

"When a man's enemies believe him to be a faithful friend, there is no political ambition to grand."

El Maestro

Chapter One

A fine dew painted African orchids lining a garden pergola. Under its shade two gentlemen sat visiting over breakfast. Honeysuckle and French roast coffee hang in the cool morning air. High in the trees grackles prattled amongst themselves. Enviously, the birds peered down, critiquing the graceful movements of white swan gliding the length of a pond near the men's morning meeting.

One of the men reminisced aloud, poetically. "I remember the colors of the Sierra Madre rising to the east of the fields my father tended," the *don* expressively cupped and lifted empty hands to his nose, whiffing a fragrant memory, "ahhh, and I can the smell of fresh turned earth and taste of cold well water that grew my family's crops. As a boy, I would stand on my tiptoes, alongside long rows of poppy, kissing each bulb while giving thanks to a God only children know."

"I can only imagine," the morning meeting's host responded. "We grew up so differently. Tell me, are your parents still living?"

"My father drank himself to death. My mother is very old, but enjoys good health. I purchased the farm my father tended and gave it to my mother. She lives there now, contently. And if I may ask, Maestro, what of your rearing?"

The wealthy and powerful man kept his comments brief, "I was blessed with a privileged upbringing. I attended the finest private schools and later completed my formal education at Yale University in the United States. Of course, you know the rest of my story. I won't bore you with details."

There lived many rumors in Mexico about the man who lived in La Palacio Verde - The Green Palace, near the heart of Mexico City. Rumors included that of corruption, of sadism, and it was even rumored he was the lone owner, the *titiritero* of a powerful drug organization. Rumors in Mexico are as common as the flies that muster on burro dung. In this case however the rumors were true, but truth's in Mexico are often buried with the dead and because of the man's impeccable reputation, most countrymen counted these accusations as a silly wives tale.

On this day the covert leader of the Sinaloa, known in the underworld as Maestro, had summoned his highest ranking *jefe*. The man's *apodo* - 'El Grande' and he was the face of the Sinaloa Organization. While Maestro enjoyed the life of a revered public figure, El Grande lived his life a criminal, a wanted man, never resting his head on the same pillow two nights in a row.

"I'd like to move on to the reason I asked you here, Grande."

"Certainly, Maestro, certainly."

“Tell me just how much money did we invest into the development of the Colombian’s new drug?”

“All totaled . . . two-hundred-forty million.”

“And it was a complete loss?”

“*Si*, a complete loss. The bulk of our investment was in equipment and infrastructure. The bombs that were dropped reduced the laboratory to dust.”

The god-like *titiritero* took a bit of his bagel and chewed meditatively. He observed, “It’s a shame. If this drug call Piri Aji was all it was represented to be, half the earth’s population would have soon been addicted to it and most certainly in time we would have become the drug’s soul provider.” Maestro then sighed as if he had lost a hand of cards in a weekend poker game.

“There is no doubt it was the United States that dropped the missiles,” Grande huffed. “I sent my best man to Washington D.C. and what he discovered might surprise you.”

“What’s that?”

“The U.S. Drug Czar, Mathew Winston Whitaker, ordered the strike.”

“That is a logical deduction. Why would that surprise me?”

“This man, Whitaker, he is involved with the Cali Cartel. I’m confident he and the leaders of the Cali are working together.”

Maestro’s countenance hardened, “But that makes no sense. If the Czar was in partnership with the Cali why would he order the destruction of the laboratory?”

“That is what I intend to find out.”

“This may be a secret difficult to uncover. Do you have a plan?”

Grande, still looking grieved by the situation, answered, “Not yet, but I will devise a strategy.”

Maestro shook his head, “You are not to blame, Grande. This investment would have not been made if you had not been confident in the structure of the venture. Remind me, what was the woman’s name who first brought this deal to our doorstep?”

“Claudia Samper-Trujillo, she is the niece of the Trujillo brothers.”

“Ahhh *si*,” Maestro responded, his voice returning subtle tone. “Perhaps we can use her to learn more.”

“I’ve thought of that and we have attempted to contact her, but she is nowhere to be found.”

“What about Whitaker? What plans do we have for this pig?”

“I assure you, Maestro. Whitaker’s days are numbered. I soon will have answers to all your questions and we will end the life of this dog who eats his own vomit.”

“Is it the environment in which one is raised that produces the true criminal mind? Are there those individuals simply born with evil intentions? Does genetics play a role? Pose these questions to the gangster and most often you will receive this simple answer, ‘it’s nothing more than a choice I made.’”

*Mathew Winston Whitaker
Office of National Drug Control Policy,
Director*

Chapter Two

The day had the look and feel of exactly what you’d expect for a funeral. When they lowered Mathew Winston Whitaker’s body into the ground his friends and family wept. At his memorial, powerful men wearing long faces delivered eulogies befitting the loss of a national hero. They spoke of his fierce determination in ridding the country of illicit drugs and making our world *a safer place to raise our children*. Present to honor “Wit” were many dignitaries – senators, congressmen, judges, and directors of one governmental department or another. God alone noticed the absences of the one most responsible for Wit’s outstanding career, a man named Leonardo Lomez.

The day of his murder was not unlike the day of his burial. A cold wet blanket of mist had rolled over the district and drifted midair, rendering the nation’s capital a powerful haunt. That morning Wit’s murderer had arrived by private charter at Washington National Airport, just outside Alexandria, Virginia. He was a handsome Latino, dressed as if he might be flying in to attend a business meeting or possibly to call on wealthy clients. The traveler had a serious face and yet his demeanor was humble. His gait was controlled, his posture perfect, and when he spoke his English was romantically accented – Spanish, no doubt, his first language. The role he played today was that of an ambassador’s assistant, a messenger, from the country of El Salvador.

In front of the airport, the emissary caught a taxi that drove him to the Eisenhower Executive Office Building in Washington D.C. There, he was required to show his credentials, all of which had been forged by master counterfeiters. Per standard protocol the man was asked to pass through a body scan and metal detector. The ONDCP Director regularly received death threats, and security was always paramount. After all measures of security were employed, the guest was escorted to Director Whitaker’s office.

“I have an appointment to see Director Whitaker,” he’d announced.

“You are Mr. Gutierrez?” the secretary asked politely.

“That’s right,” the assassin lied.

“Yes, the Director is expecting you. This way, please.”

Prior to the man's arrival, Winston Whitaker had been lost in thought, writing a variety of pseudonyms on a scratch pad. He liked the first name Randal, but was undecided as to what the perfect last name should be, finally settling on 'York' and drawing a line under the letters. *Randal York*, he'd said to himself. *A fine name for a new life*. He'd then placed the piece of paper in a shredder near his desk and collected the sliced strands in a plastic bag with the intention of flushing them later. Just then his secretary had buzzed his desk.

"Mr. Gutierrez, is here to see you," the secretary informed after one knock and opening the door.

Whitaker stood to his feet and approached the door. "Yes, yes, send him in."

The two men shook hands. "Please have a seat here," welcomed the Director.

The 'ambassador's aid' sat down in a wingback chair across the desk from his intended victim. He had the calm demeanor of a seasoned professional.

Whitaker had begun what would turn out to be a short discussion. "Mr. Gutierrez, my understanding is that your country is ready to begin assisting the United States in combating the drug cartels in Central America. That is the purpose of this visit?"

Gutierrez parted interlocked fingers and humbly informed, "I am simply the messenger, but yes, the Ambassador and the Secretary of State are requesting a closed forum on the subject."

"I'm somewhat confused. Why didn't the Ambassador himself deliver his own message? We could have at least knocked out some of the preliminaries."

Ignoring the question, Gutierrez inquired about a painting on the wall behind Whitaker's chair. "Is that an Eastman Johnson?"

"Why yes, you do know your artists. It's called *Little Soldier*."

"May I take a moment to view it close up?"

"Certainly."

The man who called himself Gutierrez stood to his feet and walked around the director's desk. As he did so, he stumbled but did not fall. "These shoestrings," he cursed and knelt to one knee to resolve the problem.

Admiring the painting, he waited for Whitaker to turn his head away. Before Whitaker had time to face front again, the braided wire lace he'd just removed from shoe was wound tightly around Whitaker's neck. The cord was completely constricting - no air, no flow of blood, no sound. There was little struggle before Whitaker's body went limp. The assassin removed the cord and took the time to re-lace his black wingtips. Next, the skilled killer grabbed Whitaker's weak chin, opened his mouth and from his pocket he removed a Mexican gold piece. With great care he placed the coin on his victim's dead tongue. An emblematic slaying.

“It was a pleasure seeing you, Director Whitaker, and keep up the good work,” was all the secretary heard as the messenger exited Whitaker’s office, closing the door behind him. The polite visitor then asked, “Would you mind terribly showing me back to the entrance? I have no sense of direction.”

Hours later, the Director’s secretary knocked lightly and said goodnight through the closed door to ears that were long past hearing.

“When a man returns to the place of his birth he finds the part of himself he cannot recall having lost.”

*Austin Adair
Wilderness Outfitter,
Storyteller*

Chapter Three

Adair drew on his cigar and blew smoke upward into the dark wooden rafting of the roughened West Texas bar. A tad of irritation could be heard as he spoke to friends in his native drawl, “Damn y’all. I grew up with most of ya, and I can remember a story worth tellin’ involving each and every one of ya, so why not trade stories about back when we were kids?”

“Oh, hell no,” a voice rang out. “Do you have any idea how many crazy wive’s tales have floated around this community over the years you were gone? Look, we asked your no good ass here to find out the real story.”

“So, y’all want to know what happened after leavin’ the ranch and venturin’ off to make my fortune?” Nods of affirmation came in unison. “Hell, fellers, isn’t it plain to see where chasing life landed me? Right back on my dad’s ranch.”

“Tell us everything, Adair,” voiced a busty barmaid with a curvaceous backside.

Adair paused a moment to gather his thoughts. “Shit ... okay ... well, some of what I’m going to tell ya I’m not proud of, but without telling you the bad I can’t connect the good parts ... so here goes. After I somehow graduated high school, I left the ranch and went to work in the oilfields.”

“Hell, we know that; get to the good stuff,” a burly cowboy said abruptly.

Adair handed the man a perturbed look before continuing. “At age twenty-one, with money in my pocket and a plan in mind, I flew from West Texas to Colombia. Without going into the details, this scheme of mine ... well, it wasn’t exactly a legal one.” A light chuckle swept the dreary bar. “On my flight over I met this pretty redheaded *Senorita* and fell head-over-heels. Now, I didn’t know much about this girl other than she was beautiful, well groomed and stirred a man’s interest the way a woman should stir a man. We spent our days walkin’ and talkin’ and takin’ in the sights of Bogota, which was her hometown.”

Adair let the story’s charm churn in the minds of his friends a moment before continuing, “Well, one night she snuck me into her uncle’s pool house which was situated to the rear of the damnedest mansion you ever saw. It was while the young beauty’s ass was in the air and I was enjoying her from behind that her uncle and a bunch of his security guards, along with a large portion of her family, stormed

the room. Now fellows, Colombian drug lords don't stick out in a crowd, not the smart ones anyway. They look like doctors or lawyers, you know, respectable and kind hearted. But you get caught fucking one of their highly prized nieces and they turn ugly fast." Again, laughter filled the bar. "That uncle of her's had me beat up and man-handled into a helicopter. I was then flown out over the jungle, and booted out of the helicopter, butt naked and into a free fall. I twirled end over end. One moment there'd be the blue sky then the green jungle, then sky, then jungle, over and over till finally I landed in a small pond. That patch of water saved my life."

"Praise God, sounds like the good Lord was watching over ya," said one of the more religious in the bunch.

"Yeah, well, like I said, the fall didn't kill me, but it tore me up damn good."

"Aaaa-daaair, is this a truuue story or are you just feedin' us a line a shit?" asked the Daisy Duke look-alike barmaid.

Adair paid the woman little mind and continued his story. "I was nursed back to health by Campa Arawakan natives and stayed with them for quite some time. I married the chief's daughter and became one with those people." Again, Adair puffed his stogie to life and blew a cloud of smoke out over his small audience.

One of the storyteller's old schoolmates mused skeptically, "Adair, you sure you didn't fly down there, get all fucked up on cocaine and then imagine all this shit?"

Again Adair ignored the cynicism. "I purchased an outfitting company and for years I provided services to companies trekking the jungles of Central and South America."

"What made you want to come back to this God forsaken country?"

Austin gave the question some thought, "There's something to be said about living in wide open spaces ... a man feels safe. Then there's that longing for home. No matter how hard he tries, a man can never shake it."

Daisy again spoke up, "So what about your wife? Did you just leaver her down there?"

Austin didn't answer immediately. "Yeah ... I did."

"Men!" she huffed, "You are all a bunch of no good bastards."

"I'd say that pretty much sums us all up," Adair concurred.

"So, if ya left your wife down in Colombia, who's the hot *Senorita* you're livin' with up at your dad's place?" asked the roughened cowhand.

"How'd ya know about her?"

"Hell, Adair, remember where your boots are planted. The entire community knows when the preacher's wife has the squirts. There's no hiding anything round here. So who is she?"

"Just a friend."

Daisy once again stood up for the female race, “It says a lot about a man that would just up and leave his wife.”

Adair’s stern look hushed the woman. He then explained without expression, “My wife and unborn child were murdered,” before turning to ask the bartender for another vodka on ice. The grief painted on his face told his friends that this was not a life imagined, and the bar fell silent for quite a long time.