

## Café

The village of Minca is the definition of sleepy. Casas laze along both sides of the mountain road high above the coastal valley that cradles Santa Marta. Here the mountain air dries the skin rather than sticks to it. The heat rises in the afternoons; still the village is cooler by fifteen degrees than below. Along the river that parallels the road, it is even cooler, pleasant but for the companionship of chiggers, mosquitoes, flies, and other long-term residents. Choking the water with massive granite boulders, the river scoops out deep pools. A haze colored by microscopic life creates a green and gold backdrop to peering at schools of minnows.

One road bumps in and out of Minca. The severely pocked asphalt crosses a hopeful bridge that glares down at the river as it plunges. A Catholic Church, white-washed with an inviting open door faces a small park of sand and struggling flowers. This is the village center.

An attractive middle-aged woman beckons the taxi. She and the driver talk. She turns to the backseat and offers English directions to the pools. Behind her against the wall of her home, a poster in English announces, "Organic Colombian Coffee." She answers the query, "No, it is not a restaurante, a café." "Great", enthuses the reply, "A café." Si, Señor, café." As the taxi slowly pulls away, the woman continues her directions to the driver walking faster into a jog. Very helpful. The conversation in the backseat confirms that after the pools, the couple will enjoy a cup of organic Colombian coffee with their lunch.

The driver is convinced to wait for them. They traipse down a dirt road to the sound of the river growing closer. A young boy, expert on his bicycle, joins them. Gestures suffice for words. He fastens to them as guide. Sometimes he thinks they understand Spanish and he jabbars for a few minutes. He stops when she says, "Lo siento." A fifteen minutes scramble over boulders and sandy rocks, Jairo strips off his shirt and leaps from a tall boulder into a pool shadowy deep pool. The man strips to his underwear, wades into the cool green, and plunges

headfirst. The lady begins to pull down her khaki shorts to join the fun, when an older boy joins the Jairo in the pool with an exuberant splash. She ducks and buttons.

Many times the young boy climbs the boulders that surround the depth of water. He is fearless up and down the speckled granite chunks. He never hints at slip; his bare feet are like climbing boots. The older one is more cautious. But they only jump, never dive, because the bottom isn't visible. Between two boulders the water rushes. Jairo dips deep and swim against the current. Uncertain, the man gives it a try. You have to look and the blocks of stone litter the bottom with fish grazing. The waters are less a force in the depth.

On the way back up to the village, Jairo is paid 2,000 pesos for his service. His smile shows surprise. He hops on his bike and disappears of the steep road. Near the church, we see him with a foil wrapped empanada and a Coke. He smiles and balancing his treats, he peddles down a grassy path.

Across from the café, the driver nurses a Coke in the blaze of the afternoon sun. He sits on a low wall facing the colorful coffee poster. The wife sits down next to him. Only the man ventures to the café, bold to try new food and a fresh cup of coffee.

As he knocks on the screen, he makes out a sofa occupied by an older woman. The furniture is tasteful, arranged with care. The English-speaking woman appears. It dawns on him that this is not a restaurante; it isn't a café either. She explains that the poster is a product of her graphic design work for a coffee company headquartered in Bogota. I glimpse mama slipping into another room. He is invited to sit down on iron bench outside. The gracious woman disappears into the house. His wife and the driver across the way are smiling, and not in support of his adventure.

It dawns on all of them that is not even a café, but a home. They howled, he flushed and yelled for them to shut up while whispering his plight, "I'm so embarrassed." They catcalled. They hooted.

Presently, the woman taps at the screen door with her foot to open it. She carries a silver tray with a silver sugar bowl and a porcelain cup of café. He apologizes profusely. She assured him that it is no trouble. He wants to gulp it down and get out of there. The coffee is hot, he can't gulp, and he is sweating under the sun.

After a gracious interval, the woman returns to collect the service. Apologies and more apologies are uttered. The woman smiles and explains her work and clients like the Colombian Organic Coffee Association. He pays her despite her protests.

Finally, in haste he retreats down the street. The taxi follows; it's occupants, merciless.