



*Thanks to my wife Debbie, for her artistic input
and support.*

To my sister Beryl, guardian of the family library.

*To all the salsa musicians and singers, past and
present, who give me pleasure from their music.*

Brian Hiley

**What's Done
Is Done**



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THE CARTEL

During the 1980s, there was great unrest in Colombia, a war was raging with various factions involved, which included the Colombian government. The FARC (Peoples Army) was a left-wing faction with thousands of supporters and was funded by kidnap and ransom as well as levying taxes on drug traffickers.

The Cartel was formed by Pablo Escobar the head of the operation in Medellin together with Gonzalo Rodriguez Gacha who was in control of the cartel in Cali. They joined forces to control and supply illegal drugs out of Colombia. Escobar was in overall control while Gacha built up the Cartel's army of sicarios (hired guns) by hiring British and Israeli mercenaries. Being a hired gun for the Cartel meant work for many poor young Colombians, who rarely lived beyond the age of twenty-two

years before being gunned down. The Medellín Cartel was an empire of stunning sweep and unimaginable violence. At its height, it earned as much as \$4 billion a year, most of it cash, for its members and controlled 80 percent of the cocaine supply in the United States, leaving tens of thousands of corpses in its wake. Violence ruled as Escobar's motto was 'plato o plomo' (silver or lead) take a bribe or take a bullet.

They united with right wing death squads and paramilitary groups to fight against the FARC. In the eighties, such was the demand for cocaine, the cartel took control of Normans Cay, a Bahamian island, where large shipments of cocaine were flown in and transferred to smaller planes for the onward journey to the USA via Florida.

The pilots would drop the cargo then ditch the plane in the sea, where a boat would be waiting to save the pilot, such was the huge profit from drugs, to fund this. Cocaine was also supplied inside refrigerators, tv sets, mixed with Guatemalan fruit pulp and also soaked in blue jeans, the substance being extracted by chemists before distribution.

Escobar rallied support from the poor by building housing where the government wouldn't, the

people praised him for what he did and saw him as a modern day, Robin Hood. Shootings and killings were commonplace in this area of Colombia, making it a dangerous place to be at night, as violence and murder ruled the day.

If loyalty didn't work brutal violence did.

Chapter 1

The alarm sounded at 6am but José Perez was already awake, the morning was bright and sunny with a light breeze from the coast, a good day for everyone. He got out of bed and went to the bathroom, shaved and showered. Am I doing the right thing, he kept asking himself, but his decision had been made and the deal agreed, there was no possibility of changing his mind. He had a light breakfast and went to his Mercedes, a car he had dreamed of owning when he was a teenager in Colombia.

He came to America fifteen years ago with his daughter, settled in Miami and had set up his company Perez Importing. He had prospered as the business thrived and now lived in Coral Gables, a city near Miami, in Florida. It is home to the 1920s Venetian Pool, carved from a rock quarry, with its grottoes, towers and bridge. Coral Gables was founded by George Merrick whose childhood home has been restored as a memorial to him. Located here is the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden

which includes tree-lined lakes, a tropical rainforest and a butterfly display, while the collections at Lowe Art Museum include Cuban and Caribbean works. For recreation, there is the sprawling Matheson Hammock Park which features a beach popular for water sports including sailing, kiteboarding and stand-up paddle boarding. To the south of Coral Gables is the Montgomery Botanical Centre, known for its palms, cyads and rare tropical plants. Life for him was enjoyable here and he was thankful to everyone who had assisted him in his success since coming to America and settling in Miami. Now, he considered the time was right to make a change to the current situation and he was on his way to see his lawyer and friend of fourteen years Michael Gambini. They first met at a business convention when he was launching his importing business. Fifteen years, he thought, fifteen years of importing goods from Mexico, Panama, China, Colombia and a whole host of other countries including Europe. Goods consisting of blue jeans, coffee, tobacco, biscuits, fine art and other goods which he could not even remember. His decision to make a change had not come lightly and he was on his way to see Michael to complete what he viewed as security for the future, for himself and his daughter Susana. He placed his briefcase on the rear seat, sat in the driving seat thinking of his daughter Susana Maria Perez, the only family he had and considered

she would also be safe for the future. There was no turning back now. 'A lo hecho pecho', said José, what's done is done. He drove away from the house with a settled mind.

Chapter 2

Xavier Benitez sat on the patio by the swimming pool under a canopy shielded from the morning sun, where he ate breakfast and read the newspaper. He resided at Miami Beach, Miami Dade County, a south Florida island city connected via bridges to mainland Miami. It boasts wide beaches which stretch from the Open Space Park at North Shore, past palm lined Lummus Park, to South Pointe Park. At the southern end, well known for its international cachet with models and celebrities is South Beach, with its early twentieth century architecture in the Art Deco style, in the historic district, with pastel coloured buildings especially on Ocean Drive. The land was originally purchased for seventy-five cents an acre in 1870 as it was uninhabitable. Development investment came over the years with the first hotel being constructed in 1915 which still stands on Ocean Drive. In 1959, a

wave of Cuban immigrants flooded this area of Miami after the rise of Fidel Castro and today has a very large Hispanic population and is home to wealthy people and visitors from all over the world. He lived in a large mediteranian style property built in the nineteen thirties which, despite improvements over the years, the building had obvious signs, which were still visible, of the art deco period when it was constructed.

He was in his late fifties, a short man of five feet six inches and portly with thinning hair and had been overseeing the distribution routes through Miami for the last five years where he ran a tight organisation. He was a very wealthy man who admired loyalty as long as the loyalty was for himself. He was ruthless and his distribution routes had thrived under his rule. A while later, he took a brief swim as he did every morning, believing that regular exercise was good for the mind and assisted him in running a tight organisation, as mistakes were not tolerated lightly by his employers La Oficina de Envigado and usually the consequences for mistakes was a severe penalty to pay. He exited the pool, dried himself and donned a monogrammed towelling robe, sat down and relaxed under the canopy by the pool. On the table by his side was a

slim wooden box which bore the label Cohiba Cigars. He opened it and took out a large hand rolled cigar, slicing the end with a mechanical cutter in the guise of a French guillotine which amused him. He took a zippo lighter which was emblazoned with his initials and played the end of the cigar in the flame until it was a grey ash colour, put the cigar in his mouth, puffed on the cigar and started to smoke it while relaxing in the wicker chair smiling to himself, enjoying the aroma while he waited for a phone call he was expecting. The day was going to be a good one he thought.

Chapter 3

The journey to see his lawyer at his office was not a long one for José and traffic was light. He travelled down the main highway and slowed as he approached the major cross roads, but the lights were in his favour and he passed through the junction, travelled a little farther down the road, then made a right into the parking lot in the basement of the building where his lawyer Michael Gambini had his legal office. He parked his car, collected his briefcase and stepped out of the Mercedes and headed for the elevator, entered and pressed the button for the tenth floor. The doors closed and the elevator juddered slightly, as it began to ascend. The elevator stopped, dinged and the doors opened. He stepped from the elevator and was greeted by a woman, Gambini's secretary.

'Good morning Mr Perez' she said with a smile

'please go right in, Mr Gambini is expecting you'

He entered the office and Michael Gambini stood up, held out his hand and gave José a firm friendly handshake and welcome. The door to the

office closed. It was a good sized office with filing cabinets on the left hand wall and a large oak desk behind which sat Michael Gambini. On the desk were a few open files, a rolodex and a telephone. Behind the desk was a large window which allowed natural daylight to flood into the office, giving it an airy feel. Michael was almost six feet tall with dark hair and dark skin and quite handsome. He wore a light linen business suit and white shirt which contrasted with his skin colour. He too was of Colombian origin and had made a name for himself as a business lawyer in Miami.

'would you like a coffee?' asked Michael

'no thank you. My visit today will be brief'

'please sit down my friend. What can I do for you?'

He sat down in front of the office desk opposite Michael and opened his briefcase, took out two wax sealed envelopes and explained to Michael that the envelopes were not to be opened or revealed to anyone until the event of his death. Michael looked puzzled.

'Are you alright José?' he asked.

'Yes, I am fine and well. It is merely a precaution and security for my daughter Susana'. He handed the envelopes to Michael who took them to his office safe, opened it and locked them securely away for future use. 'Your wishes will be fulfilled my friend and I wish you well'. 'Thank you' said Jose with a smile, 'now I must leave, I have other business to attend to'. They shook hands and parted company. 'Goodbye Mr Perez' called the secretary, 'goodbye' he replied and took the elevator back to the basement parking area. When the elevator doors opened, the parking lot was very dimly lit but he paid little attention to it, walked to his car, opened the door of the Mercedes, put his briefcase in the rear then sat in the driver's seat and closed the door. He started the engine and drove out of the parking lot and made a left heading east to his home. Michael Gambini picked up the telephone in his office, dialled a number and made a short call. 'Thank you Michael' said the voice at the other end, then hung up.

The heavy cement truck was travelling south, at the wheel was Rafe Gonzalez, a Mexican. He was sweating and kept taking a drink from a liquor bottle in a paper bag which was in a secure holder