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THE AIR WAS THICK OUTSIDE THE BARN, this August was right up there with the worst ones I remembered from my youth. I missed the ocean breeze that offset the heat in the Keys.

So much for catching a breath of fresh air.

The afternoon light was on the wane, and a thin line of pink and purple had begun to form along the Blue Ridge Mountains on the horizon. But my mind was still focused on the contents of my father's old brown notebook. There were fifty pages of cryptic notes, many of which were dates and names, most of which were Hispanic, usually just a first or last name.

The muggy air drove me back inside. Ben would be home in a couple of days and I planned to leave for Key West the moment he arrived. Hurricane Harvey had just decimated coastal Texas, and I was relieved it had missed the Keys. No way to reason with hurricane season when you live on an island in the tropics.

Again seated on the mounting block, I reopened the brown note- book. At the end was half of a crude map. The other half had been torn out. The last entry in the book was dated October 1992, from Key West. Two names were listed—Tommy Diaz and Frank Graves— along with some numbers:

17000 / 50 # 12000 / 100 # 10,000 / 20 ### LO / SP / EP / ES

Perspiration clung to my shirt in the non-air conditioned room. I packed the four journals, my adoption papers, and the handful of old pictures with the photo from Shark Beach on top into a box. I replaced the padlock on the door and hustled my way through the humidity back to the main house, where the air-conditioning was on high and a half bottle of Pilar dark rum awaited.

Ben had redecorated much of the house using some of the money inherited from our parents. They'd left me nothing, because according to Carlton Grooms, our family attorney, my net worth had been north of twenty million dollars when the wills were codified. I'd had a few successes since then, so I no longer needed the monthly stipend Ben had initially provided me after my bankruptcy.

I poured three fingers of Pilar into a Waterford glass and dropped a few ice cubes in. A photo of Ben and his girlfriend, Julie, an heiress from a candy dynasty who lived nearby,

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caught my eye. She was somewhat plain for my taste, but Ben had told me there were billions of reasons for him to love her. I've never seen a cash cow produce anything but sour milk, but I'd wished him luck.

I sat at the kitchen table where Ben had left his computer, took a sip of the smooth rum, and retrieved the brown notebook from the box. The Weather Channel blared from the TV on the counter.

"Hurricane Harvey has made landfall in Louisiana five days after first hitting Texas. This historic storm has caused more damage than any other in history..."

That damn hurricane had ricocheted around the northern Gulf of Mexico like the Tasmanian Devil for a week solid. The fact that it had now made landfall again was incredibly bad luck.

Back to the brown notebook with its many names, most of them cited in Colombia in the eighties and nineties. An uneasy sensation caused me to take a gulp of rum. The last time I saw my father was when I gave him the maps and clues to other potential treasures I had spirited away from e-Antiquity. As it turned out, this had been the night before the FBI and the SEC closed us down. Initially shocked at what was happening, my father's last words surprised and confused me then but now had me as curious as I could recall ever being in my life.

"I wasn't always a Boy Scout, Buck."

Would the brown notebook provide insight into that ... comment? Confession? I settled on a page in the middle. Two names appeared with several dates: Carlos Castaño and Fidel Castaño. After a quick Google search I learned that they were the founders and leaders of the Colombian National Army, a murderous paramilitary force that had once provided muscle for Pablo Escobar's Medellín cartel, only to turn on them later. They had another brother, Vincente, and according to the article I'd found, Vincente had killed Carlos for control of their private army.

Had my father known them?

Apparently so, given how often their names appeared throughout the notebook.

But why?

It suddenly hit me that I knew very little about my father's life before the State Department. He'd worked there for as long as I'd lived, but by his own admission he wasn't always a Boy Scout.

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I found another name, Jose Gonzalo Diaz Gacha, listed several times, then an X next to the last mention of his name with the date December 15, 1989. Thirty seconds on the Internet explained why. Gonzalo, a key member of the Medellín cartel, had been murdered on December 15, 1989.

I stared at the screen, then again at the notebook. Why had my father recorded the day a drug smuggler had been murdered?

I searched more names. All had been murdered.

According to multiple articles online, all their deaths were attributed to a vigilante group known as Los Pepes: People Persecuted by Pablo Escobar—in Spanish, *Perseguidos por Pablo Escobar*.

Los Pepes. What the hell?