



The Cartel (Vintage Crime: Black Lizard)

By Don Winslow

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A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

WINNER OF THE LOS ANGELES TIMES BOOK PRIZE

ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR

A New York Times Critics' Pick * The Seattle Times * The Denver Post * The Washington Post * Publishers Weekly * Amazon * National Post (Toronto) * The Guardian * New Statesman * The Telegraph * The Sunday Times (London) * The Daily Mail * The Mail on Sunday

It's 2004. Adán Barrera, kingpin of El Federación, is languishing in a California federal prison. Ex-DEA agent Art Keller passes his days in a monastery, having lost everything to his thirty-year blood feud with the drug lord. Then Barrera escapes. Now, there's a two-million-dollar bounty on Keller's head and no one else capable of taking Barrera down. As the carnage of the drug war reaches surreal new heights, the two men are locked in a savage struggle that will stretch from the mountains of Sinaloa to the shores of Veracruz, to the halls of power in Washington, ensnaring countless others in its wake. Internationally bestselling author Don Winslow's *The Cartel* is the searing, unfiltered epic of the drug war in the twenty-first century.

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Editorial Review

Review

One of the Best Books of the Year: A *New York Times* Critics' Pick, *The Seattle Times*, *The Denver Post*, *The Washington Post*, *Publishers Weekly*, Amazon, *National Post* (Toronto), *The Guardian*, *New Statesman*, *The Telegraph*, *The Sunday Times* (London), *The Daily Mail*, *The Mail on Sunday*

The New York Times

"Winslow's drug war version of *The Godfather* . . . A big, sprawling, ultimately stunning crime tableau . . . A magnum opus . . . Don Winslow is to the Mexican drug wars what James Ellroy is to L.A. Noir."

—Janet Maslin

Esquire

"An epic, gritty south-of-the-border *Godfather* for our time. You don't have to read Don Winslow's *The Power of the Dog* to get swept away by *The Cartel*, its ripped-from-the-headlines sequel, but you should. You should try to get your hands on everything Winslow's written, because he's one of the best thriller writers on the planet."

—Benjamin Percy

NPR

"Hugely hypnotic new thriller . . . the pace and feel of an exploded documentary . . . a brilliant and informative work of fiction about a nightmare world that flourishes in the bright light of day."

—Alan Cheuse

Rolling Stone

"A *Game of Thrones* of the Mexican drug wars, a multipart, intricately plotted, blood-soaked epic that tells the story of how America's unquenchable appetite for illegal drugs has brought chaos to our southern neighbors and darkened our own political and criminal culture."

—Will Dana

Booklist (starred review)

"Winslow's riveting and tragic epic seamlessly blends fact and fiction to tell [an] incredible, heartbreaking story. . . . Winslow never loses control of his subject or his characters, despite the book's scope and complexity. There is some of *The Godfather* here, but Winslow's characterizations, though certainly multidimensional, have more of an edge to them than do Puzo's, a greater recognition of the tragedy a violent power struggle leaves in its wake. Clearly one of the most ambitious and most accomplished crime novels to appear in the last 15 years, *The Cartel* will likely retain that distinction even as the twenty-first century grinds on."

—Bill Ott

Arizona Republic

"*The Cartel* is the most important crime saga of the millennium. This is reporting and expose built around an intricate plot, finely etched characters and whip-crack dialogue. . . . Storytelling that matters."

—Robert Anglen

Lee Child

"Sensationally good, even after the near-perfection of *The Power of the Dog*. Less of a sequel than an

integral part of a solid-gold whole.”

Men's Journal

“Winslow is the most fearless chronicler of the chaos and violence along the U.S.-Mexico border . . . who has written what could be the *War and Peace* of the War on Drugs.”

—Erik Hedegaard

Fresh Air

“*The Cartel* tells its ghastly story with enjoyable verve yet I was even more impressed with the way Winslow uses his plot to offer a superb history of the cartels and those out to stop them. Steeped in reportage, the novel . . . possesses a virtue I associate with traditional documentaries: it explains things. I finished the book understanding why Juárez is so violent; why cartels murder so many innocent people; why both the American and Mexican governments favor some cartels over others; and why the war on drugs is not just futile, but morally compromised. It’s here that fiction and documentary come together in a shared sense of, well, bleakness.”

—John Powers

Michael Connelly

“Don Winslow has done it again. *The Cartel* is a first rate edge-of-your-seat thriller for sure, but it also continues Winslow’s incisive reporting on the dangers and intricacies of the world we live in. There is no higher mark for a storyteller than to both educate and entertain. With Winslow these aspects are entwined like strands of DNA. He’s a master and this book proves it once again.”

Los Angeles Times

“Winslow has delivered two of the most . . . emotionally resonant novels in the past decade, 2005’s *The Power of the Dog* and its epic conclusion, *The Cartel*. . . . His prose is sparse and ferocious, and his rapid-fire story hits you like bullets from an AK-47.”

—Ivy Pochoda

Entertainment Weekly

“High-octane . . . The righteous indignation that fuels Winslow’s tale of cops, cartels, and the near-apocalyptic havoc they can create is, to use a sadly appropriate word, addictive.”

—Clark Collis

James Ellroy

“Don Winslow delivers his longest and finest novel yet in *The Cartel*. This is the *War and Peace* of dope-war books. Tense, brutal, wildly atmospheric, stunningly plotted, deeply etched. It’s got the jazz dog feel of a shot of pure meth!!”

The Sunday Times (London)

“Astoundingly ambitious . . . It is unlikely to be bettered this year.”

—John Dugdale (Thriller of the Month)

Vanity Fair

“With corruption, violence, and a love story to boot, [*The Cartel*] is sure to have you grasping at the edge of your seat.”

—Elise Taylor

Details

“Winslow has long been hailed for his hard-boiled humor and storytelling, and this sequel to the best-selling *The Power of the Dog* shows why. . . . The coke-fueled, blood-soaked horror show that ensues would scare Tony Montana straight.”

—David Swanson

Harlan Coben

“The Cartel is a gut-punch of a novel. Big, ambitious, violent and wildly entertaining, Don Winslow’s latest is an absolute must-read.”

Los Angeles Magazine

“An adrenaline rush, addictive as crack, and epic in the pre-Del-Taco-marketing-their-burritos-as-“epic” sense of the word. Don Winslow deals in corruption, subversion, and revenge with an intensity that makes him irresistible.”

Associated Press

“The Cartel is an intricately detailed narrative of the cartel life. . . . Winslow has become an unintentional expert on a subject that sickens him.”

—Hillel Italie

The Huffington Post

“A sprawling epic of drug trafficking, murder, coercion, and corruption at the highest levels of Mexican law enforcement and government. . . . A grand and gripping epic novel.”

—Mark Rubinstein

The San Diego Union-Tribune

“A monster of a novel—big in story, big in ambition. Based on real events, it’s unavoidably violent but not voyeuristic. There is a deep understanding of the bonds and betrayals inherent to the drug trade, considerable musing about the difference between vengeance and justice, and a recognition that even in the face of soul-sapping depravity, there can be nobility and courage.”

—John Wilkens

Sunday Herald (Scotland)

“The Cartel offers a riveting expose of a modern tragedy where the fast pace of the thriller narrative never stumbles over the painstaking attention paid to detail and background. More importantly perhaps, they offer an alternative perspective on the accepted history of America’s involvement in the ‘war on drugs’, a shocking litany of greed, complicity and political machination. . . . Winslow [writes with] the authority of an investigative reporter and the narrative skill of a best-selling author.”

—Alan Morrison

MysteryPeople (Pick of the Month)

“Winslow deftly uses violence in the novel, fully aware of how much he asks the reader to act as witness. . . . The denouncement gives *The Wild Bunch* a run for its money in the final showdown category. He builds up to these moments beautifully, creating emotion and setting the stage for visceral attitude when such scenes explode. . . . For a mammoth novel, *The Cartel* moves. Winslow never loses his humanity and rage as he sweeps across a decade of rough shadow history to the wounded grace note it ends on. It captures everything great about crime fiction and makes it epic.”

Kirkus Reviews

“[A] vast and ambitious thriller . . . Winslow has envisioned his novel on an epic scale. . . . At heart, this is

the familiar tale of symbiosis between pursuer and pursued, reconfigured for the war on drugs and given a mean noir edge.”

Barnes and Noble Review

“Don Winslow is one of those shape-shifter novelists; now light, now dark. Funny one minute, terrifying the next. . . . A Wagernian epic of murder and vengeance . . . *The Cartel* is as much a work of meticulous journalism as artful fiction. But through the blood haze and the political fog, Winslow allows us to see—and even to care about—his skillfully drawn characters.”

—Anna Mundow

Publishers Weekly (starred review)

“Masterly . . . This exhaustively researched novel elucidates not just the situation in Mexico but the consequences of our own disastrous 40-year ‘war on drugs.’”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

The Chicago Tribune

“This is the big one . . . the El Niño, tsunami and San Andreas Fault shaker of drug novels rolled into one—a 600 page immersion that may leave you thinking you knew next to nothing about its seamy subject. . . . *The Cartel* is so relentlessly paced, its probing of daily evil so deep, you’re drawn in whether you like it or not.”

—Lloyd Sachs

Vice

“The book is as gruesome a read as it is insightful, chock-full of research into the organization and tactics of cartels and their (at times) strikingly similar governmental opponents. It is disturbing, and it is based in large part on actual events.”

—Kristen Gwynne

The Seattle Times

“If you have managed to shield your eyes and plug your ears against what’s been going on with the war on drugs in Mexico, Don Winslow’s searing new novel *The Cartel* will tear off the blinders. . . . This reader stuck with *The Cartel* to the end because it says something important.”

—Mary Ann Gwinn

Interview Magazine

“[*The Cartel*] is brutal, graphic, and well-researched, with many of the more gruesome acts based on real events. But there is something else that characterizes Winslow’s work. Beyond genre, there is musicality to his prose; staccato sentences that draw the reader in immediately.”

—Emma Brown

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

“Don Winslow affirms his status as one of the best American writers with *The Cartel*. . . . Devilishly plotted and exhaustingly vivid . . . Winslow’s style, efficient and undeniable as a bullet, keeps you hanging on through the most labyrinthine plot twists. And there are plot twists.”

—Carlo Wolff

Bill O'Reilly (Factor Tip of the Day)

“[*The Cartel*] gives, perhaps, the clearest insight I’ve ever seen into the corruption that has nearly ruined the country of Mexico. Very tough book, but if you want to know what’s going on south of the border it is a must read.”

Stephen King

“I’m totally swept up. You can’t ask for more emotionally moving entertainment.”

The Oregonian

“Winslow is a prolific author.”

—Jeff Baker

Miami Herald

“The dark side of the U.S./Mexican drug wars [from] the gritty author of *The Power of the Dog* . . . Expect violence, gore—and revenge.”

—Connie Ogle

National Post (Toronto)

“Despite an impressive amount of research and its epic scope, *The Cartel* still readily embraces its old roots in the thriller genre. The old comforts you might find in Michael Connelly or Elmore Leonard are still here. . . . Terrifying.”

—Andrew F. Sullivan

San Francisco Chronicle

“Could not be more timely.”

—John McMurtrie

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

“[Winslow’s] story feels less like a product of the imagination than an exhaustively researched bit of journalism. Which it is—a kind of true story set in the recognizable horror show of Mexico narco-terrorism.”

—Philip Martin

Santa Barbara Independent

“By securely grounding his fiction in fact, Winslow achieves a level of emotional truth and illustrates the hard challenges and brutal ironies of the decades-old dope war in a way that few works of nonfiction can match. . . . If you care about the nature of crime and justice in today’s America and the steep price that the men and women on the front lines of the War on Drugs pay to preserve the law and maintain a semblance of order, then pick up *The Cartel* and spend some time with the author’s dark vision.”

—Bruce Riordan

LitReactor

“One of America’s best crime novelists.”

—Keith Rawson

Time magazine

“Overpowering.”

—Sarah Begley

Cinephilia & Beyond

“[Winslow is] the leading American thriller writer of his generation. . . . What emanates from his writing . . . is a sense of humanity, of emotions under the surface, of the ever-going ambition to understand society, what drives people to do what they do, to explore what’s in their nature that makes them behave the way people have been behaving from the dawn of time. . . . It’s this warmth and compassion that makes Winslow one of the best contemporary novelists just as much as his writing does. . . . Whatever you feel gives life to the

books of Don Winslow—be it nail-biting action scenes, detailed and thought-out characterizations of the people at the center of his stories or the abundance of details that lends his writing astonishing authenticity and credibility—one thing remains certain. *The Cartel* is going to blow our minds and leave us wanting for more.”

Star-News

“The opening scene of Don Winslow’s *The Cartel* takes hold like a vise, and for the next 600 pages the book keeps a tight grip as it takes the reader into the underbelly of America’s 30-year war on drugs. . . . Like the journalists he praises, Winslow’s grasp of the material is impressive and has a nonfiction quality. . . . Winslow educates without being heavy handed or preachy. . . . While it is epic in scope, the writing has an intimacy and the characters, even the most evil, feel authentic. It’s a story that is hard to shake even when you’re done. And that is a good thing because this book shouldn’t be forgotten.”

—Kevin Maurer

The Bookmonger

“*The Cartel* may be to Mexican drug lords of today what *The Godfather* was to the Mafia in the 1960s and 1970s—a great story full of compelling characters, as well as a good way to learn about the motives and methods of a super-violent criminal organization.”

—John J. Miller

Library Journal (starred review)

“Winslow’s two-novel project about this still-raging conflict is entertaining, well researched, and difficult to process, a jarring glimpse into a reality about which many Americans remain blissfully unaware.”

—Michael Pucci

About the Author

Bestselling author Don Winslow has written nineteen books and numerous short stories, as well as writing for television and film. A former private investigator and trial consultant, Winslow lives in Southern California.

www.don-winslow.com

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1

The Beekeepers

We think we can make honey without sharing in the fate of bees.

—Muriel Barbery

The Elegance of the Hedgehog

Abiquiú, New Mexico

2004

The bell rings an hour before dawn.

The beekeeper, released from a nightmare, gets up.

His small cell has a bed, a chair, and a desk. A single small window in the thick adobe wall looks out onto the gravel path, silver in the moonlight, which leads up toward the chapel.

The desert morning is cold. The beekeeper pulls on a brown woolen shirt, khaki trousers, wool socks, and work shoes. Walking down the hall to the communal bathroom, he brushes his teeth, shaves with cold water, and then falls in with the line of monks walking to the chapel.

No one speaks.

Except for chanting, prayers, meetings, and necessary conversation at work, silence is the norm at the Monastery of Christ in the Desert.

They live by Psalm 46:10—“Be still and know that I am God.”

The beekeeper likes it that way. He’s heard enough words.

Most of them were lies.

Everyone in his former world, himself included, lied as a matter of course. If nothing else, you had to lie to yourself just to keep putting one foot in front of the other. You lied to other people to survive.

Now he seeks truth in silence.

He seeks God in the same, although he has come to believe that truth and God are the same.

Truth, stillness, and God.

When he first arrived, the monks didn’t ask him who he was or where he came from. They saw a man with saddened eyes, his hair still black but streaked with silver, his boxer’s shoulders a little stooped but still strong. He said that he was looking for quiet, and Brother Gregory, the abbot, responded that quietude was the one thing they had in abundance.

The man paid for his small room in cash, and at first spent his days wandering the desert grounds, through the ocotillo and the sage, walking down to the Chama River or up onto the mountain slope. Eventually he found his way into the chapel and knelt in the back as the monks chanted their prayers.

One day his route took him down to the apiary—close to the river because bees need water—and he watched Brother David work the hives. When Brother David needed help moving some frames, as a man approaching eighty did, the man pitched in. After that he went to work at the apiary every day, helping out and learning the craft, and when, months later, Brother David said it was finally time to retire, he suggested that Gregory give the job to the newcomer.

“A layman?” Gregory asked.

“He has a way with the bees,” David answered.

The newcomer did his work quietly and well. He obeyed the rules, came to prayer, and was the best man with the bees they’d ever had. Under his care the hives produced excellent Grade A honey, which the monastery uses in its own brand of ale, or sells to tourists in eight-ounce jars, or peddles on the Internet.

The beekeeper wanted nothing to do with the business aspects. Nor did he want to serve at table for the paying guests who came on retreats, or work in the kitchen or the gift shop. He just wanted to tend his hives.

They left him alone to do that, and he's been here for over four years. They don't even know his name. He's just "the beekeeper." The Latino monks call him "El Colmenero." They were surprised that on the first occasion when he spoke to them, it was in fluent Spanish.

The monks talked about him, of course, in the brief times when they were allowed casual conversation. The beekeeper was a wanted man, a gangster, a bank robber. No, he'd fled an unhappy marriage, a scandal, a tragic affair. No, he was a spy.

The last theory gained particular credence after the incident with the rabbit.

The monastery had a large vegetable garden that the monks depended upon for their produce. Like most gardens, it was a lure for pests, but there was one particular rabbit that was wreaking absolute havoc. After a contentious meeting, Brother Gregory gave permission for—in fact, insisted upon—the rabbit's execution.

Brother Carlos was assigned the task and was standing outside the garden trying to handle both the CO2 pistol and his conscience—neither very successfully—as the other monks looked on. Carlos's hand shook and his eyes filled with tears as he lifted the pistol and tried to pull the trigger.

Just then El Colmenero walked by on his way up from the apiary. Without breaking stride, he took the pistol from Brother Carlos's hand and, without seeming to aim or even look, fired. The pellet hit the rabbit in the brain, killing it instantly, and the beekeeper handed the pistol back and kept walking.

After that, the speculation was that he had been a special agent, an 007. Brother Gregory put a stop to the gossip, which is, after all, a sin.

"He's a man seeking God," the abbot said. "That's all."

Now the beekeeper walks to the chapel for Vigils, which begin at 4:00 a.m. sharp.

The chapel is simple adobe, its stone foundations hewn from the red rock cliffs that flank the southern edge of the monastery. The cross is wooden and sun-worn; inside, a single crucifix hangs over the altar.

The beekeeper goes in and kneels.

Catholicism was the religion of his youth. He was a daily communicant until he fell away. There seemed little point, he felt so far from God. Now he chants the Fiftieth Psalm along with the monks, in Latin: "O Lord, open up my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise."

The chanting lulls him into a near trance, and he's surprised, as always, when the hour is over and it's time to go to the dining hall for breakfast, invariably oatmeal with dry wheat toast and tea. Then it's back to prayer, Lauds, just as the sun is coming up over the mountains.

He's come to love this place, especially in the early morning, when the delicate light hits the adobe buildings and the sun sets the Chama River shimmering gold. He revels in those first rays of warmth, on the cactus taking shape out of the darkness, on the crunch of his feet on the gravel.

There is simplicity here, and peace, and that's all he really wants.

Or needs.

The days are the same in their routine: Vigils from 4:00 to 5:15, followed by breakfast. Then Lauds from 6:00 to 9:00, work from 9:00 to 12:40, then a quick, simple lunch. The monks work until Vespers at 5:50, have a light supper at 6:20, then Compline at 7:30. Then they go to bed.

The beekeeper likes the discipline and the regimentation, the long hours of quiet work and the longer hours of prayer. Especially Vigils, because he loves the recitation of the Psalms.

After Lauds, he walks down into the valley to the apiary.

His bees—western honeybees, *Apis mellifera*—are coming out now in the early morning warmth. They're immigrants—the species originated in North Africa and was transported to America via Spanish colonists back in the 1600s. Their lives are short—a worker bee might survive from a few weeks to a few months; a queen might reign for three to four years, although some have been known to live for as long as eight. The beekeeper has grown used to the attrition—a full 1 percent of his bees die every day, meaning that an entirely new population inhabits a colony every four months.

It doesn't matter.

The colony is a superorganism, that is, an organism consisting of many organisms.

The individual doesn't matter.

All that matters is the survival of the colony and the production of honey.

The twenty Langstroth hives are built of red cedar with rectangular movable frames, as convenience dictates and the law demands. The beekeeper takes the outer cover from the honey-super of one of the hives and sees that it's thick with wax, then carefully replaces it so as not to disturb the bees.

He checks the water trough to make sure it's fresh.

Then he removes the lowest tray from one of the hives, takes out the Sig Sauer 9mm pistol, and checks the load.

Metropolitan Correctional Center

San Diego, California

2004

The prisoner's day starts early.

An automated horn wakes Adán Barrera at 6:00 a.m., and if he were in the general population instead of protective custody, he would go to the dining quad for breakfast at 6:15. Instead, the guards slip a tray with cold cereal and a plastic cup of weak orange juice through a slot in his door of his cell, a twelve-by-six-foot

cage in the special housing unit on the top floor of the federal facility in downtown San Diego where for over a year Adán Barrera has spent twenty-three hours a day.

The cell doesn't have a window, but if it did he could see the brown hills of Tijuana, the city he once ruled like a prince. It's that close, just across the border, a few miles by land, even closer across the water, and yet a universe away.

Adán doesn't mind not eating with the other prisoners—their conversation is idiotic and the threat is real. There are many people who want him dead—in Tijuana, all across Mexico, even in the States.

Some for revenge, others from fear.

Adán Barrera doesn't look fearsome. Diminutive at five foot six, and slender, he still has a boyish face that matches his soft brown eyes. Far from a threat, he resembles more a victim who would be raped in ten seconds in the general population. Looking at him, it's hard to credit that he has ordered hundreds of killings over his life, that he was a multibillionaire, more powerful than the presidents of many countries.

Before his fall, Adán Barrera was “El Señor de los Cielos,” “the Lord of the Skies,” the most powerful drug patrón in the world, the man who had unified the Mexican cartels under his leadership, gave orders to thousands of men and women, influenced governments and economies.

He owned mansions, ranches, private airplanes.

Now he has the maximum-allowed \$290 in a prison account from which he can draw to buy shaving cream, Coca-Cola, and ramen noodles. He has a blanket, two sheets, and a towel. Instead of his custom-tailored black suits, he wears an orange jumpsuit, a white T-shirt, and a ridiculous pair of black Crocs. He owns two pairs of white socks and two pairs of Jockey undershorts. He sits alone in a cage, eats garbage brought in on a tray, and waits for the show trial that will send him to another living hell for the rest of his life.

Actually *several* lives, to be accurate, as he faces multiple life sentences under the “kingpin statutes.” The American prosecutors have tried to get him to “flip,” to become an informer, but he's refused. An informer—a *dedo*, a *soplón*—is the lowest form of human life, a creature that does not deserve to live. Adán has his own code—he would rather die, or endure this living death, than become such an animal.

He's fifty—the best-case scenario, extremely doubtful, is that he gets thirty years. Even with “time served” he'll be in his seventies before he walks out the door.

More probably he'll be carried out in a box.

The slow trudge to trial drags on.

After breakfast he cleans his cell for inspection at 7:30. By nature an almost obsessively orderly person, he keeps his space neat and clean anyway—one of his few comforts.

At 8:00, the guards start the morning count of the prisoners, which takes about an hour. Then he's free until 10:30, when they slip lunch—a bologna sandwich and some apple juice—through the door. He has “leisure time activities,” which for him means sitting and reading, or taking a nap, until 12:30, when they do another count. Then he has three and a half more hours of tedium until another count at 4:00.

Dinner—"mystery meat" with potatoes or rice and some overcooked vegetables—is at 4:30, then he's "free" until 9:15, when the guards count yet again.

The lights are turned off at 10:30.

For one hour a day—they vary the schedule for fear of snipers—guards lead him handcuffed out to a wired pen on the roof for fresh air and a "walk." Every third day he's taken for a ten-minute shower, sometimes tepid, more often cold. Occasionally he goes to a small meeting room to consult with his attorney.

He's sitting in his cell, filling out his order on the commissary form—a six-pack of bottled water, ramen noodles, oatmeal cookies—when the guard opens the door. "Attorney visit."

"I don't think so," Adán says. "I have nothing scheduled."

The guard shrugs—he does what he's told to do.

Adán leans and presses his hands against the wall as the guard shackles his ankles. An unnecessary humiliation, Adán thinks, but then again, that's probably the point. They get into an elevator and ride down to the fourth floor, where the guard unlocks the door and lets him into a consultation room. He unshackles Adán's ankles but chains him to the chair that's bolted to the floor. Adán's lawyer stands across the table. One look at Ben Tompkins and Adán knows something is wrong.

"It's Gloria," Tompkins says.

Adán knows what Tompkins is going to say before he says it.

His daughter is dead.

Gloria was born with cystic lymphangioma, a deformation of the head, face, and throat that is eventually fatal. And incurable—all Adán's millions, all of his power, could not buy his daughter a normal life.

A little over four years ago, Gloria's health took a turn for the worse. With Adán's blessing, his then wife, Lucía, an American citizen, took their twelve-year-old daughter to San Diego, to the Scripps clinics that housed the best specialists in the world. A month later Lucía phoned him at his safe house in Mexico. Come now, she said. They say she has days, maybe only hours .??.

Adán smuggled himself—like his own product—across the border, in the trunk of a specially outfitted car.

Art Keller was waiting for him in the hospital parking lot.

"My daughter," Adán said.

"She's fine," Keller said. Then the DEA agent jabbed a needle into Adán's neck and the world went black.

They were friends once, he and Art Keller.

Hard to believe, but the truth often is.

But that was another life, another world, really.

That was back when Adán was (is it possible to have been that young?) twenty, an accounting student and wannabe boxing promoter (Dios mío, the foolish ambitions of youth) and not even thinking of joining his uncle in the *pista secreta*—the drug trade that flourished then in the poppy fields of their Sinaloan mountains.

Then the Americans came, and with them Art Keller—idealistic, energetic, ambitious—a true believer in the war on drugs. He walked into the gym that Adán and his brother Raúl ran, sparred a few rounds, and they became friends. Adán introduced him to their uncle, then the top cop in Sinaloa and its second biggest *gomero*—opium grower.

Keller, so naïve then, knew Tío's first role and was blissfully ignorant (a notable trait of Americans, so dangerous to themselves and those within their flailing arms' reach) of the latter.

Tío used him. In all fairness, Adán has to admit that Tío made Keller his *monigote*, his puppet, manipulated him into taking out the top tier of the *gomeros*, clearing the way for Tío's rise.

Keller could never forgive that—the betrayal of his ideals. Take faith from the faithful, belief from the believer, and what do you have?

The bitterest of enemies.

For, *más o menos*, thirty years now.

Thirty years of war, betrayals, killings.

Thirty years of deaths—

His uncle.

His brother.

Now his daughter.

Gloria died in her sleep, her breath cut off by the weight of her heavy, misshapen head. Died without me there, Adán thinks.

For which he blames Keller.

The funeral will be in San Diego.

"I'm going," Adán says.

"Adán . . ."

"Make it happen."

Tompkins, aka "Minimum Ben," goes to see federal attorney Bob Gibson, an ambitious ballbuster who prefers to be known as a "hard charger."

The sobriquet "Minimum Ben" reflects Tompkins's success as a "drug lawyer"—his job isn't to get his clients acquitted, because that usually isn't going to happen. His job is to get them the shortest possible sentence, which is less about his skills as a lawyer than it is about his skills as a negotiator.

"I'm sort of a reverse agent," Tompkins once told a journalist. "I get my clients less than they deserve."

Now he relays Adán's request to Gibson.

"Out of the question," Gibson says. Gibson's nickname isn't "Maximum Bob," but he wishes it were and is a little envious of Tompkins. The defense attorney has a macho handle and makes a lot more money. Add to that the fact that Tompkins is a cool-looking dude with raffish silver hair, a surfer's tan, a house on Del Mar beach, and an office that overlooks the ocean up in Cardiff, and it's obvious why the civil servants in the prosecutor's office hate Minimum Ben.

"The man wants to bury his *daughter*, for Christ's sake," Tompkins says.

"The man," Gibson answers, "is the biggest drug kingpin in the world."

"Presumption of innocence," Tompkins counters. "He's been convicted of nothing."

"If I recall," Gibson says, switching tack, "Barrera wasn't too squeamish about killing *other* people's kids."

Two of his rival's small children, thrown off a bridge.

"Old wives' tales and unsubstantiated rumors," Tompkins says, "passed around by his enemies. You can't be serious."

"As a midnight phone call," Gibson says.

He refuses the request.

Tompkins goes back and tells Adán, "I'll take this in front of a judge and we'll win. We'll offer to pay for federal marshals, the cost of security . . ."

"There isn't time," Adán says. "The funeral is on Sunday."

It's already Friday afternoon.

"I can get to a judge tonight," Tompkins says. "Johnny Hoffman would issue an order—"

"I can't take the chance," Adán says. "Tell them I'll talk."

"What?"

"If they let me attend Gloria's funeral," Adán says, "I'll give them every- thing they want."

Tompkins blanches. He's had clients snitch before for lighter sentences— in fact, it's SOP—but the information they gave was always carefully pre-arranged with the cartels to minimize damage.

This is a death sentence, a suicide pact.

"Adán, don't do this," Tompkins begs. "We'll win."

"Make the deal."

Fifty thousand red roses fill St. Joseph's Cathedral in downtown San Diego just blocks from the Correctional Center.

Adán ordered them through Tompkins, who arranged the funds through clean bank accounts in La Jolla. Thousands more flowers, in bouquets and wreaths—sent by all the major narcos in Mexico—line the steps outside.

As do the DEA.

Agents walk up and down past the floral arrangements and take notes on who sent what. They're also tracking the hundreds of thousands of dollars in Gloria's name contributed to a foundation for research into cystic lymph-angioma.

The church is filled with flowers, but not mourners.

If this were Mexico, Adán thinks, it would be overflowing, with hundreds of others waiting outside to show their respect. But most of Adán's family is dead, and the others couldn't cross the border without risking arrest. His sister, Elena, phoned to express her grief, her support, and her regret that a U.S. indictment prevented her from attending. Others—friends, business associates, and politicians on both sides of the border—didn't want to be photographed by the DEA.

Adán understands.

So the mourners are mostly women—narco-wives who are American citizens already known to the DEA, but who have no reason to fear arrest. These women send their children to school in San Diego, come here to do their Christmas shopping, have spa days, or vacation at the beach resorts in La Jolla and Del Mar.

Now they stride bravely up the steps of the cathedral and stare down the agents who take their photos. Dressed elegantly and expensively in black, most walk angrily past; a few stop, strike a pose, and make sure the agents spell their names correctly.

The other mourners are Lucía's family—her parents, her brothers and sisters, some cousins, and a few friends. Lucía looks drawn—grief-stricken, obviously—and frightened when she sees Adán.

She betrayed him to Keller to keep herself out of jail, to keep Gloria from being taken by the state, and she knew that Adán would never have done anything to harm his daughter's mother.

But with Gloria gone, there's nothing to stay his hand. Lucía could simply disappear one day and never be found. Now she glances anxiously at Adán and he turns his face away.

Lucía is dead to him.

Adán sits in the third row of pews, flanked by five U.S. marshals. He wears a black suit that Tompkins bought at Nordstrom's, where Adán's measurements are on file. His hands are cuffed in front of him, but at least they had the decency not to shackle him, so he kneels, stands, and sits as the service requires as the bishop's words echo in the mostly empty cathedral.

The Mass ends and Adán waits as the other mourners file out. He's not allowed to speak to anyone except

the marshals and his lawyer. Lucía glances at him again as she passes by, then quickly lowers her head, and Adán makes a mental note to have Tompkins get in touch with her to tell her that she's in no danger.

Let her live out her life, Adán thinks. As for financial support, she's on her own. She can keep the La Jolla house, if the Treasury Department doesn't find a way to take it from her, but that's it. He's not going to support a woman who betrayed him; who is, in effect, stupid enough to cut off her own lifeline.

When the church clears, the marshals walk Adán out to a waiting limousine and put him in the backseat. The car follows Lucía's behind the hearse out to El Camino Memorial Park in Sorrento Valley.

Watching his daughter lowered into the earth, Adán lifts cuffed hands in prayer. The marshals are kind—they let him stoop down, scoop up a handful of dirt, and toss it on Gloria's casket.

It's all over now.

The only future is the past.

To the man who has lost his only child, all that will be is what already was.

Straightening up from his daughter's grave, Adán says quietly to Tompkins, "Two million dollars. Cash."

To the man who kills Art Keller.

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