

THE  
ENIGMA  
RISING

BREAKFIELD AND BURKEY

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Specialized Terms are available beginning on page 308 if needed for readers' reference

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PROLOGUE, PRESENT DAY – AUGUST

## ADVICE, LIKE MEDICINE, NEEDS TO BE THE RIGHT DOSE

**T**hiago stared at his most recent picture of his beautiful daughter Lara as if that alone would bring her back. Her long almost auburn hair, slightly wavy like his, big chocolate eyes with lashes that needed little cosmetic enhancement, generous mouth with perfect teeth smiling like she had a secret. Lara was around 1.7 meters, trim, with a well-proportioned figure he feared too many males would notice when she went away to university. Her grace when she walked and her lilting laughter, to say nothing of his wealth, made her a very sought after heiress, whom he'd overprotected her entire life. He missed that laughter in their home. The four months that his daughter had been gone had felt closer to a year.

Lara was brilliant in her subjects, fluent in English, Portuguese, and Spanish, with a stubborn streak that matched his own. Hard headed when it came to her dreams of modeling and being an actress. As if he'd allow his daughter to ever pursue a career like that. Maybe if her mother had lived, these pursuits would have been nipped in the bud and channeled into her legacy. Thiago knew she was more than capable of stepping into his shoes one day and taking over his interests in his iron, steel, and petroleum business. She knew a great deal about the business, the social requirements, and many of his associates. She simply didn't want it like she had when she was younger. Most likely because he wanted her to do it, along with the influences of college.

He hoped his meeting with Otto today for lunch would provide a new option for locating Lara. As wealthy and powerful as Thiago Bernardes was in Brazil and throughout Latin America for that matter, he hadn't been able to find his daughter Lara. He'd been able to keep the fact that she was missing from the press and friends with the contrived story of her vacationing at a spa. How much longer that would work was an open question. Oscar, the head of his security team, had done some digging and tracking, discreetly of course, but had no real leads.

Otto was visiting for an update on the financial investments that his firm provided to Bernardes Ltd. They'd been friends for many years, and Otto had advised him well for investments. Thiago knew, however, that Otto had many inroads to information sources. As Thiago entered the restaurant, he was delighted to see that Otto was already seated. Otto stood to shake hands as he approached.

"Thiago, my friend, so happy you could meet with me today. The cuisine smells amazing, and I hope you have a recommendation," Otto said as he shook hands with his old friend.

Thiago responded with a slight smile, "It is very nice to see you again. We get together in person too rarely, my friend. Yes, of course I have my favorites which I will recommend."

They sat down and glanced at the menus briefly while giving the waiter their drink orders. The waiter provided a list of the specials and indicated he would be back with their drinks and to take their orders.

"Business, by all reports, appears to be good here in Brazil and throughout South America. Your investments, I am happy to report, are doing quite well, and I have a few items for your consideration. But, before all of that boring discussion takes place, tell me about yourself and of course your lovely daughter, Lara. I thought perhaps she might be joining us today." Otto smiled, pleased to be there with his old friend.

A shadow crossed Thiago's face, deepening the lines of stress. "Business is very good, Otto. Lara however is a different matter. I was thinking of confiding in you and seeking your counsel. I require your utmost discretion, however, if

we continue with that discussion. But let's order lunch first, shall we, and discuss the weather and such."

"Of course. I have never broken a confidence of yours. Problem with Lara? From all you have told me over the years, I find that difficult to believe."

The waiter interrupted when he returned with their drinks. They both chose from the specials offered, with the waiter indicating they would be most pleased with their choices. When the waiter left, they toasted their meeting and discussed the weather and such as they waited for their meals. Though Thiago looked less robust than previously, Otto strived to keep the conversation light. Their luncheon was served, and they were left in peace to their corner of the restaurant.

"Thiago, this salmon is excellent. How is your swordfish?"

"Very nice. To be honest I have yet to have a poor meal here. Consistently delicious though a bit pricey on some dishes. I find these days my appetite is not what it once was, so this always tempts me to eat more."

"Ah, so how is your progress on overcoming your health challenges? You look a bit tired, but I would attribute that to worry from what you indicated before lunch."

"The doctors were not encouraged at my visit last week. Some recommendations have been made, but I fear that the end is closer than they are willing to admit. That is another of the reasons I would like to discuss Lara with you and see if you have any options I might explore."

"Your health is critical so of course you must either seek other medical opinions or adhere to their recommendations."

"I have consulted with two other doctors, and they are all aligned in the treatment methods. They all indicate I can overcome this issue, but I need to reduce my stress, exercise, take their silly pills, and rest more. I am doing my best to adhere to their guidance and am scheduled for some additional procedures in a few weeks.

"Otto, Lara is missing. She has been for months. So far all my efforts haven't resulted in any leads on her whereabouts. Due to my health problems and lack of finding Lara, I have also redone my will naming you as the executor. I have no other choice until Lara returns."

“There are courses of action for your health. That is good. Executor of your estate? That seems extreme, but I will honor your wishes for the time being. Now what about Lara? What is the problem? I of course would like to help you if I can.”

Forcibly calming himself and taking a breath, Thiago succinctly stated, “Lara essentially ran away four months ago. I have kept it out of the press, but have no leads on where she is. I am so worried, that I am starting to neglect the business and imagining all the worst for my princess.”

He paused again, then continued, “I have Oscar on it, but he has found nothing of any substance. He tracked her on a flight to Argentina then totally lost her.”

“Oh my! I am so sorry. Do you know what she took with her? Was there an event that caused her to leave? You two didn’t butt heads, did you?”

Shaking his head and looking very sad, he responded, “She took two suitcases filled with clothes, her passport, her credit cards which she has not used since the purchase of the airline ticket, and a few thousand U.S. dollars cash.

“To be quite honest, we did have an argument. She wanted to try her hand at modeling and acting, but I could never allow my daughter to do that. I put my foot down and reminded her of the responsibilities to the company and our people. We stood toe to toe, with me giving orders and her saying she was grown and could make her own choices. I told her my expectations. My last words were to forbid her to pursue modeling and acting. She glared at me and told me I was impossible and then she ran from the library where we’d been talking to her room. When I got up in the morning, I didn’t see her and figured she was cooling off. When I returned from work that evening, she was gone with no word to any of the staff. I then discovered the missing luggage and the other items.”

Otto empathized, “You’ve had no word, no calls from her? Are you sure that she wasn’t taken? How could she escape the scrutiny of her bodyguard? She adores you. I am surprised she wouldn’t have at least called you to say she was alright.”

With tears coming into his eyes, Thiago said, “Honestly she’s been outsmarting her bodyguards over the years, though not in public. Even during her time at the university, she adhered to the security requirements. Oscar and I

both believe she left voluntarily. The words were terribly ugly between us. I told her she would fail and not to do this then come begging for help from me. At one point during our argument, she said she didn’t need me and could do this on her own.”

“I understand. Sometimes when we are mad we say things that we would never otherwise say. I am sure it was the case on both sides of the argument. So Oscar has had no success. You believe she left on her own. Overall she has not been in the limelight and thus is not immediately recognized so no paparazzi interest, I would guess. How do you think I can help you?”

“Otto, I am confident that you have resources outside of the financial investments which we have always dealt with. Perhaps you can make some discreet inquiries. Keep an eye out for her. I do not want it in the press. It is far too private and that would really alienate her, I fear. We have been fortunate to not be a targeted family, as some of my associates are.”

Otto sat back and thought for a few minutes. Could he use his resources to help here? It was different than other activities his team was involved with, but then again perhaps not so much. His team was the best at getting information, but to be discreet would take time. Perhaps JAC and Quip would have some ideas, he thought.

“Thiago, this is not an area in which I or my associates would normally get involved. However, I have known you for a long time and Lara since she was very little. I have a couple of folks that I might be able to have work on it. It will take time though, especially if you do not want the press involved.

“Doesn’t she speak several languages? This is important to potentially discover where she might have traveled to. Do you have some current photographs of her? Exactly how much cash do you believe she left with and in which currencies? She aspires to be a model and an actress, right? As I recall, she is tall and thin but more proportioned than the typical anorexic runway model, with a face like an angel and with a slightly bronzed complexion and huge eyes. Did she do any acting in school?”

Thiago nodded and said, “She speaks fluently in languages that would allow her to easily fit in anywhere in North America or South America. She did not act in any school plays, but said her whole life was like playing a role. Sadly, though

she inherited the looks of her mother, she also got her tenacity, or what you would call mule headedness from my side of the gene pool.”

They both grinned, knowing that trait was well engrained in the both of them. It contributed to their success in business overall. Their discussion continued down the business path of the main objective for their lunch when it was originally scheduled. Otto wanted to gather his thoughts as well as give Thiago a chance to recover his composure after telling of the disagreement with his daughter. As they finished up their conversation, paid for their lunch, and readied to leave, Otto ventured forth with an offer.

“Thiago, I will have my team make some discreet inquiries.”

“I understand, Otto, and I appreciate that it will take time. She could be any place and doing anything to reach her dream. Money is no object so please let me know your fees for this.”

“Do not insult me with fees for doing a friend a favor. If the team incurs costs then you can reimburse for those, but no fees. You do have to make a promise to me for doing this.” Otto knew that the longer she was gone the greater the risk at her recovery, and he wanted to push Thiago.

“Of course, anything! What do I need to promise?”

“That no matter how long it takes, and it could take some time to maintain your requested discretion, you will do what your doctors say so that you can see her when she is found.”

“That is not fair. I can hardly control that.”

“You will adhere to their requests, and I will have a doctor I know review the treatment recommendations as well. When she is found then you can readress your will. Agreed?”

As they stepped outside, Thiago seemed reinvigorated, “Alright. I agree. Thank you, Otto. I will send some information to you. Please provide progress updates. Oscar is at your disposal if needed.”



8 MONTHS EARLIER - JANUARY

CHAPTER 1

## WE DON'T NEED NO STINKIN' BADGES

Juan and Carlos were fidgeting and distracted while waiting on the plane. Their home away from home did not provide much in the way of amenities, since they wanted as little attention as possible out here in the Chihuahuan Desert of Mexico. Besides, they didn't want to have an electricity bill for this unmarked landing strip they had spent so much time getting ready. The idea was to have it look deserted from the air as well as on the ground. Any time there was work to do, they showed up with their own water truck and portable generators. This allowed them to be self-sufficient for as many days as needed.

Carlos had become rather proficient at *borrowing* satellite communications time, so their voice and data connectivity never suffered because there was no phone line available. Actually, Carlos had been a telecommunications specialist in the military. He was quite clever at setting up complex signaling schemes that were encrypted and got bounced several times around his ground links to cloak the true location. When they sent a plane off or when they had a plane on approach, he insisted on radio silence. Being naturally cautious, he felt this minimized the possibility of the un-necessaries to triangulate their location based on

radio communications traffic. That left them with a lot of time on their hands to worry about what might go wrong with the shipments.

Carlos was practical, thoughtful, and the consummate worrier of the two brothers. Juan, on the other hand, never showed up properly prepared for any situation. Thus, he improvised a lot to compensate for his cavalier approach to most everything. The result, however, gave him great adaptability to any given set of circumstances. His sense of humor, coupled with his knack of getting out of touchy situations, made him an excellent resource for this kind of work. Juan's natural abilities to adapt and excel at almost any sport, whether physical or social, made him the person everyone wanted on their team. Juan's charming wit and personality was always a hit with the ladies. This unfailing charm of his could usually be counted upon to get him out of difficulties, which he seemed to court more times than not. Born in Mexico, but educated in both the United States and Mexico allowed the brothers to work easily in either country. They preferred Mexico.

The rest of the ground crew in their private location in the Chihuahuan Desert of Mexico was comprised of Vaughn, Don, and Ron. They were referred to as the On-Brothers, though they weren't even closely related. They didn't quite seem able to make it with the ladies or possess the commonly accepted social behaviors. Indeed from time to time Carlos and Juan were asked if the On-Brothers were gay. They weren't, but the absence of social skills only left them each other to live with. Their favorite game was mental cruelty. They'd take turns belittling one another usually as a game of two against one. Their eccentricities could be entertaining or tiresome depending upon the circumstances. Carlos had gotten into the habit of letting them know when they could devolve into their ritualistic verbal combat routine and when they could not. Whenever a landing was expected, the dialog became informational only among them, so that Carlos wouldn't lose his temper.

At one point Carlos and Don had been equal partners in the business. Don had zoned out from time to time, taking as much as six months off, leaving Carlos to run operations. Vaughn showed up one day after his marriage had failed and fell right in to the new line of work. His temperament was the opposite of Don's. Don was introspective, fairly well read, and when

his pockets were full of money, he would simply leave if nothing was going on work wise. Don had come to Mexico seeking mystical enlightenment from the Yaqui Indians but stayed because of the peyote. One time he had even lived as a hermit in a cave along the Rio Grande and lived off the land wearing just a loin cloth. However after six months, he was driven to return to civilization primarily because he couldn't get his major food supplement, *fudgesicles*. Vaughn couldn't read very well so the material had to have lots of pictures of women and the more naked those were the better. Ron was like a puppy dog no one wanted, but for some reason he fit right in to round out the On-Brothers trio. The trio was mostly unfit and scruffy looking. Not candidates for inclusion in GQ Magazine.

Carlos had an unusual birth defect. For all his planning and efforts to contain and control himself in a situation when he lost his temper, it triggered an adrenaline leak into his system which doubled his strength thus giving him the moniker *Raging Bull*. Juan loved to tease his older brother, but he had to be careful that he didn't push the wrong buttons on Carlos. The one time was quite enough and ever since then they'd worked together like well-oiled machinery. Carlos, at a lean 1.83 meters, muscular, black hair with a mustache, and Juan, at 1.52 meters, stockier but muscular, black hair with no facial hair, could easily be candidates for GQ Magazine, when they were cleaned up. Neither of them had problems attracting females and thoroughly enjoyed them.

"Where the hell are they?" asked Carlos. "I don't know why I let myself get talked into using gringos for this operation. You know they can't be trusted! If they screw this up--"

Juan interjected, "Then we won't have to worry about them ever again. Look, you don't fly into the U.S. looking like us without attracting attention. They are wanted fugitives with nowhere else to go. They can't go back to where they came from, and we are the only ones who will work with them after the Mexican police started cleaning house. After the enemies they made at the Night Owl shoot out, their ONLY option is to work with us."

Juan looked up at the weather and in particular the clouds moving in and added, "I sure don't like the looks of the weather. These clouds have the look of *Nympho-Cumulus* all over them."

Carlos stared at Juan for a moment and said blankly, "...*Nympho-Cumulus?*"

Juan, not changing his studying of the cloud formations, said, "You know, fucking thunderstorms." To which Carlos rolled his eyes at being pulled into Juan's gag.

"But anyway, just so you know, I am glad we have that remote detonation device hidden in the plane as our failsafe. Good thinking, bro."

Carlos settled down a bit, based on Juan's statements. Juan was right, where would they go if not back here? JC and Robert were larger than life men who had played it fast and loose. The U.S. federales were after both of them. If it hadn't been for Juan's plane and some low level flying, JC and Robert would be parked in the same cell block with Charles Manson and his friends.

JC was a small time crook who wanted to be a big time crook. At 1.835 meters tall and 113 kilograms, he was an imposing individual. His size, coupled with his hyper out-going and larger than life personality, made it seem like he almost sucked all the air out of a room when he entered. His jokes were desperately off color but his laughter was so contagious that everything seemed alright with everyone. He liked to pay for everything when he was out with the gang, and it earned him the nickname *on-me JC*. In fact he was so extravagant in his spending that he always needed more money, which led him into dealing drugs. His first wife didn't quite get the hang of his changed lifestyle and didn't want to go along that path.

The big score he needed to put himself into the larger than life role he envisioned came with a cash price he couldn't deliver. So JC, being the resourceful individual he was, killed two birds with a single stone. According to federal testimony, JC murdered his wife for the insurance money and used it to finance his first big drug deal. His second wife, who was almost the same age as JC's oldest daughter, didn't seem to mind JC's undocumented business activities. She thoroughly enjoyed spending the money it brought in. JC was always talking about his new acquisitions.

At dinner one night with 15-20 close friends, JC told everyone about the new Cadillac he had just ordered with every option possible.

JC told everyone, "You should see this new Caddy I have coming in. Man-o-man, it's got EVERY possible option you can think of! But the only one I

couldn't bring myself to get was the automatic douche-bag. I don't want an automatic douche-bag."

His wife and daughter laughed the hardest at this as they did with all his antics.

JC's drug dealing connection was Juan out of Mexico City. They shared the same passion for flying, which is why Juan picked up JC one day at Dallas Love Field regional airport just one step ahead of the federales and flew him to Mexico. It was quite a haul that day since Juan also brought along another social climber, Robert.

Robert was somewhat quiet and withdrawn, almost moody. A moderately built ex-military gunnery sergeant and sharp shooter, there wasn't anything he didn't know about weapons and how to effectively use them. All Robert ever talked about was being in financial investments. Word was that after Robert left the service that is exactly what he did. He robbed banks, 20 to be specific. His assembled team would blow into a bank masked, heavily armed, hold a few hostages, and grab everything of value in under eight minutes. Then they'd take someone's car out of the lot and drive to where their car was located. The story goes that one of his team members got drunk one night and described in too much detail one of the robberies to a lady who was also an undercover cop.

The police broke in on Robert and held him at gun point while they searched his apartment. The SWAT team recovered several weapons and some C-4 explosives. One SWAT team member brought a locked brief case over to Robert and asked him to open it. Robert was being held down on his stomach with his hands cuffed behind him with two H-K semi-automatic weapons pressed to his head.

Sensing the irony of the situation, Robert told the guy, "You can open it if you'd like. I'd do it but I'm busy right now."

The guy said, "Ok I will, but first let me bring it over here and put it next to your head" which he did.

Robert, not one to let the moment slip through his fingers, quickly added, "Hey man, before you open it can you put your fingers in my ears? I hate loud noises."

Robert was out on bail and trying to buy a drink at the bar with only dimes, nickels, and quarters after the police confiscated everything he had. That's when

he bumped into *on-me* JC and Juan. Robert was due for sentencing the next day and was trying to have one last drink before he went in. When Juan and JC couldn't watch the pathetic activity of Robert trying to pay for a drink with loose coins, they both covered the tab.

However, Juan was never able to miss an opportunity to have a dig at someone and, knowing a little about Robert, said, "Boy, some bank robber you are!"

The absurdity of the situation made everyone laugh and of course that was their evening toast at every round of drinks ordered. JC and Robert really seemed to hit it off as drinking buddies.

Juan sized up the bar crowd and knew something was wrong. He was pretty sure that his two new friends were being watched which meant so was he. But ever the party animal and with someone else to rock-out with, he ignored the feeling. The night got louder and louder. Juan even bought drinks for the DEA, the Feds, and the undercover police, pretending he was just being sociable to the crowd watching their antics. Apparently around midnight, a couple of small caliber weapons went off in the bar which quickly emptied the place.

Juan had staged the exit and took his two new friends straight to the fully fueled King Air twin engine parked at Love Field and promptly took off. He filed his flight plan while taxiing down the runway. He dropped from radar shortly after crossing the DFW city limits, and no one picked him up again until he was on the ground at the landing strip in the Chihuahuan Desert of Mexico. Juan was right. Robert and JC had no place else to go.

The On-Brothers came rushing in to say that a plane was on approach and so everyone went out to see if it was theirs or someone unwanted.

Carlos said, "Right, *saddle up!*" as he strapped on his favorite Colt 1911 semi-automatic pistol and grabbed his weapon of choice, an H-K semi-automatic assault rifle. Everyone else saddled up as well in case they needed to greet intruders.



## CHAPTER 2

# THE LESS YOU HAVE THE MORE THERE IS TO GET!

Carlos was a little on edge with receipt of this shipment. He'd been trying to push the band of misfits into becoming a powerful cartel that could broker anything for a price. They struggled to move up the brokerage food chain and only got marginal jobs that lacked prestige in his mind. Carlos and Juan simply didn't have the political connections that the older families had.

They didn't have the resources of the drug lord growers. They were deficient in the financial backing needed to take on the bigger deals which required larger aircraft. Carlos's approach or business mantra focused on small deals with thin margins, but more of them done faster than anyone else could. Thus the group was really only a small *mom-n-pop* retailer in a business dominated by large cartels who bought wholesale closer to the source and drove up the margins. Carlos and Juan knew that they wanted to do more wholesale buying and selling. Success with that would allow them to move away from the frontline dealing which was too close to the focus of the federales.

Ron interrupted to say that the plane was on approach. Ron was the most stable of the On-Brothers. To further his role and assert his leadership, he'd been trying to learn how to smoke. You can always tell when someone is not comfortable with something because they act like they are learning. Everything about their actions is unnatural. Unfortunately, Ron had been learning to smoke for 24 years. He still didn't get it.