

Coffee Addict

Chapter 5 – The Carcass

“A Grisly bear comes in at around six hundred pounds.” Said Luke. “We’re calling our friend here the Santos beast. Named after Alice Santos, the local pharmacist; she found it after all. Our dead and decaying friend here, weighs about eleven hundred pounds.....Probably more when she was alive.”

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Kate Doyle had heard one of the local cops say that she was with Chad. Julian it had been and he’d been sure enough to say it while she was within earshot. Was she with Chad ? To her it felt like two people a long way from home, enjoying themselves in an adult manner. They were both single, or as single as anyone is when they’re a very long way from home. Fuck buddies ? Kate hated the term, and friends with benefits sounded even worse. Casual sex was a nonsense, there was never anything casual about good sex. Was she Chad’s girlfriend ?

“No way.” Kate muttered.

She was spending most nights at his place and had a routine for showering there, dressing there and.....As she was currently doing; having her morning run from his place.

“Crap.....I really might be with Chad.” She mumbled.

The thought didn’t really horrify her, though he wasn’t her usual type. Far too sure of himself. Kate was enjoying herself though and the guy had a good firm body. She was going to carry on seeing him. But if he took her for granted, or began asking where the relationship was going.....She’d grab her things and be out of his place like the wind.

Kate waived back at Maria, who was waving from across the street. They’d bumped into each other on a few mornings and had begun a kind of friendship. Still at home most of the time, with regular visits by Doc Perez. The poor girl still seemed haunted by the death of her two friends. Officially the plantation investigation team were avoiding Maria. She wasn’t an adult and couldn’t be questioned without the presence of a parent.

“She’s just a troubled kid.....And we’re friends.” Muttered Kate.

Kate swerved across the usually quiet road and was close to being hit by a car. The driver honked their horn and Kate waived a couple of times. One day a car would get her, all her friends told her that. Maria had stopped her morning run and was looking at her, a little open mouthed.

“Wow, you’re lucky she stopped.....Anna’s mum has blurred vision.” Said Maria.

“And she’s still driving ?” Asked Kate.

“She saw you.....You have to be more careful, Kate.” Said Maria.

There was that haunted look again, as if she hadn’t got over the death of Luis, her boyfriend. It hadn’t been that long ago though and losing two friends on the same night. Kate had read that emotional strength didn’t kick in until people had suffered a little. If that was true, Maria was going to be one hell of a strong adult. They’d exchanged phone numbers, but Maria had never called her.

“Are you alright ?” Asked Kate.

“Fine.....Just don’t get squashed by a car.”

It hadn’t been planned, but it did seem to be the perfect time. If Maria said no, Kate had already decided to leave the girl alone. Maria didn’t seem keen on Chad, but there were ways around that.

"If you want to talk, about anything, you have my number." Said Kate. "If you don't fancy coming to the apartment, we can use the car. Drive somewhere and talk."

"You mean an official interview ?" Asked Maria.

"No.....No notes, no recordings.....Just two friends having a talk about things."

"Promise me, it'll be totally private." Said Maria.

"Of course it will.....I promise." Said Kate.

What would she do if Maria mentioned something too dreadful to ignore ? That was a bridge she'd examine when, and if, they came to it.

"Alright.....Tomorrow morning." Said Maria. "I'll wait for you on this corner.....No driving too far out of town; I still get nightmares about being in the woods."

"Fine, we'll find somewhere on the edge of the village." Said Kate.

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"A Grisly bear comes in at around six hundred pounds." Said Luke. "We're calling our friend here the Santos beast. Named after Alice Santos, the local pharmacist; she found it after all. Our dead and decaying friend here, weighs about eleven hundred pounds.....Probably more when she was alive."

"It really does look like an incredibly huge wolf." Said Julie Yago.

Alice hadn't called the cops, she'd called her and Julie was determined to keep some kind of ownership of the massive beast. Definitely a female, Julie could see the row of nipples down her tummy. Being dead for a couple of days in the woods, had given bugs and bacteria, a chance to get to work on the massive carcass. The Santos beast, who most were calling Alice, was filling the mortuary trailer with a distinct and powerful smell of corruption. Officially for human dead, Alice filled an entire end of the chilled space.

"She looks impressive.....Pity about the stench." Said Julie.

"We can use fixers once we've all the samples we need." Said Luke. "I'm asking everyone if they can guess what killed our Alice. Unless you've already heard ?"

"My arm is long, Luke.....But not that long." Said Julie. "If no one in Bogotá knows, I won't know. I'll take a guess.....Doesn't look like death from old age. Did it poison itself by eating berries from one of our infamous toxic shrubs ?"

"That was my first thought." Said Luke. "Or killed by one of the numerous pathogens that call the swamp home. I still need to do a full autopsy, but I dug these out of the brute. I'd say they're a pretty convincing cause of death."

They were in a kidney bowl of all things, probably some piece of equipment that had made its way from the back room of Doc Perez. Luke rattled the bullets around a little. They were fairly long and made of a metal the colour of copper, but obviously much stronger.

"So.....Bullets can kill these things ?" Asked Julie.

"Not all bullets, these are from Chad's super gun." Said Luke. "Yes, we have Chad Hudson to thank for proving that given the right gun and ammunition; we can kill these things."

"And even then, it took a while to die." Said Julie.

"Oh yes, they seem to be tough brutes." Said Luke. "I'm hoping a full autopsy will reveal why they're so tough to kill. We're lucky to have kept the carcass; Colonel Hernandez wanted it sent by plane to Bogotá."

Julie had wondered how long it would take the colonel to be a major irritant. She'd seen his kind before, all petty rules and control issues.

"That's insane.....Even packed in dry ice, it would probably fall apart during transit." Said Julie.

"And we have no dry ice.....I talked him out of it, but we'll have to watch that one." Said Luke.

"I'll invite him to my house for dinner one night." Said Julie. "My husband has a knack of forming friendships with unlikely people."

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Jorge Alvarez was in two minds about the guards Julie Yago was hiring. He'd heard from the recruitment people in Manizales, Julie had asked them to keep the plantation cops in the loop.....And he was just about the entire plantation police force. The first five of the hired guards would be there by the weekend and the recruitment agency had given him a quick verbal run through of their CVs.

"They're good people Chief Alvarez.....Some of the best CVs I've seen in a while."

The recruiter had told him and there'd been a promise of hard copies of everything by post. Julie's guards would either be a brilliant idea, or a disaster and Jorge hoped it wasn't a disaster. The last thing the village needed was more problems.

"Mercenary cops.....They'll be running away from something." Jorge muttered. "Or hiding from an ex-wife who wants child support.....There'll be something.....Always is."

Four experienced male ex-cops would be there by the weekend and one female. Tempting to hope the woman would be less trouble, but experience tended to be against that hope. Just so long as they stopped a few kids getting chewed up and killed. Jorge's real reason for being out near Jaimie's house was to examine the burned out car and arrange for it to be taken away. There had been so many phone calls though and being honest, he thought Julian or Olie should have been doing the job. They were making excuses, but neither of them wanted to speak to the father of one of the dead kids. His trainees might look tough, but inside.....They were as soft as butter.

"Yeah.....Burst into flames huh." Jorge muttered. "Late at night and you needed a beacon. I get it, Michelle and I'm not about to contradict your story."

The car was an expensive Range Rover, which was only about eighteen months old. Julie Yago had nothing against conspicuous wealth, even her run around vehicle had to be a bit special. It had rolled into a ditch and burst into flames, or so Michelle and Teresa were saying. Cars didn't do that of course, apart from on TV shows. Well, they might.....If someone had started a fire inside the vehicle. Jorge could argue about the cause of the fire, he might even succeed in getting Michelle fired by Tessera Coffee. Not an outcome he liked the sound of. Michelle would have torched the car to get help, after being attacked by something large and dangerous.

"Fuck it.....The car was insured." Jorge muttered.

When the insurance company asked for a report, Jorge would make sure it agreed with what the two women had put in their statements. The next thing he wasn't looking forward to. The father of Luis, one of the dead kids, was the official tow away and collect service for the plantation police. That's how it was in the plantation, everyone knew everyone. Sometimes that wasn't a good thing. Jorge was relieved when his call went to the company's answerphone.

"Hi, this is Jorge Alvarez." Said Jorge. "The burned out car you were informed about, is now ready to be picked up. It's the Range Rover, not far from Jaimie's house."

No wonderful new car smell; the wreck still stank of gasoline and burned leather. Jorge would check in a day or two, to make sure it had been taken away. That was it; he'd inspected the car and called the grieving father of poor Luis. Next it was a trip to see Julie Yago, to agree a few rules about what her new guards, could and couldn't do.

"Please.....Don't let them cause havoc." Jorge muttered.

He'd arrived to look over the wreck, in one of the oldest four wheel drives in the police department. Old and clunky, but reliable and solid. He was halfway to it, when he saw something moving among

the trees. Broad daylight and it didn't look camouflaged. Surely it couldn't be the creature come back to have a look at Julie's burned out car ?

"Crap.....That's bigger than the dead one the pharmacist found." Jorge muttered.

The gun Chad had given him was too big for a holster on his hip, but it felt comfortable hanging on two leather straps under his jacket. Jorge would never have won a fast drawer contest, but he had the gun in his hands fairly quickly. He'd practised with it; he knew how it kicked when fired and how to compensate for the kick.

"Oh.....I'm ready for you." He said.

It came out of the trees and changed, its head becoming longer, its neck shorter. It changed again, as if undecided on the best physical form it needed to be. Longer legs this time, with brown fur rather than black. The brute stood in the centre of the road, looking at him. Not a mindless monster, Jorge was sure it was thinking, while it stood quite still. When it began to walk towards him, Jorge brought up the gun and held it in both hands.

"Just a bit.....Closer." Jorge muttered.

Jorge was well aware, about being careful what you wish for. The beast didn't run, but it began to walk faster. No more than twenty yards away, a distance quickly becoming far closer. It put on a real burst of speed and hit the front of Jorge's ancient police truck, before he could fire. The creature actually snarled, as though the truck was another large predator. It had to know the difference between a truck and a man.....Or maybe it didn't...Maybe it was still learning.

"You won't get a second try." Jorge yelled.

He lifted the gun and held it very firmly. The creature had seen him and seemed to have made its mind up. It became lower on the ground, with shorter legs, but a longer tail. A little shimmer, as it took on the colour and look of a tarmac road surface. It ran at him and Jorge aimed right into its face. He fired twice and the brute screamed.

"Yeah.....Not so brave when it's not kids." Yelled Jorge.

The creature ran from him, away from the man with his weapon that bit into its flesh. It should have been dead of course, but Jorge was happy to see it run down the centre of the road. At the corner of the road, it ran into the trees and in the direction of the old Wilkins place. No one to harm there, the buildings had been derelict for years.

There were two areas of the road, splattered with the beast's blood. It really did look as though ramming the metal front of his truck, had done more damage than the gun. Not that Jorge cared.....It had run away.

"It fucking ran away." Shouted Jorge.

Tempting to go home, hug Gabi and tell her he'd made one of them run away. She'd go crazy though and try to make him stay home when he needed to do his job. He had rubber gloves and sample bags these days, the plantation police were evolving. Jorge wiped some of the blood from the front of his truck onto a tissue and put it in a sample bag.

"Let's see what Luke makes of this." He mumbled.

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Kate Doyle hadn't slept much that night. Mainly because Chad seemed to be out most of the night. There was a wounded creature out there and everyone wanted to be the one to finish it off. Not just a macho thing, Michelle had gone out looking for it, with what looked like an elephant rifle. The word had gone around, the beasts could be killed. You just needed a large enough gun to get the job done.

"My embassy contact might be able to get me a high velocity minigun." Chad had muttered, before climbing into bed.

Kate was like the rest of them, suffering from a come down from an adrenaline rush. She was tired too, but a promise is a promise; especially if it's a promise to a sixteen year old girl, whose world has just been turned upside down. At the agreed time, Kate was waiting in her vehicle, for Maria to turn up. A little late when Maria turned up, but at least she hadn't decided to stay at home and let her down. Maria even smiled, as she walked towards Kate's car. An opened door and Maria was sat beside her.

"I heard you had a busy night, last night." Said Maria.

"Does everyone know?" Asked Kate.

"Of course they do.....This is the village."

People always found out everything, it was why Kate didn't believe in UFOs and little green aliens. If anyone's government knew about them, someone would have talked by now. There were no secrets that couldn't be leaked. A famous lingerie store had discovered bed bugs in its New York store. They tried to keep that secret. Some hope; eventually they'd closed the store and moved to a different part of town.

"I heard the green behind the new school is nice." Said Kate. "We could go there to talk, if you like? I brought some cookies and lemonade."

Cookies and lemonade, the girl might be insulted.

"That would be nice." Said Maria.

Jess Fisher took pride in becoming the expert on the local area, the plantation zeitgeist. It was how she was so good at her job. To control the conversation in the media, you had to fully understand what was going on. The new school had once been at the north eastern edge of the village, until the town council had built more homes beyond the school and the school green. It wasn't exactly the middle of nowhere, but for a quiet chat.....Jess had told her the school green was her best bet. Kate parked her car in a spot that was shaded by a few trees.

"Thank you for agreeing to see me." Said Kate. "I see you most mornings, jogging around the block. I've yet to see you look happy.....That's not right. I remember my teens. Maria. It's the time to have fun."

Maria almost leapt at her and ended up hugging her. Kate hugged her back, but the poor girl was crying so much. Kate stroked her hair and carried on hugging her, until the worst seemed to be over. Kate was glad she'd decided to talk to Maria. All that grief and pain.....Bottled up inside her. It was beyond simply being unhealthy.

"Have you talked things over with your mum?" Asked Kate.

"I tried, but there are all the crazy stories." Said Maria. "My mum really thinks Luis raped me and killed Daniela. Luis would never have hurt anyone. My grandmother refuses to be in the same room as me, until I tell the truth.....I am telling the truth."

The crying began again and Kate let it run its course. Kate's own mother had been a little judgemental, but nothing like Maria's family.

"You can tell me anything, Maria." Said Kate. "I will never judge you and I will never tell anyone what you tell me."

Kate had said that before and had, sort of, meant it. This time she did mean it and would take anything the girl told her to the grave.

"I saw it.....Though I told Mauricio I hadn't.....I even lied to myself." Said Maria.

"What did you see?" Asked Kate.

"It bit Luis and kept biting him." Said Maria. "I really believed I hadn't seen it.....I know that makes me sound crazy. I saw it biting Luis and I ran away. I should have helped him.....I'm a bad person." Kate was beginning to wish she'd done a quick course in psychotherapy. Where to begin ? Kate began with the obvious.

"You're not crazy, Maria. Our minds hide painful memories." Said Kate. "You're not a bad person either, not everyone is cut out to be a hero. So, you ran.....I'd have probably run away too. If you'd tried to help Luis, you would have died with him."

"You really think that ?" Asked Maria.

"Yes, definitely.....You're not a bad person."

More crying, but it was more controlled, in a way. Less frantic this time, less like the poor girl was approaching a nervous breakdown. Kate needed to be somewhere else soon, but to hell with it. She was going to stay with Maria until she seemed much, much calmer.

"Do you fancy warm lemonade and cookies ?" Asked Kate.

"Yes please."

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Luckily, Luke had already completed the autopsy on creature Alice, the carcass found by the village pharmacist. He'd even copied the report to a thumb drive, a fairly new thumb drive. He'd once learned the hard way, that thumb drives had a limited lifespan. It wasn't even that much of a surprise when Colonel Hector Hernandez arrived in the medical trailer, with three tough looking cops from Bogotá.....

"Have you finished examining the creature ?" Asked the colonel.

"My dear Colonel.....I could spend several lifetimes examining this beast. It's like other living animals, but also vastly different. I have completed a basic autopsy and what I found is.....Amazing."

"Have you sent the report through to your people in Calgary ?"

There was something about the way the colonel said your people, but Luke was too excited to shut up until he'd had a moment to ponder on it.

"Yes, I've sent it all to my ultimate boss at Tessera Coffee Holdings." Said Luke.

Colonel Hernandez was giving him the stink eye and it finally broke through Luke's good mood.

"Is there a problem, Colonel ?" Asked Luke.

"I have new orders from Bogotá." Said Hernandez. "Have you sent the report to my people ? Has it gone to the Policía Nacional de Colombia, in Bogotá ?"

His people.....Luke had decided an uprising was occurring, even if it was just in the colonel's head. Time to say little, and be careful with what he did say.

"It's on my laptop.....I was just about to send it." Said Luke.

"Then send it now, while my sergeant watches." Said Hernandez. "After that I'll need your password for the laptop and the network. Refuse and I don't care who you work for, I will have you arrested." Strangely, the disrespect wasn't that much of a shock; the colonel had a reputation for such things. New orders probably meant the Colombian police intending to completely take over the investigation. Luke sent the report to the police HQ in Bogotá and wrote his passwords on a yellow post it note.

"May I finish working on the creature ?" Asked Luke. "Only a few samples I really need.....Fifteen minutes, twenty at the outside."

The door to the trailer opened, to show a large and strong looking crate in the car park. Hernandez had brought another half dozen men with him to pack the crate. The fools intended to fly out the carcass, it was obvious now. No dry ice anywhere in the plantation, they'd need to wrap the carcass

and pack it in layers of wood chips and bubble wrap. The carcass would arrive in Bogotá, but it would be decaying by then, far worse than it was now. By the time the plane landed, the stench alone would be a health hazard.

"You intend to fly the creature to Bogotá?" Asked Luke.

"That is the plan.....And yes, I do know there's no dry ice anywhere near the plantation."

"I'll trade you.....My expertise for fifteen minutes." Said Luke. "I'll wrap the carcass, far better than your men could do it. I'll spray the beast with fixers and wrap it really tight. It'll be stinking by the time it comes off the plane, but it will still be in one piece. I just want fifteen minutes with the brute, to get those few final samples."

"Fifteen minutes and then you'll help my men.....Yes, I can agree to that." Said Hernandez. "I repeat my warning..... Failure to cooperate will result in arrest."

The colonel muttered at his men and two left with him. The third found a chair to sit in and seemed to be trying to take a quick nap. He'd be no problem and probably didn't understand the procedure for taking samples.

"I won't take long." Said Luke.

"Take half an hour if you like.....But not a minute longer."

Luke had sent him a tired man in search of a half hour nap. The extra time would make all the difference. Luke turned on the record function on his phone and placed it on an equipment stand, which was fairly free of blood and unidentified bodily fluids from the brute. He'd already cracked open the skull, but had wanted another look inside. The brain had looked.....Interesting.

"Reopening the skull of the creature." Said Luke. "The convolutions in the brain indicate a creature with some intelligence. All eye witness accounts indicate otherwise. This reinforces the idea that these beasts are still learning."

Luke looked up and the cop left to make sure he did nothing untoward, was leaning on the wall and fast asleep. Luke took the top off a specimen container and snipped off part of the creature's very clever looking brain.

"Specimen one from creature designated Alice 1." Said Luke. "Brain matter, definite grey matter in layers of deep convolutions. May indicate a potential for intelligence equal to our own."

A little more fluid from the brain in a container and Luke left the brain alone. The chest area next, though the beast didn't have just one heart. Not hard to cut into, the toughness of the beasts was a mystery. It might have something to do with having three hearts. Several other organs seemed to be in pairs and a few were unknown to Luke. Fast healing maybe, spare organs waiting to take over from damaged ones. Maybe even a souped-up immune system? It all needed the kind of research the cops were unlikely to go through. Luke took samples and recorded notes on the brute. It was an impressive life form; maybe even smart and tough enough to, one day, replace humans as the dominant species on Earth.

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Jess Fisher had never been told not to involve the local population in her research into the religion of Muisca. It was fairly obvious that her boss, David Sullivan; didn't want the entire plantation getting the idea that they were being studied, like lab rats. On the other hand, her research would progress faster, if she could discuss the ancient religion, with those who still practised it. Her research would be much faster and verified by actual verbal testimony. That had to be good, didn't it? Not that Jess had intended to be a disinterested observer. To keep the locals happy, she'd decided to play the role of an interested new recruit to Muisca and its family of deities. Surely every religion wanted new

recruits ? Well, if they didn't, Jess was going to do her best to be keen, alert and just the sort of recruit they couldn't ignore.....

"My mother would be so upset if she knew." Said Jess. "Her religion has always been so important to her, but I really can see me converting to Muisca."

"We're not into pressurising anyone." Said Ana Moura. "Nor do we require you to tell your loved ones. For many on the plantation, Muisca is a secret faith."

At first Jess had felt guilty about using Ana Moura to get information on her religion, she was Bea's older sister. It was just that when Jess had mentioned her intention of getting inside the religion to Teresa Correa, she'd recommended befriending Ana. In truth, Teresa was fairly cynical about the religion, but.....

"If you want the down low on Muisca, Ana is the person to talk to." Teresa had said.

A few very careful words with Jorge's wife, Gabi and she too had mentioned Ana being very active in the religion. There was a local head of the religion, but no one was told their name, until they were officially converted to the faith. Even the location of their places of worship, were considered to be private. Muisca really was shaping up to be a conspiracy nut's wet dream.

"If you're genuinely interested.....Talk to Ana." Gabi had told her. "Remember to be kind, she has just lost her mother and sister."

They always met where Jess lived, but Ana never looked anxious about telling of the old ways of the very ancient religion. No recording was allowed, but Jess had already filled up a spiral bound notebook.

"Can we run over Nencatacoa again ?" Asked Jess. "The God of arts and dance.....Do you really think he appears to the faithful as a bear ? A bear dressed in gold ?"

"I can answer that with certainty." Said Ana. "Once when I was very ill, I saw Nencatacoa as clearly as I can see you. He remained with me for over an hour and when he left.....The illness left my body."

"That must have been amazing." Said Jess.

"It was.....The most memorable moment in my life, so far." Said Ana. "I hope to eventually see more of our deities."

"Is it possible to summon the deities to appear as animals ?" Asked Jess.

She'd gone slightly too far, Jess could feel it. Ana was still smiling at her, but something was different. Like the clouds going over the sun on a spring day, there was less warmth coming from Ana.

"Not summon.....But I know someone who saw Huitaca in the form of a large white owl. If you're trying to find out if Muisca might be causing the huge beasts ? We are a religion with a God of the rainbow and a deity of arts and dance. Do we sound like some monster summoning cult ?"

"No.....No, you don't." Said Jess.

It had crossed Jess's mind that Ana was pretty high up in the local church of Muisca. Maybe not that well educated, but Bea's sister was no fool. Ana placed her hand over Jess's.

"No rush, the timing will always be up to you, Jess." Said Ana. "Eventually though, you will have to make a choice. Return to the religion of your family, or.....Convert to Muisca with its many and varied deities. No hurry, but it is a choice you can't ignore forever."

Jess had intended it all to be a second persona, the version of herself which pretended to fancy becoming a fully paid up member of the ancient religion of South America. Now though.....Jess hadn't seen anything, but she'd heard things, something near her in the dark. It didn't scare her though. Now her two personas were less clear cut, less independent of one another.

"I need a little more time, but I can see myself accepting the Muisca religion." Said Jess.

"Is that the truth, Jess ?" Asked Ana.

"Yes, Ana.....It is."

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"At first I thought there'd be no one at the old Wilkins Place." Jorge said, over their radios.

Oliver, Olie to just about everyone; cursed the fact that their radios were having a rare good day and reception was perfect. They were going to be given a task, a mission by their boss; Olie could almost feel it arriving. Julian was already giving him a 'what now ?' look.

"Been derelict for years.....Since the widowed wife passed away." Said Olie.

"Yeah.....I hear what you say." Said Jorge. "One of those things was heading that way, the one I'd wounded. Sometimes the local kids go there instead of school. Give the place a look over."

"On our way, boss." Said Olie.

Julian was giving him a really bad dead fish look.

"What could I do, he's the boss ?" Asked Olie.

"I hate the old Wilkins place.....Got a nail in my foot once." Said Julian. "I suppose we have to go now, as you've volunteered us to check it out."

"I never volunteered anyone for anything, Julian.....He's the boss."

No use, he'd be getting bags of attitude from Julian for days, maybe weeks. The Wilkins place had started off as a cattle farm, before moving onto dairy, before moving.....Just before the widow Wilkins had died, the farm was just about breaking even. By then they were growing grain crops, which went into huge vertical silos. The silos were still there, busy gathering dirt and corrosion. The Wilkins place was now derelict and full of dangerous old equipment. Plus there were a few local rumours about the place. Why had the entire Wilkins clan died out in less than one generation ? Rumours began and talk of a curse. Mention curse in a place like the plantation and all logical thought instantly vanishes.

"We could say we checked the place out." Said Julian.

"This job doesn't pay much, but I do get paid to do it." Said Olie. "I'm going to the Wilkins place and I hope you're going with me."

"Yeah alright.....But if I step on another nail.....It's on you."

They both had shotguns for use in an emergency. Hunting a wounded monster in the Wilkins place sounded like just the time to load up the shotguns and get ready to use them. Olie drove the police four wheel drive, while Julian gave the shotguns a little care and attention.

"Not that these things will kill it." Said Julian. "They might make it run away."

"I'd be happy with it running away." Said Olie.

Jorge hadn't ordered them to go after the beast, but how else were they going to keep the area safe ? Truanting kids were a problem and it was getting worse. Letting something nasty kill those kids, would really piss off Julie Yago.

"If we see it, we have to try and kill it.....Agreed ?" Asked Julian.

"Jorge did wound it.....So, yes.....Agreed." Said Olie.

By the time they drove over the rusting sign that said Wilkins Farm, Olie was beginning to think they really could kill the creature. Jorge had shot it twice in the face.....Yes; they could finish it off with shotguns. Given the opportunity; they just had to keep shooting it in the head.

"Someone has been here; the barn door has been opened." Said Olie.

"Kids.....They come here to fool about and drink beer." Said Julian.

There were a few derelict places like the Wilkins farm. Rule one for police patrols was to close and secure all doors, where possible. Olie remembered closing the door of the large barn and pushing

home the clasp. There was no padlock in the clasp, but the door had been as secure as had been possible at the time.

"At least it's not dark." Said Olie. "I hate this place in the dark.....Too many weird noises."

"Not you too.....Everyone gets spooked out here." Said Julian.

The barn door was open, but not fully open. Olie wanted light inside the barn, as much daylight as he could get. He fully opened the barn door and the two of them stepped inside.

"That wasn't here last time we did a patrol.....I'd have noticed it." Said Olie.

"Crap.....Jorge will think we missed it." Said Julian. "He'll go crazy."

"We didn't miss that.....No one could miss that." Said Olie.

It was a hole, that had been dug into the ground and seemed to keep on going. The daylight reached far enough to know the hole was dug down at a steep gradient and went a long way into the ground under the barn.

"Mole rats like burrows under the ground." Said Julian. "Luke told someone that, or I might have heard it from Doc Perez."

"No fucking mole rat dug this hole.....They're quite small." Said Olie.

The hole was wide and tall enough for a cow to wander into it, though it might have found it a bit steep. The loose soil was stacked up around the hole. It all looked recent, as though the piles of soil hadn't had time to settle.

"This wasn't dug by a machine.....Some kind of creature made itself a burrow." Said Julian. "Are we going to get flashlights and go down there?"

Were they going down there? Olie had joined the police three months before Julian had arrived. For some reason that made Julian treat him as the senior guy. They were both still officially trainees and paid accordingly. No one ever got rich being a trainee cop.

"No.....This job pays me, but not enough to get me down that hole." Said Olie. "Get closer to the hole; Julian.....There's a smell, a really unpleasant smell."

"Yeah.....Like something died down there."

"We'll call the new Colonel; he's supposed to be some famous tough cop." Said Olie. "He can come out here with his guys from Bogotá. They can go down there and sort this out."

"Good plan." Said Julian.

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