

BREAK NIGHT

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BREAK NIGHT

Chapter 1

Wednesday 1 August 2012 22:00pm, Matamoros, Mexico

The old barn was the only building for miles around and visitors were clearly neither welcomed nor wanted. The gravel crunched loudly under the large wheels of the black BMW as it pulled to a halt outside the barn. Heavily tinted, bullet-proof windows provided the security and anonymity that the occupants craved. The two well dressed men climbed out of the car and walked through the hot night air up to the barn door. The only noises that could be heard were crickets clicking and the occasional flutter of the wings of a bird flying off.

The men rapped sharply on the rickety wooden single door and a small shutter slowly opened. A battle-scarred face peered out at the two visitors and as soon as he recognised their faces, the doorman let them in.

"Gracias Juan" said the man in charge. "Wait out here please".

"Si Signor Perez" replied the burly doorman, leaving the barn as instructed.

The two men strode into the gloomy barn, where a man sat tied and slumped forward on an old chair in the middle of the room, illuminated only by a single bulb dangling from the ceiling. His head was covered by an old and torn hessian sack.

"Well, well, well.... Commandante Cabrere. What a disappointment you have turned out to be. I have looked after you so well over these years have I not? And now...well I hear that you have been sharing information with my enemies. What is happening to Mexico's great police force these days when its senior officials cannot be trusted?" said Perez with mocking irony.

He roughly pulled the sack from the cop's head to reveal a bloodied and badly beaten face - the result of Juan's brutal handiwork. The dazed cop slowly looked up at Perez with a resigned, knowing stare and paused before snarling

"Go to hell Perez!"

Perez slowly circled the chair, his gaze constantly fixed on Cabrere. He slowly and very deliberately pulled a gold pistol from the inside pocket of his Gucci leather jacket, letting the cop get a good close look.

"I can understand a man getting greedy. Indeed I am a very greedy man myself" he said nodding his head in self agreement.

"But I cannot tolerate disloyalty and people crossing me. No, no, no... It makes me sick. And it makes me look weak which I am certainly not." said Perez now shaking his head as if to give emphasis to his words and inner thoughts.

When he abandoned these self doubts and thoughts, he was positioned directly in front of Cabrere with his back to the prisoner. He paused reflectively for a few seconds before speaking again, his voice now a mixture of anger and disappointment.

"You are probably right Cabrere, I will go to hell" he paused again before adding in a steely voice.

"But you'll be there first - you sly bastard."

Perez then spun round very fast, looked deeply into the policeman's eyes, now filled with fear and shot him twice through the forehead at point blank range.

The cop slumped forward instantly dead, blood spraying from his brow.

"Come on Luis - it is done now and I feel much better. We have work to do for our business in Florida. This is not a problem for us now and we will soon find somebody else at the *delegacion* who will work for us." said Perez, now in a more contented frame of mind.

They walked out of the barn and Perez pulled a large brown envelope bulging with pesos from his jacket pocket and handed it to the hard doorman.

"Thank you for finding him Juan and bringing him here. I like to look after my loyal friends like you. I am afraid the Commandante has lost his head in many ways. He needs to rest in peace now - at the bottom of the sea perhaps. Can you arrange for this please?"

"Si Signor Perez y gracias" said Juan, tucking the envelope into his jacket pocket and walking back into the barn to oversee the disposal of the body of the corrupt law chief.

Thursday 12 August 2012 19:00pm, FBI Headquarters 935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington DC

DEA Special Agent Logan Watson slouched back in his office chair and rubbed his face with both hands. His top button was undone, his tie was pulled down and he was real tired now. He looked out of the office window at the people down on the sidewalk heading for the bars and restaurants. He felt envious and wanted a cold Budweiser to take his mind off narco-criminals and these jerks at the FBI.

He looked across the desk at his new temporary partner, Federal Bureau of Investigation Agent Madison Hayes. He wanted her too but he wasn't sure how to move that carnal desire on without screwing up their fledgling working relationship.

Watson was in the second week of a secondment from his Drug Enforcement Administration agent role to work with the FBI, the military and other Agencies in a

series of cross-departmental operations called Operation Marlin. Its aim was to tackle the tidal wave of narcotics invading America, via Florida, and originating from Central and South America.

Several inter-Agency "mini-teams" had been established each to target a major known narcotic trafficker and bring them to justice through close co-operation and the open sharing of data and resources - without any prejudices. Hayes and Watson formed a mini-team code-named MEX1.

The President had ordered a major offensive on the dealers as he worked towards winning a second term in the White House. The November Presidential election was looming and the Republicans and Tea Party folk across the States had started to become very angry with the nation's seemingly unchallenged drug problems. They were rapidly winning public support for a fight back against the pushers and peddlers.

Across the whole of the United States, the President's meet and greet sessions with ordinary folk were punctuated with questions about the rampant drug problems. Dads Against Drugs (DAD) and Mums Against Drugs (MAD) button badges and bumper stickers were everywhere along with banners and T-Shirts. The TV and radio interviews all featured a series of awkward and difficult questions about how he planned to tackle the drugs issue.

Everyone it seemed wanted something done to tackle the white pus that oozed through America from Seattle to San Antonio and Portland to Philadelphia. It seemed that no street, no fashionable neighborhood, no ghetto nor corporate office block was untouched.

With the US drug trade said by the White House's Office of Drug Control Policy to be now worth \$70bn a year, the Administration was losing the battle to keep its streets clear of drugs. The President was starting to look weak, ineffective and lost - he didn't like that and his ratings were suffering badly. He wanted results to convince the people of America that he was serious about drugs and that it was he who could make a difference.

Senior officials at the Department of Justice too were long aware of the criticism that its two most powerful agencies did not work well together and wanted to improve co-operation and intelligence sharing. The DoJ really wanted - no really needed - big results, more convictions and to win public admiration to ensure that its multi-billion dollar budgets were not hacked back any further in the next round of public spending cuts. The order for all the different and competing agencies to "get along" had come from the very top - The White House. The War On Drugs was declared as he issued the quintessential Presidential order - "Take them down!"

Logan Watson was a promising agent in his late twenties who had progressed very well since joining the DEA. He had attended the State University of New York at Brockport for two years before joining the US Navy, where he had served as a reconnaissance pilot in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

His work with the DEA had taken him down to South America where he had spent a month's attachment with the DEA Jungle team in Columbia. But the recent past had been spent on street busts around Washington, New York and Boston.

Standing at 6 feet 2 inches, weighing 210lb with brown eyes and thick, curly black hair he was a strong, fanatically fit and imposing figure. He was also a damned good poker player, a skill honed during idle time in his Navy days.

His father, Logan Snr, had served for many years in the NYPD before retirement and he had always held strict views on what was good and what was evil. Those beliefs had passed on to his son so maybe Logan was always destined to work in some form of law enforcement role eventually.

Watson had quickly volunteered for this secondment opportunity from Arlington in the hope that it would boost his career prospects - and his monthly pay cheque. A lot of his fellow DEA agents were married and settled down with kids and didn't really fancy being away from home for a long time.

But a couple of months in the Sunshine State appealed to a single guy like Logan - and he decided to give it his best shot as he was confident he could get along with anybody. His boss, Special Agent Frank Jinks felt Watson was destined for good things in the Agency and happily supported Logan's application.

But by now Watson had already had enough of the painstaking intelligence work in Washington and getting the cold shoulder from some of the Feds - who historically resented what they considered to be "jumped up" DEA staff. He had hoped to make some new friends, and then take in some serious sports action in Florida like watching the Marlins at Sun Life. As he was a keen marksman, having scored top in DEA target practice competitions, he fancied his hand on one of the many shooting ranges down there.

So far none of his colleagues, with the exception of Madison, had shown any interest in him or made him feel particularly welcome in Washington. Madison had bought him lunch on his first day working with her and she was always cheerful and friendly but Logan wondered if that is what she had been told to do.

So Watson now itched for some action, some real action. He wanted out of Washington and into the Florida heat.

Madison Hayes was a graduate in bio-chemistry, in her late twenties too and in her fifth year now with the FBI. She had originally planned to follow her parents' footsteps and become a physician but had then decided to cut her own path and do forensic and analytical scientific work instead. Her interest in matters medical had remained and she had received advanced FBI medical training in dealing with emergency situations.

Madison was very attractive, standing about six feet tall, very slim with shoulder length dark brown hair and smouldering pale blue eyes. She was a highly intelligent, clear thinking, respected and calm lady very focused on doing her job well.

Hayes hadn't really applied for the secondment - her boss, Assistant Director Joel Konchesky, the FBI Assistant Director for Law Enforcement services and the senior officer in charge of MEX1, had nominated her for the job. He had long been impressed by her thorough, ordered analytical skills in the laboratory whilst examining drug samples or dead bodies always followed by logical conclusions. She possessed a tough and driven side to her personality that Konchesky liked.

Konchesky had earmarked Hayes as having the potential to rise to FBI Assistant Director Status in the not too distant future and she was on the Agency's Fast Track Development program. He felt some serious field experience, facing out hardened criminals, would complete the missing part of her impressive CV.

And as Konchesky had always been firmly in the "don't trust the DEA" camp, he knew she wouldn't take any shit from the DEA.

Madison kinda liked Watson straight away and thought he was polite, honest, knew his work well, had a sense of humour - and was hot. She wasn't dating anybody now but didn't yet want to mix her professional and social life. She was keeping things cool with him for now.

The pair were shared an office next door to Konchesky's office up on the 5th floor of the J. Edgar Hoover F.B.I. Building on Pennsylvania Avenue. They had spent the past week piecing together intelligence information supplied by local field agents from the FBI, DEA and occasionally from the murkier quarters of the CIA.

Reports were being received about illegal narcotic activities from all over the Americas and a lot of dollars had been thrown at informants. The walls of the MEX1 office were covered in grainy photographs of suspects, properties, boats, autos, sea maps, airport listings and hundreds of contact numbers on sticky notes.

The joined-up intelligence was slowly beginning to work but there were still some key gaps in data.

Watson and Hayes had been given the task of apprehending Miguel Perez, a violent Mexican who had amassed a fortune from a lifetime of illegal activities including drug running, protection rackets, arms supply and prostitution. The terms of reference for all teams operating under Operation Marlin were simple - Kill or Capture.

Perez was on all American agencies "most wanted list" primarily due to his recent links with fanatical Middle Eastern terror groups, to whom he had been providing a terrifying arsenal of weapons, explosives and chemicals.

He was nicknamed *Pablo de la nueva* or *the new Pablo* after Pablo Escobar the famed Columbian drugs baron. Perez was now the biggest player in South American smuggling and operated separately from the other cartels in Mexico after several bloody feuds had ultimately led to agreements on "territorial" rights. He had risen to become the ruler of the narcocleptocracy in South America.

Perez kept a very close circle of acquaintances and trusted very few people, perhaps due to his uncertain and unloved start to life. His secluded white fifteen roomed

hacienda, perched high on a cliff outside Matamoros, was rumoured to have cost over \$50 million - and was more protected than Fort Knox. The Perez estate included helicopter landing areas, a small runway for light aircraft and at the bottom of the cliff there were moorings for various superfast vessels. Between four and five ex-Chetnan soldiers provided round the clock armed security - and they took no prisoners.

American agency attempts to bribe locals for information about Perez had not been very successful and any unfortunate servant thought likely to have spoken to the Americans was quickly wasted. However large wads of pesos or greenback dollars always appealed to members of the poorly paid local community and every now and then somebody would talk in private.

Perez was a very hands-on guy and most of the time would personally deliver shipments of cocaine or heroin to buyers - to ensure full and immediate payment, usually in cash. His wife, Maria, was heavily involved in the business and the only other associate identified by American intelligence, was his childhood friend from the less affluent part of Matamoros, Luis Delgado.

The US Government wanted him dead or alive.

Hayes had been tapping away on her PC for some time now and seemed engrossed studying something. Watson struck up a conversation in the hope that it might lead to a drink with her later on in one of the nearby bars.

"Hey Maddi - you found something?"

Hayes didn't really like being called Maddi - and neither would her parents had they heard it - but she tolerated it as they needed to get on. She later found out that this was the abbreviated nickname he had for a college acquaintance back in New York also called Madison and he had no idea that it had offended her.

"I'm still waiting for our Florida agent's latest update on Perez but to tell you the truth I was reading about a weird incident. This is the second case I have seen this year of a huge tapeworm being recovered from the intestine of a human body down in Florida. This worm measured over ninety feet in length, was described by eye witnesses as being very thin, bright white and aggressive in nature."

"Unfortunately the surgeon didn't retain the parasite instead ordering its immediate incineration. The host, an elderly man in his 60s, died a few days later of heart failure. One of the junior surgeons posted an internet report on a pathology newsgroup I follow and guessed the worm was from the Diphyllbothriasis family of parasites. He said the creature was similar to a serpent in its behavior."

Watson could see she was fascinated by the article and resisted the urge to make a joke about his colleague's favoured internet browsing - which was of an entirely different nature to his own preferred gambling web sites.

"Ninety feet? No way!" he said trying to sound as interested as he could and using this as an excuse to lean over her shoulder and look at her PC. She smelt good he noticed.

"And what the hell is diffyobothry?" Logan asked in understandable ignorance.

"It is a fish tapeworm that is caused by an organism called *Diphyllobothrium latum*. People can contract it by eating raw or undercooked fish or shellfish, like mackerel and red snapper that contains fish tapeworm larvae. Usually in human intestines, this type of tapeworm grows up to thirty feet long which is why the 90 foot worm in Port Charlotte is so weird."

"You know I really worry about what is happening to our eco-system down in Florida when people are dumping unwanted pets like snakes, cougars and tigers and introducing them into new environments and habitats. Some estimates say there could be upwards of 100,000 pythons in the wilds of the Everglades National Park. When big aggressive snakes like the African python and the Indian python cross-breed we've got a real problem on our hands. And who knows what has already been produced down there that we don't yet know about - or understand."

Logan nodded. He had been told pre-assignment that she was very smart and logical and now he was seeing those qualities for himself.

They were then interrupted by Assistant Director Konchesky's harsh voice.

"Madison, Watson my office now. Your target is on the move."

Chapter 2

Thursday 12th August 2012, 22:00pm EST, El Alcatraz longliner, Gulf of Mexico.

"It is working again Senor Perez" said Capitán Hector Sanchez nervously. His brow was sweating profusely and his hands, covered in diesel, still trembled with fear. He had witnessed Miguel Perez's temper before and had once watched Perez execute a fisherman who had crossed and upset him. Sanchez cursed the engine and was desperate for his usually reliable new boat to get his unwanted client to American waters.

"No more delays" shouted Perez curtly with his eyes narrowing.

"We cannot be late to Florida. Do you understand me?" He shot a frightening look at Sanchez which didn't really need a reply.

"Si Senor" gulped Sanchez as he steered El Alcatraz out into the Gulf of Mexico and increased the ship's speed gingerly.

An attractive young woman climbed the steps and joined Perez and Captain Sanchez on the bridge of El Alcatraz.

"Miguel. Is it OK now?" she asked keenly.

"Yes the old man says he has fixed it. There will be no more problems now" Perez replied to his young wife kissing her softly on the cheek and then glancing again towards Sanchez, who swiftly avoided any eye contact.

"We will be in American waters by daylight and then we will meet Luis as planned. He has acquired a very fast boat and has it hidden in a boathouse near to Boca Grande lighthouse. Everything else is good."

Perez stood about 5 feet 10 inches, had dark brown eyes and was of slight build with thick black hair parted down the middle and brushed back. He was well tanned and had perfect white teeth - the best money could buy.

He had been born in Matamoros forty three years ago and had lived there all his life - though he could have afforded to live anywhere in the world he wanted. He had no idea who his parents were having been abandoned at birth and had been raised in a series of orphanages. This is where he had been schooled in all sorts of criminal tricks and cons and a violent criminal was formed.

It is in one of those orphanages that he met Luis Delgado and a lifetime friendship was forged. Delgado was a large boy who slept in the bunk bed above Perez. They became friends as Perez helped Delgado with homework and Delgado had looked out for Perez like a younger brother. When other boys at the orphanage started to bully Perez, Delgado had stepped in with his fists and protected his friend. This level of "brotherly" protection had carried on throughout their teen years and Perez had never forgotten it. He was the brains and Delgado was the muscle.

Perez never had the opportunity to attain many qualifications at school but that didn't mean he wasn't intelligent. He certainly was naturally bright and now spoke English, Russian and Portuguese fluently. He often wondered what he might have become had criminality not rewarded him so well.

Perez and Delgado's criminal education started off with low level activities such as picking the pockets of the middle classes around town before moving on to shop lifting, car theft and forgery. Perez realised he was good at this; it was very profitable and it was much easier than working in a factory or on a trawler.

By the time he was eighteen he had moved onto armed robbery and soon added murder to his CV. He was already feared - and respected - by the hoodlum underclass in Matamoros whom by now he pretty much controlled. It was only a matter of time before he graduated to drug supply, where the real money was being made, and where, one day, he was to become the biggest *Capos*, or drug lord, in the whole of Mexico.

To be successful in that business it was important to have no rivals. So Perez set about obliterating any other operators, either personally or by hiring *Sicarios* to do this dirty work for him.

As the various drug cartels in South America became embroiled in bloody battles for territorial control, it soon emerged that no single group would ever have exclusive rights. Perez was one of the first *Capos* to realise this and negotiated deals with the

Cali Cartel and Gulf Cartel to pay a "tax" on drug shipments when trading "out of town" and a rental fee for storing cocaine in other cartel's warehouses. These agreements served every group well and reduced the death levels amongst the gangs.

To ensure a consistent and regular flow of high quality cocaine from Columbia, Perez funded the establishment of several well equipped laboratories located deep in the jungles of South America regions. These mobile laboratories were difficult to spot from the air where he knew American spy planes would be scouring the ground for evidence of disturbance and activity.

Perez was always at the forefront of developing new methods of evading detection by the Americans and others. Using the technical and scientific skills of Soviet acquaintances, he funded the development of the first narco-sub that travelled from the depths of Columbia's dense jungle rivers and up along the coast to America with their illicit and lucrative cargo safely stashed beneath the waves.

To avoid any unwanted attention from the authorities in Mexico City - he had no need to fear the local police as they had all been either bought or shot - he needed to have a legitimate front end business that gave him the opportunity to travel freely around South America. He set up a coffee import and export business, called *Café Cielo* with its HQ in Matamoros with him as CEO and Delgado as Vice President.

Café Cielo trucks delivered coffee - and collected other powders from all across South America. Many overseas cargos of coffee crates were supplemented by packages of white powder cleverly concealed in the lower third of specially manufactured and marked coffee tins.

The spurious coffee front-end provided perfect cover for Perez and Delgado to make frequent trips to Columbia where they hatched deals with the various cartels in Bogota, Medellin and Cali for the provision of vast quantities of cocaine. Using his instinctive cunningness, and the various porous routes into America, Perez was able to flood Florida, and every other state, with California Cornflakes, Florida Sunshine, Canadian Black, Orange Barrel, Patito or whatever the dealers and junkies wanted - and were prepared to pay him to supply.

He was now a very, very wealthy businessman and happily married too. He had employed Maria as a live-in nanny to look after and care for his only child, his son Pedro, born to a nightclub dancer Perez had shared a short affair with three years ago. Perez was instantly drawn to the gentle, attractive young girl and despite there being a twenty years age gap they connected very quickly.

Maria had soon moved from her servant's quarters to his bed and became a vital cog in his life. She was in awe of him, loved him very much and relished the opulent lifestyle she now led. They had married two years ago in a quiet service in Matamoros, followed by a lavish reception in his hacienda.

"Capitán. Can my wife and I have some food and wine in our room please?" said Perez. "I'll just check our cargo again".

"Of course Senor" said Sanchez, now delighted as he realised that Perez would soon be off his bridge.

"Javier!" he called. "Some food and wine for Senor and Senorita Perez."

The captain's big assistant, cook, and only other member of the crew on this trip, nodded and went down to the galley to prepare a meal of *huachinango a la veracruzana* – the Perez's favourite fish meal of fresh red snapper in a tomato sauce.

Javier regularly made this dish for the couple when they were travelling on-board. Sanchez had started to tell Javier the VIPs were due on board so Javier could prepare for their presence and be ready to see to their every need. Perez had grown to like to take a bottle of chilled Californian white wine with his meals and Maria too had developed a taste for the crisp wine. Javier always kept a case in the stores for their enjoyment.

Sanchez felt relieved as the Perez's disappeared down the steps to the hold and then to their room. He gave up his large cabin to Perez when travelling on the boat and it had been furnished to suit their tastes rather than his.

The night air was now very sticky and Sanchez turned up the air conditioning unit to cool everybody down - particularly himself.

He had first been approached by Miguel Perez in the fishing harbour at Matamoras about ten years ago and asked if his vessel was for charter. Sanchez, who was not a rich man then, agreed to take Perez and a large cargo of wooden crates out to meet a vessel in the Gulf of Mexico and transfer the cargo at sea.

Back then Sanchez did not know what was in those crates - and he didn't really care. Perez had handed him an envelope stuffed with dollars before they left harbour - and another stuffed envelope again when they returned. Like the fish his boats hunted every day, Sanchez was now reeled in and netted.

This arrangement had continued successfully for many years and Sanchez had now become a wealthy man himself, with a fleet of boats, a neat villa and new cars. His wife and family had no idea that he was making a fortune by helping the country's biggest criminal to smuggle drugs and weapons from South America to its Northern cousin.

However, Sanchez now wanted this all to be over and for Perez to go away. His nerves and conscience could not cope much longer. For some reason, he was particularly worried about this trip and felt a heavy guilt about the trade he was now deeply involved in as a courier.

Sanchez had never snorted coke or injected heroin and couldn't understand the American fascination with drugs. He dreaded his wife and family ever finding out what had been going on - let alone his brother, the local priest. Now he just wanted to retire to spend time with his family and particularly grandchildren.

But once you had supped from the Perez cup, and taken his gold, you had sold your soul and there was no escape....

Sanchez took out a small bottle of Tequila from his navigation cabinet, undid the screw cap and took a long swig straight from the neck. His throat burned but he instantly felt better and confident. El Alcatraz was now moving smoothly through the tranquil sea and darkness and they would be there soon there. Then this latest cargo of shit would be off his ship and his conscience would feel much better. Perez wanted him to pick up something from a Panamanian tanker in the Gulf and then head back to Mexico.

It would all be over soon he convinced himself.

Meanwhile Perez climbed down the stairs and into the hold normally used for fish catches. He flicked on a small light which barely lit the holdup but did sufficiently so to satisfy him that the wooden crates were undamaged. In the morning he would open them up, transfer the bags of cocaine into water-proof suitcases before putting them in the ship's motor boat and meeting up with Luis at sea. Perez, Maria and Delgado were all experienced in navigating speedboats at sea day or night.

This deal was an important one for Perez. The top grade coke was being sold for \$35,000 a kilogram, or in the case of the entire shipment of 300 kilograms, \$10.5m cash. Half of that amount was then being re-invested immediately to buy Semtex and C4 plastic explosives from Vladimir Shevensky, a Ukrainian arms dealer Perez had dealt with many times before when procuring ex-Soviet army Kalashnikov rifles for various rebel groups around South America.

The \$5m worth of explosives would then be smuggled by a variety of circuitous routes into Oman, Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Pakistan. The price to Middle East extremists would treble; giving Perez a total return in the region of \$20m after various necessary "expenses" such as bribes, drug "taxes" and transportation costs had been excluded.

By anybody's reckoning that would be a highly impressive return on investment in these times of global recession.

Chapter 3.

Thursday 12 August 2012 20:25pm, Assistant Director Konchesky's office, FBI Headquarters 935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington DC

Hayes and Watson followed Konchesky into his office, which was only illuminated by a huge silver desk lamp and sat down at his large oval conference table. Konchesky was a tall man, standing well over six feet, bald, trim but walked with a limp from a shooting incident many years before so it took a few moments for everybody to settle. A man that Hayes and Watson had never seen or spoken with before was already sitting at the table underneath a large oil painting of an eagle - Konchesky's favourite bird.

"Madison Hayes, Logan Watson - this is Steiner - he is with the CIA and has just come over from Langley with some vital information for us" said Konchesky in an unusually awkward and hesitant way as he introduced Hayes and Watson to the stranger with no first name.

Steiner was a similar age to Konchesky, in his mid to late 50s, bald and had a tanned, leathery face from what Hayes guessed to be lengthy exposure to the sun - probably in the Middle East. Steiner had menacing, piercing eyes which were now focused on Hayes' chest and he instantly gave her the creeps.

"Colleagues" said Steiner in a softly spoken but treacherous voice "We have reliable intelligence in from South America that Miguel Perez is making a considerable drop of high grade cocaine - 70% pure - somewhere in South Florida tomorrow night, Friday 13th July, via a mother ship based in the Gulf of Mexico. The purchasers are the Lombardi family from Miami, who have a large network of pushers across the States."

Both Hayes and Watson were aware of the Lombardi family and its alleged association with the drug trade in Florida. So far though the DEA had never been able to gather sufficient evidence to indict the family for narcotics provision and Watson wondered how Steiner had gotten this data.

Steiner slowly continued. "The revenue raised from this transaction will be used to purchase C4, Semtex explosives - and possibly Uranium, required for nuclear explosives, from Ukrainian contacts for onwards transmission to various Jihad militant groups in Syria, Oman, Pakistan and other Middle East terrorist groups."

"These groups will pay handsomely to get their hands on that sort of shit. Their likely targets will be our embassy offices or maybe even an attack here in DC. We **cannot** allow that to happen as many American lives will be in danger." Steiner hardened whilst emphasizing the last point, as this was clearly his priority area and he spoke as if it were he that ran the US and not the President.

"Perez is likely to use a high speed craft to move the cocaine from the mother ship to the Florida coast. My sources do not yet have the precise drop location but we suspect it to be somewhere in the Port Charlotte area - which we understand he has used before."

"What's the name of this mother ship and how big is it?" asked Watson, who like Hayes had an instant mistrust of the shadowy CIA man. Watson was the type of guy who wanted hard information in order to make informed decisions.

Steiner stared straight and hard at Watson, as if resenting having to tell him anything before forcing a slight smile.

"The mother boat is a large fishing boat, a longliner, registered in Mazatlan, Mexico as El Alcatraz. The ship is usually based in the Sea of Cortez and has substantial storage areas beneath deck - which at the moment ain't full of fucking fish. My people are trying to locate the ship's precise position from those assholes in the US Coastguard".

Another agency rivalry reared its head.

"Mr Steiner. How do you know all this information is correct?" said Hayes quizzically.

"FBI agents have always found it very difficult to gather reliable data from sources close to Perez?"

Steiner smirked in a satisfied way then paused before replying.

"Pretty lady. There are various ways of, shall we say, encouraging people to cooperate with you. Most peasants have skeletons in their cupboard or a simple desperation for money. A skilled operative will know which button to push to uncover the required information. What I have told you tonight is correct and it's now up to you now to intercept and bring him in. Within this operation you two have jurisdiction in Florida for drug matters". This was said with almost resentment.

Madison tensed inside. She was still picturing torture, brutality, blackmail and bribery - all the daily tools of the trade for somebody like Steiner she guessed, who clearly had no respect for the human rights of foreign nationals. Nor probably any non-patriotic American citizens.

"OK." said Konchesky awkwardly, as he sensed the antagonism in the room growing and wanted to bring the meeting to a close. "Thanks Mr Steiner that has been mighty helpful."

Steiner slowly rose from his chair to put his tatty jacket back on, smiled like a python and said "Good night" before leaving the office.

When he had gone Konchesky spoke again but this time seemed more like his usual confident self.

"Well guys we've done our research and now it's Showtime. Logan, your DEA colleagues have kindly facilitated a fully loaded King Air 350 plane, so you will fly tonight from DC to Charlotte County Airport. A local FBI agent, Ryan Dempsey will be there to assist you - he's a good guy. You know what you gotta do people - so let's go to work".

23:30pm Thursday 12 August 2012 Port Charlotte Airport

Both agents already had bags on standby and quickly rendezvoused at Dulles Airport. Early into the two hour flight to Florida, Watson sensed that Madison was edgy, tense and quiet. She was using the King Air's range of sophisticated radar and on-board PC equipment to track data and keep communications, updated but kept looking out of the window into the night sky.

"Are you OK Madi?" he finally asked.

"My name is Madison and I'm just fine. Why wouldn't I be?" she snapped back at him.

"OK, OK. Take it easy, no worries." said Watson who now knew for sure she was nervous. He needed to know that he could rely on her if things got hot down in Florida and now he was starting to have some doubts.

After a difficult period of silence, only broken by the drone of the Nightstalker's engines, Hayes turned round and said " Logan, US Coastguard have got the co-ordinates of the El Alcatraz so maybe they aren't as crap as Steiner thinks. They got its position as 28.195 N 83.426 W and say it is at rest - anchor down for the night. It looks like the captain is in position for tomorrow's offload."

"Good work. We're gonna need those guys assistance tomorrow for sure. I did a training stint with the Coastguard in Alaska a few years back and they know what they are doing." added Watson. He didn't share Steiner's poor opinion of the US Coastguard.

After a few minutes further silence, Madison turned in her seat and said to him "Logan. I'm sorry I snapped at you before. I gotta tell you that I am a bit nervous now. I've done FBI weapons training but I haven't much experience of using a Glock gun for real and I've never faced out real terrorists before."

Watson knew her best skill-sets lay elsewhere and he tried to put her mind at rest.

"Yeah I'm nervous too. Don't forget we've lots of back-up from Team America and we'll be OK. I've got a good feeling about this now and I'll be looking out for you. Remember the motto of Florida - In God We Trust. Well we can change that a bit to be In God and Glocks We Trust!"

He had his own reservations but with a big toothy smile he achieved his immediate objective of easing her fears. She broke into a smile and without looking at him said softly "Thanks Logan".

The King Air touched down on a quiet runway at Port Charlotte Airport before it taxied to a dark unmarked hanger on the periphery of the airport. Madison and Logan got out of the plane into the stifling hot night air, both holding their luggage bags, where they were greeted by a very overweight, older but friendly FBI agent wearing big round glasses with thick lenses.

"Madison, Logan? My name is Ryan Dempsey. I'm with the FBI here in Florida. Real nice to meet you both" he said offering a strong handshake to both.

"I've gotta car for you - hey let me help you with those bags!"

Dempsey willingly picked up the bags and loaded them into the car before wiping sweat from his face and forehead with a handkerchief.

"Hey Logan, are you a ball fan?" asked Dempsey as they walked over to the car.

"I sure am" said Watson. "I try and get to see the Yankees when I am in New York - I've always followed them since my dad took me there when I was about eight."

"I'm a Marlins fan" replied Dempsey. "I just got tickets for next week's game against the Rays and then tonite my wife goes and tells me that she has arranged a surprise birthday party for her folks. Can you believe that?!! If you are still down here you are welcome to have the tickets".

A friendly Fed? Things are looking up thought Logan.

"I sure would like to go Ryan and thanks!"

A black Chrysler Town Country with blacked out windows was parked just outside the hanger and the three agents climbed in. Hayes and Watson gave Dempsey the news about El Alcatraz's position as he drove them out of the airport complex.

"We'll get a Nightstalker up tonight over that area. With the night imaging cameras and 3D capability we might get some clue as to how many are people on board or if there are any touchdown boats ready for launch" said Dempsey who came across as very competent.

"Madison I've got those maps of the coast roads around Charlotte Harbor you asked for earlier and I've got you rooms at the Palm Beach motel on Bayshore Road. I reckon you should get a few hours rest tonight and I'll pick you both up at 7am tomorrow. Then I can show you our observation point, have a recap and plan-on."

Ryan gave out a lot of confidence and Hayes felt a whole lot better now.

Chapter 4

Friday 13th August 2012 06:00am Gulf of Mexico El Alcatraz

Miguel Perez was showered, shaved and dressed in a red Ralph Lauren polo shirt, blue Levi jeans, Nike sneakers and a Rolex Oyster. He had doused himself in his favourite aftershave, Amouage Die Pour Homme, a present from Maria and costing \$300 a bottle.

He had his gold plated AR-15 automatic tucked into his belt - a trusty piece that had served him well on many previous occasions. He, Sanchez and Vakha, the Chetnan, broke open the wooden cases below deck and carefully carried the plastic bags of cocaine onto deck. A motorboat was lowered into the sea and Maria got in with her husband.

The bags of coke were then handed overboard by Sanchez, Vakha and Javier to be stored and organized by Perez into durable plastic suitcases in the front of the motor boat. Perez fired the engine into life and the boat raced off in the direction of the American coast, slicing across the sea at high speed. Twenty minutes later a Motion

35 powerboat pulled alongside and Perez high-fived with his best pal Luis Delgado, before transferring the illicit cargo to the Motion.

Once the Motion was fully loaded, Delgado took out an Ousi machine gun from under his seat and in a deafening and juvenile performance, he and Perez triggered out the fiberglass bottom of the other boat. Within minutes, the craft slowly sank to its grave deep at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico - taking with it any fingerprints or evidence of their presence and activities. They laughed out loud like kids at their destructive handiwork.

Delgado started up the Motion, throttled back and the three of them headed back towards Florida at something close to top speed. The boat sliced through the waves like a knife, skimming the water like a pebble. With the sun beating down, the sea breeze in their faces, hair flying and adrenalin pumping, they all felt both untouchable and invincible.

In a few hours time they would be even wealthier.

Shortly before 07:00am, the Motion glided quietly into the quiet and inconspicuous boathouse Delgado had hired long term for cash several months before. He moored up alongside a speedboat that would be used by Maria to return to El Alcatraz later that evening.

"I need a cup of coffee now, that boat journey has made me thirsty!" said Maria smiling.

"It is a very fast boat for sure" said Delgado "It stalled on me before but now it is going fine".

"Amigo, let's hope it is OK for the next few hours and then we can buy ten new ones if we want!" joked Perez.

The boathouse was locked up and the trio headed off to a local cafe-bar for a coffee and cigarette and then onto motel rooms Delgado had scouted out for a few hours peace and rest. Perez carried both suitcases and had no intention of letting them out of his sight at any time. They got to the motel and checked-in looking just like tourists. They now had a few hours to kill before the transfer took place.

For Delgado, that time would be spent having a hot shower and a nap after an uncomfortable night's sleep in the boathouse guarding the Motion.

For the Perez's, it would be an hour of frantic, passionate love-making.

Friday 13 August 2012 07:00am, Palm Beach Motel, Bayshore Road, Port Charlotte, Florida

Hayes and Watson stood outside the motel waiting for Dempsey. Hayes hadn't slept that well whilst Watson had slept solidly.

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