

# The Impostor Wore No. 13

By

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**T**o the women in my life that have encouraged and prodded me to be a novelist and are no longer alive to see the results. They include my late mother Grace P. Plaisted; my late aunt Helen Plaisted Hedges, chair of the English Department at Bridgeport, Connecticut, Harding High School; my late eighth grade teacher Noreen Kennedy of Pequot School, Southport, Connecticut; my late wives Marion Thompson Plaisted and Geraldine Murphy Plaisted.



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## Chapter 1

*False face must hide what the false heart doth know.*

--William Shakespeare, Macbeth

**A** 30-game winner. It's one of Major League Baseball's most coveted accomplishments by a pitcher.

On the final Sunday afternoon of the Major League Baseball season in Boston, a Miami left-handed pitcher was hoping to become a 30-game winner. His name was Juan Martinez of the Miami Flamingos.

It was hard to believe that anyone could be more excited than the 28-year-old Martinez, but someone was. That someone was the pitcher's agent, Miami attorney David Cohen.

The agent had invited some of his better clients to attend a luncheon Sunday at his Miami Beach home overlooking La Gorce Country Club golf course. The house was a rather modest edifice of 4,907 square feet and included eight bedrooms and six bathrooms. The one thing Cohen didn't like about the home constructed in 1934 was its two-car garage. Cohen liked to boast he lived in a million-dollar mansion, but in fact the local realtors would tell you that if his home were put on the market, the asking price would be a mere \$899,000.

The luncheon was catered, of course, and Cohen was both excited and concerned about a personal problem. He had a bad habit of cracking his knuckles when under stress, which was why he avoided courtroom practice.

Cohen stood in the master bedroom on the second floor and looked in the full-length mirror, adjusting a new dark brown toupee. He wore a light blue polo shirt under a size 56 Navy blue blazer. It was hard to hide a five-foot-nine, 260-pound body, even in a \$1,500 Saville Row jacket.

His cell phone rang. "Yeah."

"You got the bread?" asked a voice with an Italian accent.

"I'm busy right now. Could you call later?"

"Listen, you fat fuck, Mr. Gattino wants his money now, or he's gonna get a pound of your flesh. Capisce?"

"Tell – tell Mr. Gattino I'll have it for him this week."

"Youse better, Cohen, or youse may be feeding the fishes in Biscayne Bay."

"Please understand –"

The line went dead.

Cohen knew the caller to be Guido Parissi, a muscle for Sal "The Saw" Gattino, the East Coast Mafia don based in nearby Hollywood.

Cohen was shaking and beginning to sweat. He grabbed a towel just as his wife, Marcia, came in. "You okay, dear?" she asked.

"Yeah, yeah, honey." His rapid response was accompanied by a crack of his knuckles, so his wife knew better.

He wasn't okay. He was scared shitless. He owed \$100,000 in sports gambling debts, and the interest was skyrocketing daily. The total could soon reach \$500,000. He knew Gattino's reputation and realized how important getting a new, fat contract for Juan Martinez would be for his own health, if not survival.

*Win your 30th today, my amigo, and both of us will be in great financial shape.*

He figured the win should be almost automatic for Martinez, because the Red Sox would be resting their starters for this meaningless game so they would be fresh for the playoffs.

Bob Casey, the Miami P.M. sports columnist, slung his computer bag over his shoulder and walked toward the exit of the Boston Ritz-Carlton to get a cab. A look at the slowly moving traffic changed his mind.

"No thanks," he said to a uniformed doorman, "I'll walk. I'm only going to Fenway Park."

"Must be the Fenway traffic," said the doorman. "That Cuban is going for 30 wins today, you know."

Bob smiled. *Why is it that every Latin player is always a Cuban? True, Martinez is of Cuban descent, but he was born and raised in Costa Rica.*

Bob shivered at the first blast of cool air. His tanned, almost leathery skin gave him the Marlborough Man look under his crew cut. His blue eyes needed reading glasses, and they crinkled with mirth most of the time.

It was a cool and gloomy afternoon in Boston, the last Sunday of September and a day more fit for football than baseball. Bob enjoyed the brisk weather as a change from Florida and left his green Burberry trench coat open. An occasional gust of wind flapped the coat and its loose belt, exposing a middle-aged size 42 waist, L.L. Bean khaki trousers, and a white Irish wool turtleneck sweater. Despite an occasional jolt of pain in his left knee from osteoporosis, he walked briskly. He noted the changes in the city's skyline as he continued up Commonwealth Avenue from the hotel toward ancient Fenway Park.

Bob scanned the rows of apartments and tried to remember where he had lived when he had worked in the city. It had been nearly ten years, and time had dulled his memory. He had many memories of Boston, both good and bad.

On his left majestically rose the Green Monster—the left field wall—and the light towers. He had arrived at the stadium. It was more than two hours before the first pitch, and he noted that the street vendors and fans were already outside.

There's an electricity in the air. *Won't use that trite line in my Monday column, but it sure feels that way.*

He made a stop at the Will Call window to claim a working press credential. The old-timer in an usher's uniform opened the Press Gate and did a double take. "Say, mister, don't I know ya?"

"Maybe, maybe not," Bob said good-naturedly.

"Where you work?"

"Miami P.M."

The usher thought for a moment. "Didn't ya used ta work here?" he asked in a heavy Boston accent.

"Yep. With the —"

"The Morning Record," interrupted the old-timer. "I knew it! You're Bob Casey. I used ta read your sports column."

"If the Record had more readers like you, Pop, it would still be in business." He patted the old guy on the back.

As Bob walked under the grandstand area, he was reminded of an old ocean liner with many, many coats of paint covering its aging hull. The smells of fresh cooking hot dogs and roasting peanuts drifted from the underground concessions. Then he was out of the shade and into the bright sunlight, which beamed down onto the still-empty first base box seats. The wire gate next to the home team dugout was open. The sun played hide-and-seek with the clouds.

The crack of wood bats against baseballs echoed through the stands. Bob stepped onto the grass and glanced at the batting cage, where the Miami Flamingos were taking their swings.

Pausing, he glanced around the old-fashioned one-deck grandstand, a snug, intimate bandbox where spectators could reach out and touch their heroes. Its perimeters were like a jigsaw puzzle – a succession of walls and barriers jutting in and out at odd angles. It had been designed not by a crazed architect, but to conform to the property's peculiar real-estate boundaries.

And there was the Green Monster, baseball's Lorelei, luring right-handed hitters with its beauty and 315-foot range – only to ruin many players who fell for it.

Bob's brief nostalgic daydream ended when a Boston writer yelled, "Hello!" from the batting cage. Bob knew the Red Sox were going to the American League playoffs, and the Flamingos were going back to Miami with a 64-97 record, one of the worst in the National League.

A sell-out crowd of almost 35,000 in Fenway Park and a national TV network audience would be waiting with baited breath to see Miami pitcher Juan Martinez try to win his 30th game of the season. Even the media figured Martinez (29-6) would get his shot to become the first 30-game winner in organized baseball since 1968, when Detroit's Denny McLain went 31-6.

At the batting cage, Bob found Miami P.M. baseball writer Luis "Casanova" Valdez observing. He had his nose against the steel cage as he watched a Miami coach throw batting practice.

"Hey Slick, what's happening?" Bob called out.

The steady crack of baseballs against wood drowned out most of the conversation of huddled sports writers, and Valdez didn't hear his name called at first. Bob approached him from behind and yelled a greeting in his ear.

"Oh shit!" Valdez yelled, jumping with surprise.

At 28, Valdez was a Cuban-American stud who loved baseball almost

as much as chasing skirts. If someone were to clone a Latin lover type, it would be Valdez. He was smooth and boasted a journalism degree from Columbia University. The six-foot, 180-pounder had the advantage of being fluent in both Spanish and English. His long, curly black hair fluttered in the wind coming over the Green Monster in left field.

"Mi amigo," he managed after a quick recovery. "I thought you were in New York for the Sharks' Monday night football game."

His English was without a trace of an accent.

"I will be, Luis. But our beloved executive sports editor thought I should do a column on Martinez going for his 30th."

"Great. Maybe we can have a couple of rum and Cokes at the hotel after we finish writing. You staying at the team hotel?"

"Nope, I had to settle for the Ritz-Carlton."

Valdez laughed. "Man, what kind of cheat sheet do you get with that personal services contract? Bet you flew up first class, too."

Bob smiled. "Yep, but on Delta. It was the pits."

"You mean you couldn't fly free on your wife's spouse pass at Sun Airlines?"

"Sun Air's Boston flight was packed, so . . ."

"What can your humble Flamingos beat man do for you?"

"Tell me about Juan Martinez's pitching style. With the basketball playoffs, Wimbledon, and the Summer Olympics, I really haven't seen much baseball this year."

Valdez explained. "Left-handed Martinez throws two-seam and four-seam fast balls that range from 92 to 100 miles an hour. He throws his four-seamer between 95 and 99. Tempo can be a problem. He always throws a lot of pitches and takes a long time between pitches. He has a 79-82 changeup and a hard 85-88 curve."

"How fast a curve did you say?" Bob asked while scribbling in his notebook with a Uniball pen.

"Oh, the curve is a hard 85-88. He can change speeds, and does it often, going from 88 to 97 in the span of one pitch. He's 29-6 with 19 shutouts and has a 2.71 earned run average. He's also struck out 1,115 and walked only 486."

"Thanks. Catch you at the Ritz bar after the game—and it's my treat."

Bob climbed down the steps and into the Miami dugout off third base, where manager Pete Dunn was filling in his starting line-up card.

"Afternoon, Skipper," Bob said to Dunn as he fumbled with his

\$1.25 pen. He was armed with a notebook and a Sony tape recorder. He was relieved to drop the weight of the laptop on the bench.

Dunn looked surprised. "What's the occasion? No football to cover this weekend?"

Bob laughed. "Actually, the Sharks are playing on Monday night in New York, so . . ."

"So you came to Boston to do a column on Martinez and his try for 30 wins."

"Right, Skip. It's one way for the Flamingos to get on the lead sports section."

Dunn was seated in the dugout. He had a large plug of Red Man under his jaw, and he unloaded a juicy drive at a coffee can on the deck that served as a spittoon. His baseball cap was tilted back, and he wore a green and black warm-up jacket with tan leather sleeves.

"Sorry to waste your fuckin' trip, Bob, but I'm not starting Martinez."

"Not starting Martinez?" Bob nearly dropped his recorder. At first he thought Dunn was kidding. "You're shitting me."

"Nope. I'm going with Joe Housey. He's had a great season in Triple A, and the organization wants to see if he has the stuff to help us next season."

Bob was stunned. "That's bullshit, Skip, and you know it."

"Probably. You can write it that way. I'm not exactly popular enough in Miami this season to run for mayor."

Bob pondered this bit of news for a moment as Dunn used medical tape to post the starting line-up on the dugout wall. Thinking the manager might be kidding him, Bob checked the card.

"You really are starting Housey!"

Both the manager and sports columnist were forty-six and had similar Irish Catholic backgrounds. Over the years they had been friends who could share a couple of beers after a road game. Both men respected each other.

Smelling a rat, Bob flopped his six-foot, 220-pound body on the wooden bench next to the manager. "Level with me, Skip. Why?"

Dunn spit out a chew that missed the can and landed on the boards of the dugout floor. "Off the record?"

"Yeah, off the record."

"Von Klug."

"The Greta von Klug, owner of the Miami Flamingos?"

"Yep, Bobby, that be the lady, or should I say Frau?"

"But why? Having a 30-game winner next year would be good for the gate, as well as TV."

"I would agree, except Frau von Klug figures with 30 wins, Martinez would cost too much to sign and fuck up our salary cap. You know his contract is up, and he's represented by that prick Cohen."

"You mean Jeff Altier thinks that way, too?"

"Probably. Our general manager does have some influence with our owner."

Bob snickered. "Right. Both in and out of bed."

Dunn showed no reaction to the columnist's dig.

Meanwhile, Bob was trying to imagine a column angle that wouldn't compromise the manager who was struggling to keep his job. With the exception of Martinez, the Flamingos were composed of a bunch of stiffs.

"How did Martinez take it?"

"Surprisingly, very good. I don't hablo Spanish, and he don't hablo English. I go through our pitching coach Esteban Lopez. You know, Martinez is still a farm boy from Costa Rica who appreciates his millionaire status."

"Do you mind if I talk to him?"

"Naw. I know you don't hablo Spanish. German, yes. But no Spanish."

"Right," said Bob as he stood up.

"But tell Esteban he can be your interpreter."

"Gracias, Señor Dunn."

"I trust my guy's interpretation better than your fellow P.M. stiff Valdez." The manager unloaded another shot at the spittoon. It was a bull's-eye. "Hey Bobby, I owe you. You're the only fuckin' yellow journalist who hasn't campaigned for Frau von Klug to fire my sorry ass."

Bob laughed as he left. "That's only because I'm too involved in football."

Before going into the visitor's club house, Bob pulled out his Nokia cell phone to call the news to the P.M. sports desk.

Intending to write his column during the game, Bob hustled into the visitor's clubhouse, which was small and cramped by major league standards. He had Lopez in tow, and the coach called to Martinez.

Knowing he was probably the only reporter to know Martinez wouldn't pitch, Bob had the opportunity to get a jump on his column before the press box overflow mobbed Martinez after the game.

Bob knew Martinez liked him. Valdez said that was because Bob wasn't using his column to beat up on the player's teammates during this sorry season.

Martinez passed an eight-inch, 52-ring Cuban cigar to the columnist. It was a real Havana.

"Gracias, Juan."

As Martinez spoke to his interpreter, Bob's sixth sense as a reporter told him Martinez was preoccupied. *Some kind of problem, and it's not about not starting tonight. Still, he seems friendly and has proven honest to a fault.*

"Juan says he isn't upset at anyone," said Lopez. "'The manager has his job, and I have mine,'" he quoted Juan. "Maybe next season I'll win 30 or more, and the team will win the World Series."

Bob smiled and thanked both men. "Oh, Esteban, would you ask Juan if I could do an in-depth feature on October 9th about how he left Costa Rica for the promised land?"

Lopez laughed. "Sure, Bob." After speaking to Juan, Lopez said, "Yes, October 9th is fine with him. Come to his casa for lunch. And you can talk all afternoon. He'll even provide all the Havanas. Even his wife."

Bob laughed. "Esteban, you're fuckin' with me!"

"Sí, señor," the coach said with a wide grin. "I guess he didn't mention the señora."

Bob playfully pushed the coach.

"Ask Juan if I can bring a photographer, too."

Juan agreed.

Bob was halfway through his column when the starting line-ups were announced. When the PA boomed, "... And pitching for Miami, number 69, Joe Housey . . ." the announcer was drowned out by boos and catcalls from the packed stands. The shock hit the working press, who knew they couldn't get to Dunn or Martinez until after the now meaningless game.

Armed with his Dunn and Martinez quotes, Bob banged away on his Titanium Mac PowerBook G5 while the competition was griping in the press box, trapped and frustrated. They were indeed trapped for

the next three hours, as Housey and the Flamingos were bombed 11-2 by the Red Sox. More than half of the announced crowd of 34,171 had left by the fifth inning.

Seated next to Casey in the first row, Valdez looked over Bob's shoulder and smiled, knowing the rival Robert Pockrass of the Miami Morning Journal had been scooped again by Casey.

The news was not received very well back in South Florida.

The loudest scream of protest came from the Miami Beach mansion of attorney David Cohen. The cancellation had spoiled a small party at Cohen's home, where invitees had arrived to watch the game on a projector TV in the agent's living room. He was so angry that he nearly knocked off his toupee.

"Damn it! They can't do this to me!" he screamed over and over again.

The gathering of about twenty guests slowly filed out, leaving their host to his grief and disappointment. They abandoned an expensive catered buffet and a bar stocked with name brands.

Cohen was upset because his client's contract had expired and he had been anticipating asking for a cool \$100 million over two years to re-sign Martinez. He knew the 30th win would be a charm, and he had been happily speculating about his 15 percent commission. That's \$15 million, plus expenses.

Marcia Cohen poured her husband a triple shot of Scotch. "Drink this, honey," she commanded. Twenty years his junior, Marcia was young enough to be his daughter. She was a walking ad for Neiman Marcus, Tiffany, and Martha Stewart.

The attorney took a long swallow and then slumped his portly frame into a leather recliner. He was trembling.

Marcia spoke softly but with assurance and confidence. "Twenty-nine, 30 . . . It won't make any difference when you go to the negotiating table, David. You still have a multi-million dollar baby to sell to the Flamingos."

His wife's words had a calming effect on him. He knew she was probably right.

Marcia may be a JAP, but she's a damn smart one when it comes to business. The acronym for "Jewish-American princess" had become almost an endearment over the years.

When his wife left to dismiss the catering staff, Cohen quickly used his cell phone to make a call to his bookie.

“Hey, Tony. It’s me. Yeah, I know Martinez got fucked tonight. The reason I called was, I need a little action on the New York-Miami game tomorrow. Yeah, football. Like, maybe ten G’s . . . What do you mean, cash? Well fuck you, too.”

Cohen slammed the phone down on the table. What can I pawn to get ten Gs? Maybe one of Marcia’s trinkets. I have to be able to play football tomorrow. I need the action.

Bob Casey’s Working Press:

### **Down to the Last Out**

BOSTON—Few Major League Baseball teams need to work as feverishly to fill empty seats as the fan-starved Miami Flamingos.

With attendance down an alarming 31 percent from last year, the Flamingos ended a season of despair in Boston on Sunday with another loss. This time it was the Red Sox by 12-2.

What was just as shocking was the decision by the Flamingos not to let Martinez go for his 30th pitching victory. The decision came out of the fear that a 30-game winner in the last year of a contract could prove too costly.

So instead of giving Martinez his chance for glory, the Flamingos opted for a no-name Joe Housey to make his big-league pitching debut.

Don’t blame Miami manager Pete Dunn. Don’t blame Miami general manager Jeff Altier. Blame Miami owner Frau Greta von Klug. She is shaking in her combat boots about the cost to keep Martinez. With Dave Cohen as his agent, look for demands of up to \$100 million.

Even if von Klug elects to keep Martinez, there is no guarantee that attendance will improve, because the Flamingos need more talent to go with their ace hurler.

Is this really happening in Miami?

A decade ago, Miami was the crown jewel of expansion plans, so both leagues’ owners haggled over how to carve up enticing markets. Because of the history of spring training in the state, it just seemed natural.

Now, that bright promise seems as distant as a Babe Ruth home run. If Baseball Commissioner Bill Ottinger and team owners make good on the promise to eliminate four money-losing teams, the Flamingos figure to be high on their list.

Maybe the good Frau can move the Flamingos back to her native Germany and rename the team the Huns. They could wear those World War I spiked helmets. This should

be good for team merchandise sales.

In Florida, debate about where baseball went wrong is a sport in itself. Theories range from lousy ballparks in the wrong neighborhoods to spring training overload to fickle owners.

For now, von Klug owes more than an apology to America's baseball faithful. She should refund the ticket prices to all who came out this Sunday afternoon to Fenway Park to watch a meaningless intra-league game. If Ottinger really cared about the integrity of baseball, he would order von Klug to do the right thing. But Ottinger, as most of us know, is simply a glorified former ambulance chaser and flunkey of the club owners.



## Chapter 2

*Wouldst thou have a serpent sting thee twice?*

--William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

Juan Martinez wanted sex. His wife, Maria Elena Gonzales Martinez, wanted to snort more coke. But she knew Juan was the meal ticket, so she pushed aside her thoughts of china white heroin for a few minutes to please her husband.

Although raised in Miami, Maria Elena realized her husband's native Costa Rica was as much a machismo society as was her Cuba. She had abandoned any thoughts of women's liberation when she married for money and security.

She was a striking woman at five-foot-eight and 125 pounds. She fit easily into a size eight. She showed the class of an upscale Cuban family who prided themselves as Castilians, not Indians. She had attended the exclusive Catholic Lourdes Academy, where the nuns had never spared the ruler. It was this discipline that had made it easy for her to coast through four years of humanities at the private University of Miami.

She and her husband were in the master bedroom of a 14-bedroom and 13-bath \$75 million mansion on an island overlooking Miami's

Biscayne Bay. The mansion had been built in 1917 as the Miami residence of a northern industrialist. It was a villa that revolved around a courtyard with arcaded hallways and loggias looking out over Biscayne Bay. The architecture created the feeling of a 15th-century villa that had evolved over the course of four centuries, each owner adding to it or transforming it a bit.

Biscayne House, or Casa Biscayne, as it was called by its new owner, sat on a coral rock bluff above Biscayne Bay. To the south of the house were its extraordinary formal gardens, replete with pools, bath sculptures, walls, and small out-buildings. Beneath the house was a grotto-like pool, and on the bay sat a great stone barge with carved decorations.

Juan had arrived late Sunday night from Boston, where his Miami Flamingos had finished the baseball season. The team charter had been delayed by air traffic problems at Boston's Logan Airport.

Juan climbed the cantilevered spiral staircase to the spacious master bedroom with French Empire furniture, a 19th-century Aubusson-Teppich rug, and an Adams-style fireplace dating to 1790. Juan guzzled from a long neck of Corona beer that had been presented to him upon his arrival by the houseman, Jorge.

He was horny and wanted to have sex, but he was beat. After kissing Maria Elena on the cheek, he stripped naked, climbed into bed, and fell into a deep sleep, filling the bedroom with loud snoring.

Maria Elena was thankful he was too tired for sex, but she knew he would be in heat come the morning. *What a slob. What does he think, I'm his maid? I don't know why he's so tired; he didn't pitch today.* She picked up his discarded clothes and deposited them in a wicker basket. Then she went to her dressing room for a snort of coke before climbing into bed next to her snoring husband.

It was 11:00 a.m. Monday when Juan awoke. He put on only his underwear to join his wife for breakfast. The housekeeper served them on a veranda overlooking the bay. Maria Elena was attired in a short, skimpy black nightgown. The housekeeper, an elderly Cuban woman, took no notice of her employers' dress habits.

Maria Elena combed her long brunette hair at the table before reading the morning newspapers, *The Miami Daily Journal* and *La Presna*.

I really prefer the gringo Miami P.M. It has all the good scandals.

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*Too bad Juan has never learned to read or speak English – just throw a baseball at almost 100 miles an hour.*

The couple made small talk in Spanish. She enjoyed her Cuban coffee and wondered if someday she would return to the land of her forefathers, Havana.

“Oh, Maria Elena, I’ve invited the gringo journalist, Bob Casey, for lunch on October 9th. He wants to do a big story on me.”

“No problem. I’ll even stay to be your interpreter.”

“Gracias, my wife.”

“So why do you have to go to Costa Rica?” she asked while spooning herself some strawberry yogurt.

“Family business,” he replied curtly. “I really don’t need another plane ride, not after this season.” He sipped on a can of Pepsi and then quickly consumed a plate of gallo pinto – fried rice and baked beans.

“Your agent has been calling all morning. He claims it’s urgent.”

“He’s a typical Jew lawyer.”

“Sí, but if he is that, then why do you employ him? We have plenty of good Latino lawyers in Miami.”

“Maybe. But Cohen is the best in the sports business.”

“He ought to be, at fifteen percent.”

“It’s him and the Yankee government that take most of my hard-earned dinero.”

“Okay, okay, Juan. Now finish your breakfast, because you have a plane to catch.”

Maria Elena was bright. She knew her husband’s mood and needs well. *He wants to get laid before he leaves, so let’s do it and get that over with. I want to go shopping at Neiman Marcus . . .*

Maria Elena was a goddess, the kind of woman men steal, cheat and kill for. She appraised herself as more than a perfect ten. She was an eleven, or maybe even a twelve. And she flaunted it.

They quickly climbed the circular staircase to the master bedroom. Juan was impatient. He had a plane to catch at 3:03 p.m., and he was horny. Maria Elena really didn’t care. Juan was a rotten lover, a slam-bam-gracias-señora hombre. Still, she played the game. She slowly and provocatively dropped her nightgown. Her firm breasts stood out from a tanned body that definitely was made for size-eight clothing.

Juan, who was still in his underwear, left on the white tank top but

dropped his black jockey shorts. He was already excited, as evidenced by his hard-on. He had been wanting sex since he woke up.

Maria Elena smiled, showing a perfect set of pearly white teeth. "Come fuck me, Juan," she said as she grabbed his penis and led him by it to the king-sized bed. She knew he enjoyed it when she talked dirty to him.

He reached out to place both hands on her breasts. He didn't bother to kiss her or offer any foreplay. His firm body, at six-foot-two and 212 pounds, jerked against her as the first shock of pain stabbed her body.

She was breathing hard when she hit the bed on her back. His mouth was feasting on her breasts. She fought for air while she twisted and turned under the excited thrusts of her husband. In the excitement, she caught Juan on his right cheek with her left index finger. She felt the nail tear into his cheek.

Damn it, I broke a nail!

Juan was too excited to feel the pain. Knowing he was about to come, she screamed out as if she were having an orgasm.

"Oh! O-o-o-oh!" she screamed as Juan shot his load into her. She rose and fell with him and sighed until his lust had been spent.

"I make you come, honey?" he asked in a tone that showed he was pleased with his love-making.

"Sí, my husband, you are the best lover." It was said breathlessly, and with a straight face.

Juan felt the left side of his face. His right hand showed blood. "What the fuck?"

"Oh, my husband, I'm so sorry. I scratched you because you made me so hot. I was crazy with excitement when your big cock entered me."

"Forget it, Maria Elena, it's nothing. I'll put a Band-Aid on it."

Maria Elena lay on the bed as Juan patted her on the butt. Just like one of his damned Miami teammates, she thought. He rushed to the shower and within five minutes was back with a large Turkish towel. Dressing quickly into a white Cuban guayabera, a white two-piece suit, and white loafers, he blew Maria Elena a kiss as he picked up his luggage.

His wife laughed. "What's so funny?"

"That Band-Aid on your face."

"Sí."

"When you coming back?" she asked with feigned interest, while pondering a nice hot bath and a snort of coke.

"Just a few days," he replied. "I'll call you from Costa Rica."

"Wait a minute, and I'll drive you to the airport." She really didn't want to, but she made the gesture.

"I'll take the Mercedes. It'll be easier. Adios."

"Hey, what will I tell your agent when he calls again?"

"Tell Cohen I'm in Costa Rica on family business. Tell him to get me a new contract. Adios."

"Adios."

Juan climbed into the black Mercedes 600 sedan with the Florida tag Suns 13. It was 1:20 p.m., so he had missed the lunch hour traffic as he drove to Miami International Airport. His mind wasn't on baseball but on the urgency of his visit to see his twin brother, Eduardo, in Alajuela, Costa Rica. Still, he couldn't help but grin when he thought about getting laid that morning.

The valet parked the Mercedes at Miami International Airport while Juan hustled into the Sun King Club toting an attaché case and pulling a small roller bag. The male club attendant in a red jacket greeted him warmly in Spanish.

"Ah, Señor Martinez, I'm sorry the Flamingos didn't make the playoffs. But you – you won 29 games. You are my sons' hero."

Smiling, Juan opened the black leather attaché, pulled out two eight-by-eleven action photos of himself, and autographed both. He handed them to the man in the red coat. "For your sons. Hope they aren't Yankee fans."

"Muy Gracias, Señor Martinez. Oh no, they cheer only for our Flamingos."

"Con mucho gusto, amigo."

The ticketing agent gave Martinez a first class ticket for the San José flight that departed at 3:11.

The other customers in the Sun King Club, predominately businessmen and -women, didn't pay any attention to Martinez, which was fine with him. He wanted to be alone and think about next season's contract. First, though, he had to bail out his twin brother, who was in deep trouble with the local drug dealer.

*My agent thinks I'm worth \$100 million over a couple of years. Maybe*

*David Cohen is too greedy. Sure, I was 29-6, and the rest of the team not so good. But can I win 29 again? I don't want to leave Miami. People here speak my language. The fans are good people. For a gringo, Pete Dunn is a good manager. If I get that money, maybe I'll break the salary cap. Maria Elena says to get as much as I can. Still . . .*

Juan walked down the Jetway to the DC-10-30. A young flight attendant took his ticket and directed him to the first class section and seat 1A. Before sitting down, he was greeted in Spanish by another uniformed Sun Air employee. This one had gold stripes on her blue uniform jacket.

"Señor Martinez, Sun Airlines is honored that you have selected us for your flight to San José," she said in acceptable Spanish. "If you have any needs or comments, please contact me. Oh, and I'll try to keep any baseball fans from bothering you."

Juan noted the gold ID tag the flight attendant wore. It read Ms. Casey/Director.

He compared her to Maria Elena. *She's no kid. Great body, blonde, blue eyes. And a flight attendant. Bet she'd be a great fuck. Wonder if she's staying over in San José? No, no time. Asi es la vida.*

During the flight to San José, the DC-10 was briefly jolted by turbulence. This knocked the Bloody Mary off Juan's lap tray and onto his white trousers. New-hire flight attendant Lois Templeton was embarrassed and started using a napkin to get the stain out of the trousers.

Juan wasn't the least bit angry. He enjoyed the young flight attendant nervously scrubbing his crotch and almost had an erection. *Wonder if she would give me a hand job?*

He was pleased when the older woman, Ms. Casey, arrived at his seat. She handed him a blanket and asked him to go to the lavatory and remove his trousers. "Return them to me, and we'll do our best as dry cleaners," she told him.

The director grabbed a bottle of soda water, washed the red stains out of the fabric, and then used the hair dryer to dry them. "My gosh, Ms. Casey, it really works," gushed Templeton.

Martinez thanked Suzy as he exited the aircraft in San José with his white slacks crisp and clean. He handed her an autographed baseball.

"Señora, maybe this be worth something if I win 30 next season."

"Thank you, Señor Martinez, for flying Sun Airlines."

In a downtown Miami skyscraper, David Cohen paced the floor of his 20th floor office overlooking Biscayne Bay. He was upset that his prime property, pitcher Juan Martinez, had favored a trip to Costa Rica over talking about a new contract.

Although the posh office with the picture windows and leather furniture was heavily air-conditioned, Cohen was sweating as he paced the plush white carpet. He could almost feel the 15 percent commission for gaining a two-year \$100 million contract for Martinez. My God, that's \$15 million plus expenses. Then there will be the commercials and public appearances. Damn, if Martinez could only speak English, he'd make me a fortune. Maybe that's too cheap. Maybe \$100 million a year.

Cohen looked in the mirror. He adjusted his dark brown toupee and used a towel to wipe the sweat from his face. He was 52 and terribly out of shape.

Finally, he slouched into a \$3,500 high-back executive chair and picked up the early edition of Miami P.M. He flipped backwards in the tabloid to the sports section and the Calder Race Course entries and selections. He ripped out the pari-mutuel pages and stuck them in the side pocket of his suit coat. He checked the time on his \$20,000 18-karat gold Rolex and realized it was time to meet a client for lunch at Calder Race Course.

"I'll be back around four-ish," he told his secretary as he left the office. Taking the elevator to the parking garage, he fumbled for the keys to a dark blue Mercedes 600.

"Hey pal, you ain't in a hurry to go someplace, are you?"

The voice shook Cohen. It came from Guido Parissi, muscle for Sal "The Saw" Gattino, the Mafia gambling don.

"Just—just going to lunch, Mr. Guido," Cohen said as he got the keys into the driver's door. He started to sweat again and cracked his knuckles.

"Lunch? I'd have thought you were bringing me the cash for that little debt you owe Mr. Gattino."

"I'm—I'm working on that, Mr. Guido. Honest. I'll have the money soon."

Guido Parissi wasn't alone. His companion was a muscular, barrel-chested Louie Maranzana. He said nothing, but the shoulder holster playing peek-a-boo under his white linen sports jacket said plenty.

"Shit," Guido went on, "you even had the balls to ask Tony to advance you ten big ones to cover tonight's Miami at New York football game. You ain't very bright for a shyster."

Before he could protest, Cohen felt a burst of pain as Guido unloaded a right-handed punch into his stomach. It knocked the breath out of him. "Please, please . . ." he wheezed.

Although 42, Parissi was a former lightweight boxer who dressed like a hood out of a Damon Runyan story. His fists were like iron, especially when aided by brass knuckles. Two, three, and a fourth punch staggered the agent, and he fell to his knees.

"Mr. Gattino is being nice because youse is an old and valued client," Guido said as he pulled Cohen up by the lapels of his gray Saville Row suit.

Already in great pain, Cohen was suddenly confronted with blasts of Parissi's garlicky breath. "Youse got a week to get the 500,000 big ones, youse understands, Mr. Cohen?"

"Y-yes, I understand."

"Good. Now enjoys your lunch. But if I was youse, I'd change my trousers."

"Uh?" Cohen mumbled as he looked at the large stain on the front of his trousers. He felt the wetness and smelled urine.

"Yeah," laughed Parissi, "youse pissed in youse pants. Oh, youse knows, next time wears youse best suit. 'Cause youse'll be buried in it."

Safely ensconced in his Mercedes, Cohen was shaking so hard he could hardly put the key in the ignition. He was terrified. He knew Gattino's reputation of using his trademark chainsaw on people who displeased him. Cohen began thinking of the widow Cantor's very fat trust fund that was in his keeping.

First he had to make a pit stop at his Miami Beach home to change his wet, tattered suit. He hoped his wife Marcia wasn't home. Well, I can explain that my secretary spilled coffee on me. Yeah, that'll work.

Eduardo Martinez looked out the entrance of the windowless shanty and studied the road. He hoped no one had followed him over the steep roads to this tranquil village of Santa Maria de Dota. He had escaped by foot from San José to the Shangri-La region, called the "Route of the Saints." Most of the villages had been named after Roman Catholic saints, and Eduardo took some comfort that the saints might protect him from the local drug king, Miguel Cabrera. Eduardo couldn't go to the police because Captain Orlando Cabrera of the Judicial Police was Miguel's older brother.

*The fuckers think I was skimming the profits. They don't believe me. But when Juan arrives, he can give me the money to pay them off, and everything will be cool.*

Meanwhile, Eduardo was hiding out in a jungle hut. He had abandoned his Alajuela apartment where he had been the pimp for six women who advertised in the Tico Times. He hired Dominicans and Colombians who hung out at tourist bars. Since prostitution was legal in Costa Rica, he was ready to set up a brothel in his hometown of Santa Maria de Dota. But if he didn't put his drug bill in order, he would never get a government license to operate a brothel. *They didn't give licenses to dead men.*

Eduardo wasn't jealous of his twin brother Juan. Eduardo was a hustler. He liked to hustle. He had never cared for sports, as did his brother, who excelled in soccer as well as baseball. He had never been to America and had no desire to go. He was happy in Costa Rica—except for the lack of funds. His macho pride prevented him from sponging off his rich brother.

Before leaving for a jungle hut, Eduardo had made a hotel reservation for his brother at the Hotel Buena Vista. He booked the room and left a note with the desk clerk for his brother that he would meet him for lunch at the hotel on Tuesday. Eduardo then adjourned to the jungle to sit out the next twelve hours.

The hotel clerk, however, was on Miguel Cabrero's payroll. Recognizing the name Eduardo Martinez, the clerk assumed the room was for him and marked it as such in the room register.

After arriving at San José's Juan Santamaria International Airport, Juan checked his Rolex and turned the hands back an hour for U.S. central time. He spent a few minutes dealing with a taxi driver to make the twenty-mile trip northwest of San José to the provincial capital of Alajuela. The taxi driver, Jesus Gonzales, wanted to talk soccer on the ride from the airport.

It was dark by the time the taxi pulled in front of the Hotel Buena Vista. Juan paid the driver in colones and then cut a U.S. \$100 greenback in half, giving half to the driver. "Come back for me Wednesday morning," he said, "and the other half is yours." He knew the driver would be there.

As he exited the taxi, Juan's bag bumped the seat, and some of his