it became talked about again.

"No parking outside Doc's.....You'll soon see why." Said Teresa. "The last thing we need is nosey neighbour seeing the car and banging on the door."

"Now I'm even more curious." Said Lidia. "All joking aside, have you killed someone and put their body in Doc's freezer?"

"Oh.....No, of course not."

Had she been joking? Teresa hoped so, but she wasn't certain. Teresa opened the key to Doc's with her own key.

"She's in the room where Doc kept his old clunky freezer." Said Teresa.

"She.....Do I at least get a name now?" Asked Lidia.

"Rocky, her name is Rocky." Said Teresa. "Luke christened her Rocky, as she can be a bit scrappy."

Rocky had never met a human who wasn't being friendly; at least since Colonel Hernandez had tried to grab hold of her. As Teresa opened the door to Doc's backroom, the lizard like creature began to make her happy chirruping sound.

"Fuck, Teresa." Said Lidia. "Only you would have one of these things as a pet. I'm assuming Rocky is used to people?"

"Yes, she's really friendly." Said Teresa. "Unless you're a yappy little terrier; I'll tell you all about that before we leave."

Rocky was all over her, while keeping an eye on Lidia, the newcomer. There were no alarm noises from Rocky, no signs that she was at all anxious about the new stranger in her domain.

"Michelle and I look after her." Said Teresa. "She's never hurt either of us. Would you like to hold her?"

"Like a mum with a new baby." Said Lidia. "Fine.....I'd quite like to hold her."

Teresa sort of handed Rocky to Lidia, who didn't seem to mind at all. Rocky was still chirruping, as Lidia used one hand to stroke the tufts of feathers on her head.

"You'll never win prizes for beauty, Rocky." Said Lidia. "You have a certain something though."

"Hey, don't hurt her feelings." Said Teresa.

"She's clever, probably cleverer than most domestic pets." Said Lidia. "She reacts to her name, genuinely reacts. She also recognises anyone you bring in here, as a friendly."

"You're beginning to sound like Luke." Said Teresa.

"I'm surprised he agreed to hide her, or whatever he's agreed to do."

"Michelle and I threatened to hide Rocky." Said Teresa. "And.....He hated the idea of anyone hurting her. In the end, he seemed quite keen on her living here."

"Alright.....I like your weird pet." Said Lidia. "Now tell me about the yappy little terrier?"

Teresa trusted her friend to not tell the world about Rocky killing a dog. The problem was how much the truth might strain their relationship. Yes, Teresa did want a full on, no messing about, relationship with Lidia Fernandez. There really was no alternative to the truth.

"We were outside.....Yes, I do take her outside." Said Teresa. "We were in the woods that are quite close to Doc's house. A small terrier started barking at Rocky and trying to bite her. I tried to make it go away, but it kept going for her. In the end she killed the damned thing. It was self-defence, Lidia." Lidia sat for a while, with a look on her face that probably meant she was thinking. She now knew that in the right circumstances, Rocky would kill to survive. Teresa had a wakeless night or two, getting used to that idea.

"Did she kill it quickly?" Asked Lidia.

"Yes, it was over in seconds.....I left the body in the woods."

"Sorry for sounding like a cop, but I have to ask." Said Lidia. "Has anyone come knocking on your door, looking for their dog?"

"No.....I thought they might, but no one has."

When Lidia kissed Rocky on the top of her head, Teresa knew everything was going to be alright. There was something about the lizard creature.....Anyone who met her, seemed to really like her. Not that many had actually got to meet her.

"I like your Rocky." Said Lidia. "Difficult for a local cop to ignore her being outside, but I can have a selective memory for things I care about. I can't see me ever remembering seeing Rocky, or knowing where she is."

"I knew you'd love her." Said Teresa. "Everyone who meets Rocky, ends up loving her."

"We need to talk over rules for when you let her out." Said Lidia.

"I know.....Let's talk it over with Luke and Michelle, when they get back." Said Teresa.

~

~

Michelle felt guilty about trapping one of the rabbit type creatures. Maria and her gang of teenage friends, were likely to hate her if they found out. On the other hand, the whole idea of trapping and testing was to; hopefully, declare the creatures to be harmless. They were large creatures, easily the size of a grizzly bear and couldn't simply be ignored.

"Oh that face, Michelle." Said Luke. "We're not harming them, but we have to know they're not going to harm us. We'll take a few samples from one of them and then set it free. It might be a little scared, but that's it."

"They turned up on the cameras again last night." Said Michelle. "They look so harmless, almost cute. It feels as though we're going to trap someone's pet rabbit."

"A damned huge pet rabbit." Said Olie.

"Yeah, we can't ignore them, but can't take one with us." Said Julian.

Julian was definitely the clever one, but Olie had a knack of cutting through to the heart of a problem. The pair of them were master wielders of Occam's razor.

"Alright, I get it." Said Michelle. "One has to be caught and examined. Just don't be surprised if I look miserable while we do it."

"You can set it free when we're finished." Said Luke.

"I'm thirty five and ex-military, Luke." Said Michelle. "Not a five year old kid."

He could have apologised, but the look on her face probably put him off. Luke just nodded at her, as if to say 'point taken.' If only she hadn't looked at the previous night's pictures from the camera traps. The damned bunnies might be huge, but they looked so cute.

"Alright everyone." Said Luke. "I know it's obvious, but no assuming the bunnies really are cute and harmless. Any sign of them attacking us and we use our weapons."

"Fine." Said Olie.

They set off from the darkness outside Luke's rather grand tent and tried to not turn on their flashlights. Lights were for when they were well away from their small tent village and people who might think 'what are they doing ?' Hiding their actions from the others, was one reason why Michelle felt a little guilty.

"We'll head for where most of them seemed to be last night." Said Luke. "The largest number of bunny pics were from the camera Tilly put up."

"That'll be CH 5." Said Michelle.

Michelle had one of the new superguns, which she was hoping not to use that night. Luke was right though, the cute bunnies might turn out to have sharp claws and rows of wicked looking teeth; all mixed with an aggressive nature. If that was the case, Michelle would use the supergun.

"The camera is quite close now." Said Michelle. "Up the animal trail and to the left."

Luke had a small but bright flashlight, which showed something moving at the top of the well-used animal trail. To the local wildlife, the trail went from a small fresh water pond and towards an area of green grass. Everything was indicating that countless hungry and thirsty bunnies had created the animal trail.

"Wow, they look bigger in real life." Said Julian.

Everyone had a gun of some kind and everyone had it in their hands. All the talk about not hurting the cute bunnies, vanished with proximity to the huge creatures.

"There are a lot of them." Said Olie.

"Remember the plan." Said Luke. "We grab one and separate it from the others. I have a hypodermic full of animal tranquilizer, but I'd prefer not to use it. If the creature is docile, we'll lead it away to take our samples."

The plan sounded a bit Disney movie to Michelle, it had right from the beginning. Even herbivores could be dangerous; ask anyone who'd upset a hippo. Harmless, docile plant eater, didn't mean it wouldn't go crazy if they tried to grab it.

"There's one on its own.....Near the pond." Said Michelle.

"That'll do." Said Luke.

Michelle had heard all the classic sayings in her days with the military. Her favourite was that no plan ever survives first contact with the enemy. She'd seen so many well thought out plans; fall apart almost as the first shot was fired. Separating a huge herbivore from its friends; of course it was going to go wrong. The damned creature began screaming, as soon as Olie had hold of it. An ear splitting screaming that might well be heard back at their camp.

"Pull it down.....Pull it down and we can tie its legs." Yelled Luke.

No, of course that hadn't been in the original plan, or the many revisions. If it was expecting the screaming to bring aid, the creature was going to be disappointed. The other half dozen or so creatures fled into the night, leaving their friend to its fate. It seemed there was little esprit de corps among groups of massive bunnies. Michelle grabbed a rear leg and toppled the creature over.

"Tie its rear legs first, Olie." Said Michelle. "All the power will be in the back legs."

"You heard the lady.....Tie up its rear legs." Said Julian.

It hadn't tried to bite any of them, or use the power of its back legs, combined with what looked like claws on its rear legs. It could have hurt them, but hadn't. It struggled and screamed and even the screaming stopped once its legs were bound.

"I think we can say with some certainty. It's as harmless as any other bunny." Said Luke.

"Yeah.....It could have done us some damage with those claws." Said Michelle. "First query answered.....The huge bunnies are harmless plant eaters."

"Not docile, but definitely not aggressive." Added Luke.

"Hold it still, while I take a little of its blood." Said Michelle.

Olie was making a comment about even Thumper putting up more of a fight. The creature didn't scream as Michelle put a needle into its arm, it gave a whimper. That whimper seemed to contain all the suffering of its kind for countless centuries. It was a truly awful sound of total despair.

"Oh, that is a terrible sound." Said Michelle.

"Ignore it.....We need all the other samples." Said Luke.

Michelle had only just filled a vial with bunny blood, when something came towards them. It wasn't exactly hurtling at them, but as her father would have said, it obviously meant business. Larger than their chosen specimen, maybe a male come to rescue his mate ? Or it could have been a large doe, come to fight for her buck ? Or it might have just been one friend helping another. It glared at Michelle, genuinely emoting hate out of its eyes. Michelle left the sample bag and grabbed her supergun.

"Kill it Michelle.....Shoot the fucking thing." Yelled Olie.

Michelle would have emptied her gun into the brute, if it had seemed likely to attack. It didn't though; it stopped about ten feet away and just glared. It gave the same pitiful whimper as the one they'd tied up.

"I reckon we grabbed his wife." Said Julian.

"You might be right." Said Luke. "If it looks like attacking, shoot it, Michelle."

Michelle aimed her gun at its face, but there was something in its posture, even in its eyes. She aimed her gun close to its front legs and fired. The noise was incredible; Michelle remembered that from practise days. The creature ran off, as if the devil himself was chasing him, or her.

"Well done.....That showed him." Said Julian.

"I'm glad you never killed it." Said Luke. "But.....We do need all those samples."

"Yeah.....Sorry." Said Michelle. "I'll get them now."

While she took the samples, Michelle heard them joking at her expense. How to justify firing one of the superguns, as the sound would have been heard in their camp.

"Shadows.....Michelle saw some shadows in the woods." Said Olie. "Luckily she killed one of them with a single shot. Our destroyer of shadows."

"Yeah, very funny." Said Michelle. "I still think the bunnies are harmless. It could have attacked us to help its friend, but it didn't."

"Might be a pacifist bunny." Said Olie.

"I tend to agree with Michelle." Said Luke. "The rabbit type creatures pose no threat to mankind, none at all."

Once she had all the samples in the bag, they left; after untying their captive bunny. There'd be a lot of gossip in the morning of course, over why Michelle had fired her pocket howitzer. No one would believe she'd shot at shadows, or at least she hoped they wouldn't.

~ ~

According to Julie Yago, the temple was safe. She had insisted to Ana that not only was it safe, some of the rooms were dry and capable of being slept in.

"We're talking about the temple of Muisca." Julie had told her. "You'd hardly expect it to be a damp ruin, full of dangerous creatures. Trust me, Ana; we can overnight there in safety."

Julie had a head full of knowledge from her trips to the temple and Ana had her belief in the Gods of Muisca. At least that was how Maria had seen it.

"Julie knows the secret paths.....She once saw an angel." Maria had said.

Getting a group of people to agree to overnight somewhere unknown and potentially dangerous, had been far from easy. Julie having the Raiments of an Angel helped, it had been the deciding factor for many. Chad was going to be there, with his supergun, which was a confidence builder for some. There'd be a lot of firepower going to the temple, including Olie and Julian, armed with police issue shotguns.

"The trick will be getting to the point where no one wants to be left out." Chad had said.

Ana was a long term senior member of the church of Muisca, but even she never viewed herself as a charismatic leader. Ana was an organiser, a damned good one. In the course of a day she'd organised over half a dozen meetings for Julie to attend. Julie had the Raiments and she had the whole leadership thing going for her. When Julie said numbers visiting the temple might have to be limited, because of available sleeping places.....Everyone had wanted to go. Julie had worked her magic, but Ana liked to think it couldn't have been done, without her organisation skills.

"I don't think some of them realised that overnighing, meant carrying their bedding." Said Chad.

"And their food, clean clothing, etc." Said Ana. "A few have moaned, but most seem glad to be on their way to the temple."

"Was it ever likely that places would be rationed ?" Asked Chad.

"Chad.....You're not silly. What do you think ?" Asked Ana.

"Ahhhh, you villains.....You secret is safe with me." Said Chad.

Ana liked Chad, with his easy charm, though there were rumours about him having a darker side.

Kate seemed fairly smitten, so he couldn't be that bad. Besides, Ana didn't like to judge anyone by rumours. Ana was keeping slightly in front of the main group, with their backpacks and supplies. One family had even constructed a kind of sled to carry their food and bedding. There were gripes of course, but on the whole.....They seemed a happy crowd.

"I'm amazed how much some consider to be essential." Said Ana. "We are after all, only going to be at the temple for one night."

"Now I feel guilty.....Kate is carrying some of my gear." Said Chad. "Her idea of course, so I can do my bit as guard for the group."

"Hard to chase a creature while wearing a full backpack." Said Ana.

It was strange, but Ana realised she trusted Julie and her assertion that the temple would be safe.

There was also the assumption that there'd be no attacks on the way there, or coming back again.

Even Chad wasn't really scouting out the route to the temple. He too, seemed to realise there'd be no threat.

"So.....Kate and you." Said Ana. "If you decide to make an honest woman of her, can I marry the pair of you ? All legal of course, I am a registered minister of Muisca."

Chad started laughing, though she noticed he was still watching the group trudging along behind them. Maybe he wasn't that certain of their safety after all ?

"Ahhh Kate, my red haired fury." Said Chad. "She has a doctorate to complete and a family in Calgary. If we can resolve those issues and a hundred and one other problems.....Who knows ? I will give you a call if we need a wedding."

"Seriously, I will travel to Canada." Said Ana.

There was a sound like a scream, though the subsequent laughter showed it to have been nothing to worry about. Chad had his supergun in his hand though and he was looking over the group. It seemed that Greta had made the noise, though it wasn't obvious why.

"We're not far from the temple." Said Chad. "Be nice to get this lot inside.....Somewhere defensible with a few solid walls."

"It was almost going to be a two night sleepover." Said Ana. "I'm just glad it was amended to be a one night's stay."

"I'm sure Julie is right.....There'll be nothing to worry about." Added Ana.

"There is a vibe, Ana." Said Chad. "I felt it when we came here. The temple isn't all about angels and ancient religions. I'll be happy when everyone is back at base and near the helicopters."

Ana didn't want to agree, so she remained silent. She too had felt something, that had nothing to do with a religion which had a God of arts and dance. The temple had been empty for centuries, open to the weather and whatever might have crawled inside.

"I can see it.....I can see the temple roof." Someone yelled.

"I've never been so happy, to see a roof with holes in it." Said Ana. "Please.....Don't tell anyone I said that."

"I feel the same way." Said Chad.

Julie chose the part of the temple to call theirs for the day and the coming night. A different part to when she'd made the Raiments of an Angel appear. There were a lot of dry solid rooms, most with a view of a hillside, with a wood at the bottom. No glass in the windows, but the weather had been dry and warm. Jaimie Gosse was pleased with the rooms, for a reason which was pure Jaimie.

"Smell the air in the rooms." Said Jaime. "Predator scat has a scent to it.....Always does. These rooms smell of nothing apart from a little damp and decaying plants. Should make safe overnight quarters for our group."

Julie seemed in a bit of a dream, while looking at the woods in the distance. After an entire life in the business, she knew what the plantation over there was growing.

"Coffee.....So rare to see a plantation that isn't ours." Said Julie. "They'll be part of the Caldas Department, just as we are. Who runs the plantation though ? I'll be totally honest and admit that I have no idea."

"Where is that plantation ?" Asked Ana. "It looks quite some distance from here."

"It is a long way; right the other side of the plateau." Said Julie. "They'll be to the north of Manizales. When we get back, I'll make a point of getting to know who they are. I might even drive over to see them. So rare to see another plantation."

"At least one without a Yago sign on it." Said Jaimie.

Ana was beginning to feel like yet another employee of Julie's plantation and that would never do. There were a lot of people needing to be shown where to put down their bedrolls for the night. Food

needed preparing too. There were three essentials to the night being a success. First was a secure, safe place to call home for a night. The second was a comfy bed and the third was a hot meal.

"I hate to interrupt, but we have people needing to know where they're sleeping." Said Ana.

"Yes.....I'm letting myself drift a little." Said Julie. "That will never do.....Let's get the Muisca faithful settled down. And fed of course."

"People are always more sociable.....If you feed them well." Said Jaimie.

Julie rushed away, in her usual fashion. Ana was happy though, knowing that Julie would ensure everyone was looked after. Ana decided to behave more like the leader of the expedition. She found Chad and asked him to go with her, as she went around talking to members of the expedition.

"I seem to remember you being a body guard for the Tessera Coffee people." Said Ana. "I was hoping to make use of those skills. Will you walk with me, while I talk to people and explore some of the temple we haven't seen yet?"

"Ana, I would be genuinely delighted to be your body guard." Said Chad. "I'm due to meet up with Kate. How do you fancy two bodyguards?"

"That sounds a brilliant idea." Said Ana.

They found Kate helping Luke to put up tents for those who'd never mastered the activity. Kate didn't need much encouragement to join them on what she referred to as a 'saunter.' It did feel as though they were going to be the only people in the temple who weren't furiously busy. That of course suited to Ana, who felt the need to look more like the person in charge.

"Up I think, follow every ramp and set of stairs going up." Said Ana. "There are some members of my church who I saw heading for the top floor. The view of the plateau will be amazing."

"Just be aware that no one has scouted ahead." Said Chad. "In other words, we could find anything up there."

"Including the extended Carvalho family." Said Ana. "I trust Julie when she says the temple is safe."

"We're both carrying pocket howitzers." Said Kate. "I think we can keep you safe."

Ana went up a ramp and it was pleasing to find her two bodyguards had followed her. It was a new situation for her, being guarded and protected by armed guards. It was actually a nice feeling. Ana never did find the extended Carvalho family, but she did find Julie giving lots of instructions to confused looking members of the Muisca church. Many had never been camping in the lives, so it was going to be an interesting sleepover. Ana waved at Julie and carried on going up.

"I get a feeling about the next ramp going up." Said Kate.

"Good feeling or run away feeling?" Asked Chad.

"An excellent feeling, a real positive vibe." Said Kate. "Can we go up there? Come on, other people are allowed to act on their feelings."

Ana looked up the ramp and had her own feeling. Destiny was the feeling, as if she was fated to go up the ramp. Not a feeling of fear, but a feeling that like it or not, it was her destiny to witness events on the top floor of the ancient temple.

"Yes, why not.....We'll keep going up until we can't go any further." Said Ana.

There were no more members of their group on the floors going up. It was just too far and too high above where most had decided to spend the night. Still a long way from being dark. Chad brought up the obvious negative consequence of their sauntering around the temple.

"You do both realise we're likely to miss the evening meal?" Asked Chad.

"I'm sure someone will save us some food." Said Ana.

Nothing would have stopped Ana then; there was a real feeling of urgency, about getting to the top floor. There had been talk about expecting strange things in the temple, but Ana hadn't expected to have such a feeling of urgency.

"We should have brought water with us.....It's still a hell of a long way to the top." Said Chad.

"Can't be this high." Said Kate. "We all saw the temple roof.....Barely protruding through the top of the trees."

"Let's look." Said Ana.

There were two windows roughly facing towards where they'd entered the temple. Even better was a hole in the wall, facing the hillside going down from the plateau. Ana expected to see the ground not far below them, maybe a few opossums playing in the leaf litter.

"That is.....Impossible." Said Chad.

It was like looking from higher than the tallest mountain. Later Ana likened the experience to how she imagined the world would look, viewed from the International Space Station. It was absurd how far away the ground looked. Chad was right, it was an impossibility.

"I think we're being drugged." Said Kate. "Something in the air.....Rotting mushrooms or something. Maybe we need to go back to the others?"

"No, we can't go back.....We need to go right to the top." Said Ana.

"She's right.....We'd never forgive ourselves if we run away." Said Chad.

"I wouldn't call it running away.....Fine, we keep going up." Said Kate.

The old temple had no more than eight floors; Kate had roughly counted them from the outside. Yet they climbed at least another dozen ramps and several flights of stairs. It was all now well beyond an impossibility. Ana was wondering if Kate had been right; something in the air was causing them to hallucinate. It was Chad who was first to climb the last set of stairs going up.

"Wow, so strange to finally get here." Said Chad. "I'm at the top of the temple."

Ana deliberately let Kate go first, so that she could reach the top last. Something was going to happen, something strange and, that word again, impossible.

"Behind you, Chad !" Yelled Kate.

Ana probably had the best view from the top of the stairs. A creature was quite close to Chad, a new type of creature. The shape of a man, they'd even put on some fairly basic looking clothing. Sharp teeth of course, they seemed obligatory among all types of the creature's plaguing Julie's plantation. The creature growled at Chad, who fired his supergun at it, twice. Simple as that, almost too quick to take in. Only Ana had a good view and the creature never ran away, or hit the ground. It yelled and vanished, as if it had never been there.

"Damn.....What the hell was that ?" Shouted Kate.

"It can't have vanished." Said Chad. "I can't be the next to be accused of shooting at shadows."

There was plenty of light; most of the roof had gone; probably torn away by centuries of wind and rain. Ana saw a glint of red on the ground and walked over to it. No touching it, just in case there was some kind of infection. It was about three inches across and Ana knew a small pool of blood when she saw it.

"No hallucination, no shooting at shadows." Said Ana. "This is blood from whatever you shot."

~

~