

Four

June 18, 2021

“No. I’m not going to calm down. Where is she? Where is my wife?”

Steven looked to Marco, then Diana, then walked out before he did something he would regret.

Marco was pacing back and forth. Diana wouldn’t answer him, Steven had just walked out, and he knew better than to trifle with Michelle who had already made it clear that she was not getting involved.

“Somebody, please!” He looked to the only remaining person that had been there, in the Amazon, with his wife before she died. “Diana, tell me something.” Desperately, he searched the dark depth of Diana’s eyes and only found himself becoming more discouraged. “Please.” He pleaded, but it was obvious that she was not going to talk to him.

Diana held firm and remained silent—warning Marco to stay away with her cold, mercurial eyes. No one would get a thing from her, except for Gary. When last they spoke, while she was still in Manaus, Brazil, he asked her to wait for him before sharing any of the details with nest members. Steven had received the same instruction.

“I’m sorry, Gary,” Diana’s hologram had been bent forward, her back forced to curve from the awesome power of her osteoporosis. The scene behind the old woman with arthritic, gnarled fingers intertwined in her lap, had been of lushness. A brilliant green forest, half inundated by torrential rain that never seemed to stop, surrounded the raised hut. Diana sat on a small porch, with a burgundy rope hammock to her left. It was slung between two of the piers that held the thatch, waterproof roof. Her hologram face seemed pained over the news she was forced to deliver. “I know you didn’t need any of this right now, but it happened and now we have to deal with it.”

That was the point where Gary had nearly kicked himself for not having established bylaws for the Nest’s residents.

“When you come back, say nothing. I’ll deal with Marco... and Steven.”

Gary had been on an errand when Diana, Steven, and the cargo arrived by U-Haul. When he finally walked in Diana softened, or at least thawed, knowing that he would take the reins from there.

“Diana,” he gave the old, fragile woman a hug and a kiss on each cheek. “Come with me. Marco,” he said, gently placing a hand on his shoulder while firmly keeping him where he was. “Give us a few minutes. I’ll come get you when I know more.”

“But, Gary. She was my wife.”

Diana had lost her patience with Marco as she turned and walked away, leaving Gary to deal with him.

Gary looked after her for a moment then dealt with Marco. “No one’s disputing that. But right now I need you to wait here while I sort things out. I’ll come get you shortly. I promise.”

Seeing he had no other choice, he relented and gave Gary a hesitant nod before taking a seat on the haystack that was covered with a blanket and served as the office couch.

“I’ll wait right here,” he grudgingly conceded.

“Thank you.” Gary replied, not unaware of Michelle’s displeasure from having a lingering guest while she tried to work.

Overall, she liked Marco. That said, she did find him to be self-serving and constantly idling a bit too high on the testosterone scale.

Gary gave him a grateful smile and caught up with Diana, who, for a woman of an indeterminable advanced age, moved relatively fast. He gently took her arm and led her out of the barn, into the night’s warm air where they would have more privacy.

“Where do you want me to start?” Although she didn’t mention it, the silence of her new home socked the wind out of her. She was used to being lulled by the cry of macaques, the call of macaws, the buzz of huge, unimaginable insects, and the nightly smell of the sweet, warm rain that came crashing down on everything. But even she had to admit, with the never ending rain, even the amazon was growing quiet. Plants were drowning and animals and insects were starving.

“Yesenia, first. We can go over inventory later.” He took out a handkerchief and wiped down his forehead. “I’m feeling a bit guilty about all this. I could tell something was going on with her before she left.” He shook his head. “I should never have sent her.”

Diana turned away from him and faced the dry, flat landscape that seemingly ran out, into the unending darkness.

Gary was again frustrated that he hadn’t learned about any of the recent occurrences or outbursts that had taken place between Marco and Yesenia.

“Steven filled me in last night. He’s feeling really guilty.”

“Why? He did nothing wrong.”

Diana saw from his expression that he didn’t know.

Gary paused in disbelief. “Oh, you’re kidding me!” He really had to get working on a code of conduct. “Diana, this type of behavior could tear the nest apart.”

“It’s odd what a husband’s indiscretion can do to a woman’s psyche. I’ve known Yesenia for quite some time and I’ve never seen her so distraught. You can’t blame her.”

Gary shook his head in disbelief.

“You went with suicide?”

Diana nodded, but she still wouldn’t look at him.

“As far as Marco is concerned, she ran into the water and started splashing about, knowing that would incite the piranhas.”

Christ, he thought. “Where is she?”

“San Francisco.” Diana looked away. “This is the best solution. Marco will move on and so can Yesenia.”