

## Chapter 8

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Despite the incident in the Dominican Republic, Landeira was committed to pursuing investigative journalism. What better place than Havana? A place of old world charm set in a tropical environment populated with a culture of warm and life-affirming people. For a journalist, a city with a broad cast of villains. A corrupt dictator. Secret police. A brutally repressive military beset by a growing leftist revolutionary insurgency. American mobsters erecting a gambling paradise out of reach of U.S. law enforcement.

The Miami Herald along with the New York Times already pushed the boundaries with articles about the origins of the growing threat of revolutionary opposition. While the Herald picked up stories from the wire services, Landeira explained his predicament to the managing editor. "I intend to focus my attention right now on the Mafia in Havana. Of interest to American readers. Although Mafia investment in the hotels and casinos is not news, the specifics are. Characters Americans recognize from the sustained interests generated by the Kefauver hearings."

"What about the political turmoil. A bloody dictatorship. An active insurgency," Fred Jansen said. He was managing editor of the Herald and an experienced reporter from the days of the newspaper's founding in 1946.

"First of all, the insurgency is not threatening Batista's hold on power. Fidel Castro is in exile in Mexico. His movement 26th

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of July has no effective footing beyond its origins in the rural sugarcane provinces of eastern Cuba. The other anti-government group is the Student Revolutionary Directorate. Former students of the University of Havana now closed and the DRE outlawed."

"Those stories still reach the wire services however," Jansen said.

"Sure, but lacking in substance. No details to engage the American reader. Not especially newsworthy, Fred."

"Reports of atrocities committed by Batista's military are newsworthy," Jansen interjected.

"At the risk of sounding callous, Fred, just more of the same political violence going on around the world. Just casualty numbers. Here's my deal, Carl. No reporter based in Cuba can report details of state-sponsored murder without running afoul of the regime's censorship. Without photographs and narrative accounts from the scene, it becomes no different than continual recurring accounts of violence in the world."

"I was not aware that journalists were at risk in Cuba," Jansen said.

"Not like Trujillo's Dominican Republic. Effective censorship however. Foreign journalists are just deported. Cuban journalists risk must worse treatment. Batista also has a secret police. "

"Speaking of secret police that was one helluva piece you put together on your experience in Ciudad Trujillo, Bart."

"My point exactly, Fred. Got myself deported from the DR. Lucky that was all. Batista's police are more subtle. I know the editors of several Cuban newspapers. Publishing something contrary to the regime's interest results in a telephone call from a censor at the Ministry of Propaganda. Imagine a government ministry identified for propaganda. Anything deemed critical of the regime becomes a target. The less than subtle instruction conveyed is to desist publishing anything further in that vain. The threat implicit. Once on their shit list, you thereafter come under intense scrutiny.

"Based in Havana, I must be careful to avoid getting kicked out of Cuba. I believe I can be freer going after the Mafia. Doubt they would go after me with physical violence. Bad for the gambling business. If I'm careful, I can indirectly suggest the corrup-

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tion derived from the newfound glamour of Havana which is now outshining Las Vegas.”

“Okay. I see your point. Does the prestige of your family provide any cover?”

Landeira appreciated the irony. Not only did it provide a measure of cover, but his father was likely up to his ears in official corruption.

“Don’t know. Better I don’t test how far I can go. However, I’m not forgetting the political side. Working a new source. Might provide useful material to probe the details of Batista’s institutionalized corruption. I also believe the same source might have connections to the DRE revolutionaries. Will see where that goes. Anything particularly damaging to the Batista regime appearing in the Herald puts me under suspicion because I am your correspondent in Cuba.”

“What about AP or UP wire material?”

“Can’t do anything about that. Just make sure attribution clearly deflects away from me as the source. Do follow up pieces by staff reporters to my reporting by as you see fit. I can claim it is not my doing. I’ll go as far as I can in my submissions but make up plausible alternative source attribution for anti-Batista material. If Batista objects to what the Herald prints, he will likely prohibit circulation in Cuba. What do we care? Our readership is Florida and the entire Caribbean. We can’t avoid publishing negative material about assholes like Batista and Trujillo for the sake of circulation.”

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The potential source was Dr. Mateo Pérez. Former professor of economics of the now shuttered Havana University. Landeira found his name while searching the archives of the Havana newspaper *Prensa Libre*. Cited in several articles since Batista assumed power in 1952, Pérez was a Batista critic carefully cloaked in financial technical jargon. Given his field of economics, his criticism focused on corruption of the Batista regime. It began immediately after Batista took up residence in the presidential palace. According to an early not so subtle quote attributed to Pérez, “*Fulgencio Batista has a long and infamous history in Cuban*

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*politics. With his unelected return to power his sights appear set on amassing personal wealth above any other objective."*

Pérez served as a close adviser to the Minister of Finance under former President Carlos Prío Socarrás, deposed by Batista's coup in 1952. He understood the structure of the Cuban government sufficient to observe Batista's personal machinations for enrichment. The Mafia was already entrenched in Havana in 1952. Pérez identified this as the primary means by which Batista could financially exploit his return to the presidency.

Pérez might be invaluable in pursuing Landeira's attack on the Mafia. Pérez argued that partnership with the American Mafia provided Batista the ability to solidify his power base. With Pérez's background knowledge, this could provide insights from which to quiz his father. No Mafioso's name appeared on legal documents. His father boasted of his setting up front companies for investors. All but admitted these probably included American organized crime figures. Pérez could provide targeted lines of inquiry to pose to his father.

Max Landeira was a tough bird. Good that they were rebuilding a relationship as father and son. That did not however extend to Bart condoning his father's architecting money laundering schemes for the Mafia, further corrupting Cuban institutions. His father's questionable past served as prologue to what Bart must do. No reason to expose his father but he felt no qualms about using him as a way to get confidential information on the Mafia and Batista. He would do his best to shield his father as the source.

If things turned out badly because of his journalistic crusade, Father could just retreat to Tampa until the regime changed. So could he for that matter. He assumed his father was careful to avoid breaking U.S. laws. Bart was indifferent to his extended Cuban family. Father sought to draw him in, yet he was still an outsider. He was born a Yanqui, in Cuba only by choice.

Of course, there remained the larger question of deceiving his father. Using him to further his own aims brought a twinge of guilt. The alternative? Dump everything, including a relationship with his father. Leave Cuba, and certainly not for Tampa. His rationale perhaps to appease his conscience that his father brought this on himself. Actively enabling criminal activity

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made you a criminal. No excuses. He father never had to take that path. In the end, he either accepts bringing this on himself, or choses to feel betrayed. Bart concluded he could live with his own actions and let circumstances play out.

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The Mafiosi involved in Havana were well known. The publicity went back as far as the meeting convened at the Hotel Nacional in 1946. What most people did not understand was the reason for the meeting. The commonly held opinion being a convenient venue close to the United States yet removed from FBI surveillance. The real reason was to lay the groundwork for developing Havana into a gambling mecca. Close enough geographically to be part of the United States yet out of reach of U.S. law enforcement. In a foreign country embracing gambling with a history of corruption since gaining independence fifty years ago. An assessable tropical paradise compared to the unattractive barren high-desert gambling venue of Las Vegas.

Therefore, Landeira needed to give these Mafiosi settled in Havana fresh treatment. Paint them as the purveyors of the dark side of glamorous Havana. Provide details of Mafia investment hidden behind front companies shielding identities. Landeira wanted names, amounts, which hotels, casinos, and nightclubs. Continue to play on the theme of money laundering. Mafia investment coming from illegal profits made in the United States. Those same details might reveal the conduits for money flow to President Batista.

How to accomplish such an ambitious plan was not yet clear. Finding knowledgeable sources willing to cooperate was a tall order. Just the activity of soliciting for sources presented a risk. In a police state, repression could easily get out of hand. Being an American journalist from an important Cuban family might not be sufficient protection against Batista's National Police thugs. The more likely retribution of deportation defeated the entire objective of access to information.

Even if successful in uncovering damaging confidential material, how to publish anonymously remained the overriding dilemma. With his father as an unwitting source, the problem

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became more complicated. However, all that was premature. He needed first to uncover compelling material with news interest. Simply repeating allegations of Mafia investment as the catalyst for the Havana entertainment boom was not newsworthy. Having set a benchmark with his Dominican Republic story, about time he developed something on Cuba. Time to approach Professor Pérez.

The Havana telephone directory listed Pérez's telephone number and address. An upscale address in the Vedado district not far from his old apartment and a few blocks from his father's exclusive men's club. Makes sense since it is also close to the campus of the University of Havana. Yet still an expensive residence on the salary of a university professor now unemployed.

"Señor Pérez, my name is Bart Landeira. I am a correspondent for the Miami Herald newspaper. I wonder if I might meet with you to discuss a subject of mutual interest. Reading past newspaper articles, you are often quoted."

Pérez interrupted, "I have no interest in speaking to reporters."

Landeira ignored the response. "You have extensive knowledge about how Cuban financial institutions operate. How the Ministry of Finance functions. You are known as a critic of American organized crime investment to develop the Havana gambling industry."

"I am sorry. I cannot help you, Señor Landeira. Good day."

The call disconnected.

A good journalist learns to handle rejection. Before making another approach, he mailed Pérez copies of his Dominican Republic article and his earlier article on U.S. involvement in toppling the elected Guatemalan president in 1954. Pérez did not respond.

After a week, he staked out Pérez's apartment. From a newspaper photo, he recognized the tall, distinguished Pérez with his signature white hair from across the street. Pérez left his apartment building walking briskly, dressed impeccably in a light grey suit, white shirt, and tie. Looked as if ready to deliver a lecture at the university.

Landeira followed at a distance waiting to see where Pérez was headed. Surprisingly, he entered the *La Fraternidad de*

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*Cristóbal Colón*. His father's men's club where his father insisted on sponsoring Bart for membership. Hoping Pérez's destination perhaps a restaurant for lunch, this was even better.

Ladeira allowed Pérez to check in first at the desk before making his approach. Entering the club's large lounge area, he asked a waiter, "I am looking for Dr. Pérez."

"Yes, Señor. Dr. Pérez is on the veranda."

Ladeira spotted Pérez reading the Miami Herald Spanish addition, as a waiter brought him coffee.

"Excuse me Dr. Pérez, I did not expect to find you here," Ladeira said.

Pérez looked up. "Excuse me. Should I know you?"

"Bart Ladeira. I called you last week." Ladeira extended his hand.

Pérez did not get up but at least took Ladeira's hand. "Are you a member?"

"Yes. A new member."

"Are you related to Maximiliano Ladeira?"

"Yes. He is my father."

"I do not wish to offend you but I thought I made it clear I have no interest in giving an interview to the press."

"I was not looking for an interview. More like a collaboration. I intend on doing a series of articles on American Mafia investment in Havana. You seem the most informed source."

Pérez folded the newspaper in his lap and looked at Ladeira. "Is this some sort of joke?"

"Certainly not. Why would you suggest that?"

"Because you are Max Ladeira's son. You do not need me. Your father knows more on that subject than I do. He is one of them."

Ladeira knew what Pérez meant but the accusation still stung. It meant that he would have to find a way to distance himself from his father reputation.

"Might I sit down and explain, Dr. Pérez."

Not waiting for an answer, he sat down across from Pérez. "My father is the chief financial officer of Ladeira Grupo. A large corporation involved in sugar, tobacco, rum, and cigars. He also maintains a law practice in Florida and Havana. I have been estranged from the family, including my father since before

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World War Two. After the war, I worked for the U.S. foreign service then became a journalist. I only came to Havana two years ago to continue working as a foreign correspondent for the Miami Herald. Perhaps you have read some of my reporting."

Pérez made no reply.

"I was born in the United States. I came to Havana to reconnect with my heritage and cease wandering around the world. I am also aware that my father's law practice consults on Cuban investment. He claims that no American organized crime figures are among his clients."

Pérez began to say something, but Landeira raised his hand. "Please let me finish. Either my father is lying or these mobsters have obscured their ownership trail and he chooses to turn a blind eye. I harbor no illusions about my father's activities.

"I have a U.S. law degree and know something about constructing legal entities whereby the true shareholders conceal their identities. The Mafia did not invent that practice."

"No. Clever lawyers like your father did," Pérez said. "Are you aware your father is the chief executive of a private Cuban bank?"

"Yes. Landeira Grupo is also the major shareholder. Another related business unit."

"More than that. A highly profitable enterprise by some estimates. Possibly more profitable than ever officially reported," Pérez said.

"Obviously, you do not like my father?"

"More accurately, I despise what he represents. He is part of the cancer destroying Cuba. He is close to Batista and close to the Mafia. I cannot prove that, but those involved with Cuban economics understand where your father stands."

Not a surprise but still difficult to hear. Pérez describes his father as central figure in the corruption. His father describes himself as a business consultant constructing legal entities to facilitate investments. Bart suspected Pérez's accusation likely closer to the truth.

"I am not interested in protecting my father from bad publicity. He and I still have an arms-length relationship. As for official corruption, I must be cautious or risk censorship as a journalist. In my case that could mean deportation as a U.S. citizen. You



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read my story about my experience in the Dominican Republic I sent to you. This is not the United States where the law protects free speech objectionable to the government.

"I am a realist. Reporting from Cuba has strict limits. The Ministry of Propaganda censors any coverage sympathetic to the revolutionary insurgents. However, reporting on the Mafia in Havana still enjoys some latitude. That genie is out of the bottle. Until my reporting comes to close to exposing kickbacks to Batista, I believe the Mafia is fair game. The more I understand about how money flows to Batista, the better I can navigate how to avoid deportation from Cuba."

Pérez reflected for a moment taking a sip of his coffee. "Since Mafia investment is a frequent topic in the media given Havana's newfound celebrity status, what can I add?"

"Possibly details that can enlarge the story beyond the mystique of movie gangsters. It is still newsworthy to readers in the United States. I am looking to expose how the Mafia launders its profits from racketeering into this foreign mecca of decadent glamour. Counterpoint to the Hollywood celebrities and the rich and famous by showing the dark side of this tropical paradise."

Pérez said, "Did you follow me here today?"

Ladeira nodded. "Yes. To try to convince you we share the same objective. I did not realize you were a member here. My reporting can benefit by your insights. Perhaps provide you with some satisfaction in protest to the repression of the Batista regime. While cautious, my research suggests you are critic of Batista.

"If I help you, Señor Ladeira, I wish my name never mentioned. Bad enough I cannot continue my work at the university. I am Cuban. I intend to see Batista someday ousted. But I do not wish to witness his downfall from exile or prison."

"Does that mean you will assist me?"

"Conditionally, yes. How else can I exercise my protest?"

Ladeira smiled. "Excellent. Will you join me for lunch? We can talk further."

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While working in his office at the distillery, one of the administration staff downstairs rang his telephone. "Señor Montero is here to see you."

"Please bring him to my office. Also bring us coffee."

"Good to see you," Landeira said. Please sit down." The young woman staffer brought them coffee on a tray with milk and sugar then left closing the office door.

Landeira waited for Montero to offer the reason for his visit. Based on Montero's initial reaction to his proposal, he was expecting him to politely decline. Gracious enough to convey his decision in person rather than by telephone.

"I have given much thought to your generous proposal, Señor Landeira. Discussed the matter at length with my wife and two children. A most difficult decision. My family has deferring opinions. My cautious answer, I would like to discuss the matter further. Much will depend on the details."

"Wonderful. That makes sense. What are the concerns of your family?"

"Well, my wife is concerned about how I will like taking on such a large responsibility."

"Do you have reservations about that?"

"Some. But I must think toward the future. I have many more working years. This seems the best opportunity for my life's work to live on. What is to become of Montero Rum when I become too old? I must embrace new challenges."

"What about your children?"

"My son dislikes the idea. Surprising how he ignores the question of what is to become of Montero Rum."

"Why surprising?"

"Because he has no interest in becoming involved in the business. Luis wants to get his law degree like his older sister. Bitter about the closing of the university. Unlike Emilia, his sights are set on politics. Yet he says only that things will somehow work out when I am old without offering any solutions."

"Considering we live under a dictatorship, what does he mean by entering politics?"

Montero reflected for a moment before answering, "Luis is an idealist. Concerned with social justice. Democracy. Not the dysfunctional Cuban brand of democracy. I worry that he might

be too close to these student revolutionaries of the Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil."

"What about your daughter Emilia? What are her thoughts about my offer?"

Montero smiled. "Emilia is smart, clever, and practical beyond her years. She understands your observation about what happens when I become too old. She points out I will eventually be forced to sell when too old to continue. Without me, Montero Rum dies."

"So she agrees to consider what I am offering?"

"Like I said, she is smart. She is also a tough lawyer. Says the devil is in the details. What is the offer? What does Landeira Grupo expect from me? Is my new job secure, or is this a ploy to buy me out at a lower price?"

Landeira smiled. Not in any way put off. Of course, there would be a tough negotiation over the offering price. Better to negotiate with a family member than some third party lawyer. "Good for her. All valid concerns. I assure you, Señor Montero, there are no ulterior motivations on the part of Landeira Grupo. I am only temporary in my involvement as I explained to you. Landeira Grupo needs you far more than you need us. Not very good negotiating strategy on my part, but I am concerned about fairness. Both Landeira Rum and Montero Rum should live on. Combining the traditions of both is the best way to insure that.

"Before we negotiate the acquisition offering price and your salary, I want everyone to be assured this is a good deal for both parties. I suggest I meet with you and the family to answer questions. Once we agree on those important operational issues, I will approach my father who is the financial head of Landeira Grupo. His office is in Tampa, Florida. He will want to meet you of course. From there, we negotiate the money and the terms of the deal.

"I agreed to oversee Landeira Rum and look for a permanent management solution with the passing of my Uncle Tomás. I am convinced you are that solution, Señor Montero. My father delegated to me the task of finding a successor. He will follow my recommendation but he is the corporation's senior officer so he must agree to the deal."

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"Before we go further, there are few legal prerequisites we need deal with. Things like confidentiality agreements, letter of intent, and reviewing financial records and other documents of Montero Rum. What is known as the buyer's due diligence. Will your daughter handle the legal affairs for you?"

"Oh yes. I trust Emilia's capabilities as a lawyer. Her specialty is business law. Expect her to be a tough negotiator."

"Excellent. Then you can trust she will argue for the best deal possible. I look forward to meeting her at the soonest. Please let me know if you wish me to meet with your family to answer questions."

"I believe a meeting with just me and Emilia will be sufficient."

"Very well. The sooner the better. I am at your service."

"Since we may soon be business partners, please call me Augustin."

"And please call me Bart. Short for Bartolo but only my mother called me Bartolo. This has been a rewarding day, Augustin. Rest assured my friend, we do this deal, and Montero Rum will continue as a brand. I will put that into the deal. The only difference is expanded marketing and distribution. You may have to increase production."

Perhaps he oversold his authority but he would not allow his father to overturn his agreement to terms of the deal. He knew his father. A domineering controlling arrogant personality. This was his son's deal, however. A perfect solution to Landeira Grupo's management problem. He would present his father a done deal in all respects, or walk away, including even running Landeira Rum temporarily. He would not allow the old man to manipulate the circumstances to get him to stay onboard indefinitely. His commitment fulfilled by finding this solution. If his father saw this as a way of manipulating their newfound relationship to bend matters to his liking, it would not work.

With that in mind, he would take negotiations further before involving his father. Meet with Montero and his daughter. Conclude everything pending a review of Montero's documents and then negotiating the financial details without consulting his father. Make Montero a specific offer. Make it a fait accompli sub-

ject only to his father's agreement, while leaving him no alternative.

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Two days later, Augustin returned to Bart's office at the distillery with his daughter Emilia.

Bart did not anticipate Emilia Montero to be the exceptionally attractive woman offering her hand. It was her eyes. The coloring giving them remarkable depth. Looking him straight on he felt self-conscious of his pronounced scar on his cheek compared to her face. A beautiful face yet the overwhelming effect conveyed intelligence. She was tall with long legs, further accentuated by heels. Her tailored business pantsuit amplified her figure and full breasts.

"I am Emilia Montero, Señor Landeira. A pleasure meeting you. Father speaks highly of you."

Slightly off balance Landeira said, "We have become friends. Please sit down." Turning to shake hands with her father, "Augustin, thank you for coming."

Landeira motioned them to a large round table, more suitable for this conversation than seated across his uncle's massive desk.

While a staffer brought a tray of coffee, Augustin looked around. "I always admired your Uncle Tomás' office."

Landeira smiled, "My uncle liked his creature comforts. Soon to be your office I hope. I am here only temporarily."

Emilia wanted to get right into discussing the deal. Reaching into her briefcase, she extracted several folders, placing them on the table.

She said, "I took the liberty of drafting confidentiality agreements and what I hope is a letter of intent acceptable to you. Of course, I defined certain issues I believe fundamental to my father's interests. I hope you don't feel I was being presumptuous."

Unexpected, but Augustin warned his daughter was tough.

He read the documents. Even the letter of intent she drafted was acceptable. Looking up he smiled at her. "These look to be in order. I also do not mind you taking the initiative. It will help

to move things along. I have a license to practice law in the United States, but not in Cuba. I will defer to my father for executing the final documents for legal content should we come to agreement. He is licensed in both countries."

Emilia said, "Father said, your father has final say over doing this acquisition. Will he be participating in our negotiations?"

"No. He has left that to me. Let me digress and explain my role in this venture. Please pour yourself coffee while I explain the management of Landeira Grupo. It is important, Augustin, for you to understand and be comfortable with joining Landeira. You know much of this by our previous conversations. And of course you knew my uncle." Turning to Emilia, "I want your father to be comfortable in that he is not a Landeira. The truth of the matter is the Landeira bloodline is dwindling. Landeira Grupo must take on senior managers outside the family to sustain its business enterprises. Should have begun years ago. That lies at the heart of our interest in partnering with your father. The same concern he has for Montero Rum succeeding him."

Landeira gave her an unabridged overview of Landeira Grupo and those in the family involved in the businesses.

She replied, "Thank you, Señor Landeira. You will of course want to review my due diligence documentation before we discuss money. However, the larger issue is assurances of sustaining not only the Montero Rum identity, but also of my father's employment security.

"Regardless of your sincerity, as you said you are only temporary. Not even officially part of Landeira Grupo management. Only a stockholder. What assurances does my father have that once Landeira acquires Montero Rum they do not terminate my father? His employment just a tactic to buy Montero Rum?"

Augustin was aghast at his daughter's bluntness. "Emilia, there is no call for being rude. I must apologize, Bart."

"No need, Augustin. This is business. More than business, it affects your life's work. Your daughter is acting as your lawyer. Any lawyer would raise the question. After all it is the most critical concern in making your decision."

Turning toward Emilia, "Of course we are prepared to offer an employment contract to your father. Yet I see though that might not be enough. Everything centers on what your father

created. The finest rum crafted by him representing his legacy. More art than business as he puts it."

Ladeira stroked his chin while organizing an idea. "What about as part of the deal a clause stating your father shall retain all trademark rights to the name Montero Rum indefinitely? Remember, our interest is in acquiring the right to produce and market Montero rum. Ladeira cannot replicate what your father accomplished by following a set of instructions. Therefore, the name carries the identity.

"We have a wonderful master distiller your father knows well. Gustavo makes excellent rum, just not outstanding like Montero rum."

Emilia was surprised at the offer and looked at her father.

Augustin said, "I told you, Dear, Bart wishes this to be attractive to us."

"Yes, I believe that is more than satisfactory," she said.

"Excellent. Perhaps you could draft the contractual language to encompass any additional thoughts."

"Very well. I have another question. I do not know how to frame this without it sounding rude as my father will undoubtedly feel. Your father will have the final say. Should we not be negotiating with him?"

"Good lord, Emilia," Augustin said.

"Emilia makes a good point, Augustin. A basic rule in negotiating is always to negotiate with the decision maker. I am offering a slightly different scenario for good reasons.

"My father is a brilliant lawyer and businessman. He would be a tough negotiator trying to get the best price and preferential terms. That is not what I am seeking. For this to work for Ladeira Rum you must see it as an opportunity for you, Augustin. Ladeira Rum needs not only a competent director, but Montero Rum represents a hidden marketing opportunity. Ladeira has the resources to allow Montero to increase production. We have the marketing and distribution channels to make this a great business success.

"My father would see that but prefer it to remain a vague issue so as not to run up the acquisition price. I take the longer view of making this a sustaining success and to be a good move for your father."

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"I am a journalist. Writing is what I do. Not a practicing lawyer or businessman. I simply am doing this as a favor to my father after the unexpected passing of my uncle. I assure you, if we come to terms, I will convince my father to accept my offering price and terms. He has little choice but to accept any agreement I make since I have no interest in pursuing other solutions for Landeira Rum management. Obviously, he must agree with my assessment that you are the right person to run Landeira Rum, Augustin. You will report to him not me."

Emilia nodded. "I do not believe I have any further questions, Señor Landeira. What is the next step?"

"I suggest setting a meeting with my father, Maximiliano. He splits his time between Havana and Tampa, Florida. Not only is he the chief financial officer of Landeira Grupo, but also maintains a business investment consulting practice separate from the company.

"However, there is no need to wait before diving into your financial documents. The real work is arriving at a purchase price. Also, not to overlook your compensation in your new role, Augustin. To be candid, I want to arrive at an agreed price that I can sell to my father as a done deal requiring only his approval."

He hoped Emilia Montero understand the unsubtle inference. He did not intend to allow his father to start arguing price and terms. Here is the deal, take it or find your own solution for managing Landeira Rum.

The prospect of negotiating with the attractive Emilia Montero a welcoming prospect. Been a very long time since a woman stirred his feelings. A few years younger probably in her early thirties. All he knew from Augustin was she was not married. Yet for someone with her looks, likely involved in a relationship.

"What do you think, Augustin? Still interested?"

Augustin smiled broadly. "Yes. Looking forward to meeting your father."

"And you, Señora Montero? Have I answered all your questions?"

For the first time since entering the office, she gave a warm smile. "Yes. You seem genuine about why you want my father to join Landeira. I may have specific questions at a later time, but you have been most convincing."



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"Excellent. Once I review your documents, I shall call to arrange our next meeting. To avoid unwelcomed rumors circulating among Landeira or Montero employees, might it be better to meet elsewhere than here or your office, Augustin?"

Augustin said, "Yes. I do not want any of my employees becoming worried. We did not discuss them but I assumed they will all have jobs after becoming part of Landeira Rum?"

"Absolutely. This merger is not about cutting costs by eliminating employees. Montero Rum will continue to operate from your current facility. Part of the acquisition plan is to expand Montero rum production. For that, you need more warehouse aging space. Landeira has the capital to do that. So if anything, you may need more employees as you grow."

Emilia said, "May I suggest we meet at my law office. I have a small conference room."

Landeira replied, "Perfect. May I call you with any questions as I dig into the details?"

"Of course. Here is my business address and telephone number."

After they left his office, Landeira could think of little else than Emilia Montero.