

Coffee Addict

Chapter 6 – The Burrow

“When a man was old and grey, he measured his success by the quality or otherwise, of his long term relationships with women. Or, so Chad’s dad had told him. He wasn’t about to ruin what he had with Kate, just to get a green star for punctuality.”

Σ

Colonel Hernandez had always prided himself on being tough. If he was given orders, he always carried them out fully and to the letter. If he had any doubts that the ends didn’t justify the means, he kept such thoughts to himself. Similarly, he expected those under him to have the same attitude to his orders. If they asked inappropriate questions, they were transferred to another division, often in another part of Colombia. The colonel had just taken a deep breath at the top of what looked like an enormous underground burrow.

“You’re right, it does smell pretty bad.” Said Hernandez.

“Something died down there, maybe several things.” Said Olie.

“And.....You didn’t go down there and take a look ?” Asked Hernandez.

“We thought you’d want to do that.” Said Julian.

Two local trainee cops, only armed with shotguns. The colonel didn’t blame them for sitting this one out.

“Alright.....Stay out of our way, but don’t leave.” Said Hernandez. “I may have more questions.”

The colonel had six good cops with him, veterans of many battles with the infamous cartels. Plus he had Captain Sánchez, his own personal guard and veteran of several brutal wars against the Narcos. Pablo Escobar had once called Sánchez the butcher of Medellín. Coming from Escobar, Sánchez had taken the comment as a compliment. All of the colonel’s officers were experienced, well-armed, and used to obeying his orders without question. Hernandez looked at Sánchez.

“Well, Captain.....Shall we go and see what’s died down there ?” Asked Hernandez.

“Sounds a good plan.” Said Sánchez.

The colonel could have remained on the surface, safely inside one of the police vehicles. His reputation for toughness would suffer though, as would his team’s faith in him. The colonel never sent his officers anywhere that he wouldn’t go himself. It took a few minutes to get ready. Kit needed checking and everyone needed a hand held light. Eventually the colonel led the way, with Sánchez walking beside him.

“Oh, that stink.....I’ll ask Bogotá for gas masks, in case we do this again.” Said Sánchez.

“Old death, I know the stench.” Said Hernandez. “Something down here has been dead for a while.” Something with claws had dug the hole in the ground. There were marks all over the walls, where it had dug out huge amounts of earth and debris, before dragging it all out of the hole. A steep hole that benefitted from being sheltered by the old large barn. Clay soil that had dried out over the years, leaving the perfect conditions to build a deep, strong burrow. Whatever had chosen the barn to build its home, wasn’t stupid.

“It’s getting steeper.” Said Sánchez.

Down the burrow went, until even the solid clay was beginning to worry Hernandez. There were no supports for what was effectively a large hole in the ground. He was just about to call a halt, until the tunnel had been supported a little.....When the burrow stopped descending.

“Not a mindless brute.....It knew when to stop digging deeper.” Said Hernandez.

“We’re a good fifty feet below the surface.” Someone muttered.

Olie and Julian were up there, probably drinking soda and nibbling at junk food. If there was a cave-in, they’d call for help. Not that the plantation were geared up to do it that quickly.

“There.....Crap ! That looks like someone’s pet dog.” Said Sánchez.

It was a pile of pet dogs, some of them little more than a few remaining bones. One of his officers picked up a few collars with name tags on them. Had there been notifications of missing pets by worried owners ? It was something worth looking into. It might give a time frame for when the trouble started.

“Christ.....There’s a half-eaten cat over here.” Someone muttered.

Whatever the beast was, it didn’t seem to have a taste for the local wildlife. No deer, no possums or opossums. Its diet seemed to almost entire comprise of people’s pet dogs and the occasional cat. Hernandez had expected a few human remains and had dreaded finding a dead child. Then again, there were no long standing missing persons notifications in the area. Like so much else, it was a mystery. Beyond the dead dogs was something easy to understand.

“Bushes and lots of soft leaves.....It built itself a nest.” Said Sánchez.

A large wide nest, it gave them a pretty good idea of the size of whatever had called the burrow its home. Large, at least the size of the creature Jorge had shot at. Maybe it was the creature he’d shot in the face ? That brute had run off towards the old Wilkins place.

“Something over here, Sir.” Someone shouted. “Looks.....They look like eggs.”

“Can’t be eggs.....I saw the dead one, it had teats.” Said Hernandez.

“Yes, that was definitely a mammal.” Added Sánchez.

Yet, the leathery looking things against the wall, did look like eggs. Sticky, they were held together in a mass against the wall. Sánchez pulled one from the pile and it looked like a green leathery, ostrich egg. The colonel had heard that all mammals were live bearers with wombs, but there was the good old duck-billed platypus. That was a mammal, but it definitely laid eggs. Maybe the creatures plaguing the plantation had adapted in some way ?

“Wow, there are about a dozen of these eggs.” Said Sánchez.

They couldn’t be allowed to hatch, or whatever they did. The idea of another dozen creatures who could charge at a Land Rover and win.....No, that couldn’t be allowed to happen.

“We’ll take them; I’m not leaving them here.” Said Hernandez. “Everyone can carry some of them.....All the eggs are going back to the mobile laboratory.”

~

~

Yes, somewhere deep down, Julie knew it would cause a row with Jorge Alvarez. The new recruits to the local police had arrived a little earlier than expected. Placing them in separate lodgings all over the village hadn’t been done to hide them; though she could see how Jorge might think that. There simply wasn’t anywhere they could have been billeted together. Anyway, it made sense to spread them about. After all, they were employed as guards for the entire plantation village.

“They do work for you Jorge, but never forget that I’m paying them.” Said Julie.

The telephone call and argument had been quite fierce; she hadn’t thought Jorge would react so badly.

"You could have at least called me when they arrived." Said Jorge. "Leave a message with Gabi, if you can't find me. They're armed cops, Julie.....I need to know where they are and what they're doing."

Four men and one woman. All of them experienced cops, or ex-members of the National Army of Colombia. If five were causing arguments, she dreaded to think how Jorge might react if she really did hire a hundred guards.

"Yes.....I'll give you something rare, Jorge.....My apology." Said Julie. "They have your number and all of them have been told to make sure you know where they are. I got it wrong.....But this is something new. Think of them as experienced people.....Which you do need. Everyone loves Olie and Julian, but they aren't exactly the A team."

"Fine.....Fine, Julie." Said Jorge. "You're right; I do need the extra five cops. Let's put the lack of communications down to a teething problem. Things are developing.....Did you hear about the eggs being found at the old Wilkins place?"

"No.....What kind of eggs?" Asked Julie.

Something Jorge knew and she didn't. Maybe not a first, but he was certain to make sure she never forgot it.

"Not the kind in omelettes." Said Jorge. "Huge leathery eggs.....Like something out of an alien film, according to Olie. They've been taken to the mobile lab the people from Canada set up."

"I must see these eggs.....Will you meet me there?" Asked Julie.

"Coffee with Gabi, then I'm on my way." Said Jorge.

~ ~

It had been so long since Chad had been required as a body guard, that he'd forgotten to check requests on his phone. There it was, received the previous afternoon, so it had been lurking on his phone for a while. Not that their phones always worked that well, but that was no excuse. He was needed to keep David Sullivan safe and unmolested at a meeting. David was their boss while in Colombia, so missing the message mattered, a lot.

"Fuck.....I'm in trouble." Said Chad.

Not early, but not really late either. Chad had decided to make the most of little direct supervision of what he was doing. He was just dressing, after taking a very long hot shower. Kate did have things to do and was rushing about, looking for her car keys.

"You're in trouble.....Have you seen my car keys?" Asked Kate. "I can't be late, not when I have an idea why they want to see me."

Was a regular girlfriend a disaster for your career? Chad had never noticed that before. It wasn't as if the village was that huge. You could get anywhere in half an hour, but they were both continually arriving late for work related meetings. Too much passion at inappropriate times, that was it. Not that Chad had any intention of changing that. When a man was old and grey, he measured his success by the quality or otherwise, of his long term relationships with women. Or, so Chad's dad had told him. He wasn't about to ruin what he had with Kate, just to get a green star for punctuality. "I never noticed I'm baby-sitting David today." Said Chad. "It's on the roster, but I missed it. I've got to rush.....How did you misbehave?"

"I've been talking to Maria, the girl who saw two friends die in front of her." Said Kate. "Just giving her a friendly ear, sometimes a shoulder to cry on. I think someone might have reported it."

"Wow, interrogating a child with no parent present.....You are fucked." Said Chad.

"It's not like that, you idiot." Said Kate. "I was just trying to help the kid."

"I know, just be careful.....Don't give her parents anything to lodge a complaint about." Said Chad.

They kissed and despite calling him an idiot, there was genuine warmth in the kiss. Out of the corner of his eye, Chad noticed a set of car keys, behind the fruit bowl on top of the fridge.

"Ahh.....Car keys." He said.

Giving her those gained him another kiss and a long cuddle. By the time he left the apartment, Chad thought it might be a decent day after all. Chad usually used a fairly nice car if he was taking David Sullivan around. There were two really sporty Audi's in the car pool and as David was the boss, there was never any problem in getting one of them. Now though, it was too late to improve on the car he was driving.

"Who knows, he might like this rather elderly, silver Prius." Chad muttered.

Some deity was smiling on him, maybe the God of Rainbows, who Jess Fisher seemed obsessed with. His phone had the maximum reception bars, which meant he could send David an apology text, with about an eighty percent chance of it arriving on David's phone.

'Sorry.....Running a little late, car problems.' He lied.

'No problem.....Come straight to the Doc's place.' Sent David.

Doc Perez, so that was what all the mystery was about. The Doc had recently contacted a few old buddies with the health ministry in Bogotá. One of them had known David reasonably well and had given him a quick run through over the phone. It seemed the Doc had shared a few angry words with Colonel Hernandez. That might well be very useful.

"No wonder David wanted a body guard." Chad mumbled.

~ ~

Jess Fisher would have happily admitted to having a thing about Muisca in general. She might even have used the word obsession to describe her interest in a few Gods of that ancient religion. Cuchavira the rainbow deity had grabbed her interest, the way some of her friends at college, had claimed to have been born again after finding Jesus. That had always made her quietly snigger, but now she had the same feelings about a South American religion, which had been around since long before the conquistadors had arrived. She saw everything David Sullivan had on the subject, including a whole file about Julie delaying a trip to the temple. A temple deep in the almost impenetrable jungle, which covered the high plateau. Something had made her decide to act, even if she wouldn't normally have described herself as impetuous. Her dad definitely wouldn't have approved.....

"I know it's a cliché, Ana." Said Jess. "I feel reborn, as if the ancient deities have decided I'm worthy in some way. I'm sure now.....I wish to become a member of your church."

It was obvious Ana Moura was ready to go out when she'd arrived. Polite to call first, better to have arranged a meeting in advance. Jess had a need to become a member of Muisca. Like a hunger biting at her soul, she simply had to become one of them. She also had a need to see the temple in the jungle. Ana had politely offered her coffee and seemed genuinely pleased to see her.

"You're sure Jess?" Asked Ana. "Are you going to tell your family?"

"I've never been surer of anything in my life." Said Jess. "I will be telling my family. No being silent and keeping it a secret."

Jess was keeping certain things to herself. There was an old saying used in many famous quotes by writers and philosophers. Whole families go to church on Sunday morning and talk to God in their prayers. But if one of them claimed that God talked to them.....They'd be labelled as crazy. Jess hadn't heard a voice claiming to be Cuchavira, God of the rainbow, but she had heard things. Usually at night and mostly when driving home along the edges of the plantation. The sound of something talking very quietly, in a language she didn't know. Sounds of the animals too, though she wasn't an

expert on the noises they made. It might sound crazy, but Jess knew it meant that Muisca was ready for her, that the jungle wanted her to enter the temple on the high plateau.

"We're not a jealous religion, Jess." Said Ana. "Many pray to the ancient Gods of Muisca, yet still offer prayers to the Christian God. If you wish to rise in our Church though.....One day, you will be asked to worship only our deities."

"Can I cross that bridge when I come to it?" Asked Jess.

"Of course you can." Said Ana. "Tonight.....Can you come here at about eight?"

"I can.....Will I become a member tonight?" Asked Jess.

"You're ready, Jess....I can tell." Said Ana. "I will take you to our church here in the village. I have to ask again.....Are you ready to join the church of Muisca?"

"Yes, I am."

~

~

Jorge had begun briefly going home most afternoons. Nothing fancy to eat, just the obligatory local coffee and a pastry to nibble. Gabi liked the idea and she'd made it a fixed part of her day. Just an hour to share news, coffee and a bite to eat. She knew he was safe, that nothing had eaten him that day, or even chewed at him. He knew that his wife hadn't become another victim of whatever was stalking the plantation. It mattered, when every day seemed to bring a fresh horror.....

"Eggs now.....Large leathery eggs." Said Jorge.

"How large?" Asked Gabi, as she put the coffee pot on the table.

"The size of an ostrich egg.....According to Olie."

His wife was a typical cop's wife. She'd hear priceless gossip, but keep it to herself unless it alright to tell all her friends. Sometimes she'd help him feed certain information into the local gossip network, but she'd never been keen on that. Too easy to lose the friends who trusted her. Of course, gossip travelled in all directions, including to his wife from the Tessera Coffee team from Calgary. Chad in particular, who told Kate, who then saw Gabi in the supermarket.....

"I never realised you were famous." Said Gabi. "Everyone is talking about how you made one of those things run away."

It had to have come from Kate and Jorge felt his heart speed up a little. They'd nearly always had a solid marriage based on good sex and honesty. That honesty included never lying by omission. There had been a few serious rows, every marriage has those. Nothing likely to end in the divorce courts.

"I'm so sorry.....I just didn't want you to worry." Said Jorge.

"Did you really shoot it in the face?" Asked Gabi.

"Yes.....Twice in the face and the fucker ran away, Gabi.....It ran away."

He'd been wanting to tell her since it had happened, but wasn't sure how she'd react. Gabi might have tried to get him to leave the police and find a safer job.....Lion taming maybe. His wife actually looked happy; Gabi was laughing.

"I was worried when I heard, but I'm also very proud." Said Gabi. "Can I see this super gun you used to shoot it? I won't touch it, Jorge.....I just want to see it."

Gabi might have already seen parts of it; the gun did stick out a little from under his jacket. Jorge took the gun out from under his jacket and placed it just beyond his coffee cup. It glinted silver in the sunlight from the window. There was the slight smell of gun oil, the smell shared by all new guns.

"I thought it would be bigger." Said Gabi. "But that would make it hard to carry."

"Large enough, Chad killed one of the brutes with his." Said Jorge. "I think the one I shot will be dead by now.....We just haven't found it yet. Luke thinks I shot the beast who laid the huge eggs."

"Alright.....I'm quite impressed." Said Gabi. "It can go back into its holster, or whatever you use."

"It fits quite well onto leather straps." Said Jorge.

The super gun went back under his jacket, with just a little of the butt protruding. Tempting to stay with his wife, maybe go out somewhere to do a little shopping. It wasn't every day that he did something to make her proud of him. His presence had been requested though, by Julie Yago herself. The colonel had invited her to see the eggs found at the old Wilkins farm and Julie had invited him. The exact word she'd used had been to inspect the eggs, which sounded too interesting an opportunity to miss.

"No rest for the wicked.....See you tonight, I won't be late." He said.

A quick kiss and Jorge was out of the house and on his way to where the people from Canada, had parked their mobile laboratory. Actually the trailers had been provided by the Colombian authorities and David Sullivan had quickly claimed it.

~ ~

Julie hadn't thought she'd get on with Colonel Hernandez, but he seemed eager to please her. Like armies and police everywhere, once someone reached the rank of Colonel, their life seemed dominated by surviving the internal politics. It might well be that he'd been told to keep her happy. Her family did have a lot of influential contacts in Bogotá. She'd seen Jorge parking his rather crappy looking four wheel drive and had waited for him.

"Well.....Have you seen the eggs yet ?" Asked Jorge.

"No, I've only just arrived.....I was waiting for you." Said Julie.

"Who else will be here ?" Asked Jorge.

"No idea, Jorge.....This is very much the colonel's big egg reveal."

Julie opened the door of the trailer, which led into a small admin area, like somewhere visitors would be checked over to make sure they were, who they said they were. Luke Walsh was there sat at a tiny desk, while fiddling with a piece of electrical equipment.

"Wonderful, you're just in time to see the egg being stimulated." Said Luke.

"Is that safe ?" Asked Jorge.

"It's an egg, Jorge.....Not a nuclear warhead." Said Luke.

Julie laughed and wished she hadn't. She too had been wondering if it was safe to stimulated one of the leathery eggs. Not that she knew what was meant by stimulating the egg. Again, Jorge was thinking along the same lines as her.

"What is involved in this.....Stimulation ?" Asked Jorge.

"You'll see.....The colonel is really excited about it." Said Luke. "Come on through, I've finally got this gadget to work."

Through another door, which looked fairly flimsy. Whatever might hatch out of the eggs, wouldn't find it hard if it decided to make a bid for freedom. They were in the working part of the trailer, with one wall covered in electrical apparatus. On the floor and seemingly stuck to the wall, was a heap of about a dozen large, sticky and leathery eggs. One of the eggs was on a bench, with several wires attached to it.

"Wow.....I take it you never stuck the eggs to the wall." Said Jorge.

"No.....Move them elsewhere and they stick to the wall there, or they glue themselves to the floor. Getting them unstuck can be hard work." Said the colonel.

"They even glue themselves to carpet tiles. Hard to see why that evolved, but some tropical fish eggs use the same trick." Said Luke.

"It keeps the eggs in one place." Said Julie. "Easier for mama monster to look after them."

"You might be right." Said Luke.

Luke attached wires from the egg to the gadget he'd been fiddling with. It didn't take the deductive reasoning of Sherlock Holmes, to know the gadget was intended to stimulate the huge egg.

"We're back to this stimulation business." Said Jorge. "What are you trying to achieve."

"Easier to show you." Said the colonel.

"I recommend everyone steps back a bit, just in case." Said Luke.

In case of what ? Not that Julie expected to be told. Asking would probably just receive another 'it's easier to show you,' reply.

"Do you know what's in there ?" Asked Jorge. "Did you X-ray the egg ?"

"No, that might damage the creature inside." Said Luke.

It was definitely the colonel's show; he was the one reaching for a switch on the gadget Luke had been playing with.

"Just a little electrical stimulation" Said the colonel. "Encouragement to hatch out and take a look at the world. The hatchling will be tiny and harmless."

Which was why they'd been advised to step back. Julie moved so far back, that her back was pushed hard against the wall of the trailer. The colonel pressed the button and the egg actually moved. Only a little, but it definitely wobbled slightly.

"Good.....Good, the developing creature is alive." Said Luke. "Again.....Press the button."

This time the egg actually cracked. Despite its leathery appearance, there was a clear line from top to bottom, where the shell had cracked. It wobbled again and a piece of the shell the size of a postage stamp, fell away.

"If this thing kills me, I will sue." Said Jorge. "I thought we were just going to look at the eggs."

"Where's your spirit of adventure ?" Asked the colonel.

Julie would rather have been facing one of the adult brutes, with one of Chad's super guns in her hand. There was something terrifying about not knowing what might emerge from the cracked egg.

"One last electrical stimulation.....Press the button again." Said Luke.

Whatever was in there, didn't like them keep zapping it. There were a lot of bashing noises and one entire side of the egg fell off. Of course, because of the perversity of the universe, the hole was facing away from them. It was silent, with no one speaking. Julie could hear everyone breathing, faster and deeper than most people breathe.

"Crab.....I can see something." Said Jorge. "Looks like a claw."

"It's coming out." Said Julie.

Small, but fully formed, or at least she assumed it was fully formed. Not one of the wolf type creatures, this was something different. Like a lizard, but even the hatchling had a light covering of black fur.

"Definitely reptilian looking, but it might develop into one of the wolf creatures." Said Luke. "Being honest.....We have no idea what this creature might develop into."

It turned and bobbed its head at them, as if letting them know it was there. Less than six inches tall and covered in short black fur. It had claws, but the tiny reptile had lost its ability to scare Julie. She was actually beginning to enter the 'isn't it cute phase.' She was actually hoping Luke wasn't going to dissect the poor thing.

"It looks.....Sort of lost." Said Julie.

"Probably imprints on the first thing it sees, like birds." Said Luke. "Pick it up; pet it a little and it might follow you everywhere."

"That could be useful." Said Jorge.

"No way am I picking that up." Said Julie, though she had been tempted.

"People today, no sense of adventure." Said the colonel.

He had to nudge her out of the way, to get to the creature that had emerged from the egg. It was still looking at them and doing the head bobbing. The colonel scooped the hatchling up in both hands and held it quite firmly.

"Warm blooded, Luke." Said the colonel. "One for your notes, definitely warm blooded."

"And born from an egg.....It's all so different to what I'd have expected." Said Luke.

"Careful, colonel." Said Julie. "I can see it has teeth from here. Small teeth, but probably razor sharp."

"Nonsense.....A baby this size will be harmless." Said the colonel.

He was prodding at it and, which meant he wasn't holding the poor thing that well. It had to weigh two or three pounds and looked far from harmless. The colonel said something about the creature having a second eyelid, like a cat. He might have tried to touch one of its eyes, or the creature might have simply been pissed off with being held by the colonel. It bit his right index finger and judging by the amount of blood, it had bitten deep.

"Shit.....This damn thing." Yelled the colonel. "Help me; get this thing off me, Luke."

"Don't you hurt it.....It's just a baby." Said Julie. "Harm it and I'll call everyone I know in the Bogotá government."

"Hurt it.....It's bitten his finger to the bone." Said Luke.

Things became frantic, with Luke trying to pull the creature off the colonel, without harming it, or the colonel losing a finger. The colonel began to scream as the creature used its claws on the back of his hand.

"Get the little fucker off me !" Yelled the colonel.

"I think we've seen enough." Said Julie.

She grabbed Jorge by the arm and left the trailer. Once they were in the car park, the world seemed to make sense again. There had been a moment in there.....Julie had imagined what an adult sized creature could have done to the colonel; to all of them.

"Are you going to call Bogotá ?" Asked Jorge. "We need experts, not that farce."

"I have the Tessera Coffee human resources files on the entire team they sent us. Keep it to yourself and I'll happily let you read them. We've been given their best people." Said Julie. "Luke Walsh is internationally famous, the best in his field. He'd just being bullied by the famous Colonel Hernandez. I won't be able to get rid of the colonel.....But I can get his claws trimmed a little."

Jorge mentioned wanting a quick look at the old Wilkins place and Julie decided to go with him. It would be nice to get a feel for the place, to see where the eggs had been found. Before she got in her car to follow him, she took one last look at the trailer.

"I do hope they don't hurt that poor creature." She muttered.

~

~

Jess Fisher had happily got into the old van, which someone had loaned to Ana Moura. She hadn't even objected to being blindfolded.

"It's a rite of passage.....The blindfold come off for the drive back." Ana had told her.

Until the right words were spoken by a priest of Muisca, she wasn't one of them, a believer in their religion. Right up until that moment, Jess could simply change her mind and someone would drive her home. Home of course, was the apartment rented for her by the Tessera Coffee head office in Calgary. The van had stopped and Jess had felt something stroke her face. It hadn't been Ana; it had

been someone, or something else. Jess had some kind of nervous reaction to being where she was and what she intended to do. Her entire body began to quiver, the way it had after she'd lost her virginity to Rory Gagnon in his dad's garden shed.

"Are you alright, Jess ?" Asked Ana. "You're shaking."

"I'm fine.....I just realised how huge this all is." Said Jess.

"I'll help you in there.....The blindfold has to stay on for now." Said Ana.

Ana came round to her side of the van and helped her out. It was then a difficult stumble over rough ground. Others were there, she could hear them muttering at one another. The congregation come to look over the new recruit ? It certainly sounded like that. No voices she recognised, but she hadn't been there long and the village was home to two or three thousand people.

"Careful now.....Steps to get up, five of them." Said Ana.

"They're quite steep." Someone said.

Jess tripped, but recovered and made it to the top of the steps. Ana took her by the arm and led her straight ahead. The sound of even more voices and what sounded like.....Wind chimes; definitely wind chimes somewhere quite close. So many people muttering, the entire village had to be followers of the ancient Muisca religion.

"Almost there." Said Ana.

A change of the way things sounded; there was now a slight echo. They were indoors, probably inside one of their churches. A scent too, flowers of some kind, but Jess didn't recognise their scent. Ana stopped walking, so Jess stood still.

"You're there, right in front of the altar." Said Ana.

Ana remained with her, so she wasn't going to perform the ritual, or service, or whatever they called it. A male voice at first, telling her to leave the blindfold on, until someone removed it. Then a female voice, asking her if she wanted to be accepted into the church of Muisca.

"Yes, I do.....Very much." Said Jess.

There were a lot of people around her, Jess heard them muttering in approval. The invisible hand stroked her face again and Jess knew she was making the right decision. Another male voice, fairly deep and sonorous. They definitely seemed to have brought out everyone for her big night. Were they trying to impress her ? A nice idea, but they probably did the same for every new recruit. A hand held hers, which was unexpected.

"Lean on me if you need to." Said the male voice. "You need to kneel to offer yourself to the Gods of Muisca."

Jess prided herself on being fit, but there was something about trying to kneel while wearing a blindfold. She needed the support of his hand. The wind chime sound again, but indoors. Was it really wind chimes ? Through a small gap where the blindfold had shifted, she saw something move. As it moved, there was the beautiful wind chime sound. Was it one of them, a deity of Muisca ? Jess would agree to having a few personal flaws, she knew when her imagination needed to be ignored. The shape moving across her line of vision was probably one of the congregation, dressed up for the occasion.

"Jess Fisher.....You are welcomed into the church of Muisca." Said the male voice.

Was that it ? Jess had an impression that time had passed, but had no idea what had occurred. It was like amnesia. Words had been said by her and another, but she couldn't recall any of those words. The blindfold was removed and Ana was hugging her.

"I don't remember.....Any of it." Said Jess.

"That is how it's supposed to be." Said Ana. "You're one of us now, Jess."

"That wasn't what I expected." Said Jess.

"It never is." Said Ana.

Jess recognised a few people, but not that many. Two women from various times she'd visited the offices of the Yago Plantation. A young man who she'd bumped into a few times while getting coffee at the one and only decent coffee place in the village. A couple of others, but the rest.....Jess would get to know them; she'd get to know every single one of them.

"I am so glad I heard about Muisca." Said Jess.

There was a little cheering and at the back of the church, behind the simple wooden altar, there was the wind chime sound again. Like a young person in a bright costume, someone seemed to run right across the back of the house being used as a church. They ran through walls and vanished as if they were nothing but a dream.

"Did.....Did you see that, Ana ?" Asked Jess.

Ana just smiled at her and held her hand.

~

~

© Ed Cowling ~ May 2025