

THE NUMBER ONE BESTSELLER

JEFFREY ARCHER



THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT

'If there were a Nobel prize for storytelling,
Archer would win' *DAILY TELEGRAPH*

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COMMANDMENT

PAN BOOKS

TO NEIL AND MONIQUE

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BOOK ONE

THE TEAM PLAYER



AS HE OPENED THE DOOR the alarm went off.

The sort of mistake you would expect an amateur to make, which was surprising, as Connor Fitzgerald was considered by his peers to be the professional's professional.

Fitzgerald had anticipated that it would be several minutes before the local *policia* responded to a burglary in the San Victorina district.

There were still a couple of hours to go before the kick-off of the annual match against Brazil, but half the television sets in Colombia would already be switched on. If Fitzgerald had broken into the pawn shop after the game had started, the *policia* probably wouldn't have followed it up until the referee had blown the final whistle. It was well known that the local criminals looked upon the match as a ninety-minute parole period. But his plans for that ninety minutes would have the *policia* chasing their shadows for days. And it would be weeks, probably months, before anyone worked out the real significance of the break-in that Saturday afternoon.

The alarm was still sounding as Fitzgerald closed the back door and made his way quickly through the small store room towards the front of the shop. He ignored the rows of watches on their little stands, emeralds in their cellophane bags and gold objects of every size and shape displayed behind a fine-mesh grille. All were carefully marked with a name and date, so their impoverished owners could return within six months and reclaim their family heirlooms. Few ever did.

Fitzgerald swept aside the bead curtain that divided the store room from the shop, and paused behind the counter. His eyes rested on a battered leather case on a stand in the centre of the window. Printed on the lid in faded gold letters were the initials 'D.V.R.' He remained absolutely still until he was certain that no one was looking in.

When Fitzgerald had sold the hand-crafted masterpiece to the shopkeeper earlier that day, he had explained that as he had no intention of returning to Bogotá, it could go on sale immediately. Fitzgerald was not surprised that the piece had already been placed in the window. There wouldn't be another one like it in Colombia.

He was about to climb over the counter when a young man strolled past the window. Fitzgerald froze, but the man's attention was wholly occupied by a small radio he was pressing to his left ear. He took about as much notice of Fitzgerald as he would of a tailor's dummy. Once he was out of sight, Fitzgerald straddled the counter and walked to the window. He glanced up and down the road to check for any casual observers, but there were none. With one movement he removed the leather case from its stand and walked quickly back. He leapt over the counter and turned to look out of the window again to reassure himself that no inquisitive eyes had witnessed the burglary.

Fitzgerald swung round, pulled aside the bead curtain and strode on towards the closed door. He

checked his watch. The alarm had been blaring away for ninety-eight seconds. He stepped into the alley and listened. Had he heard the whine of a police siren, he would have turned left and disappeared into the maze of streets that ran behind the pawnbroker's shop. But apart from the alarm, everything remained silent. He turned right and walked casually in the direction of Carrera Septima.

When Connor Fitzgerald reached the pavement he glanced left and then right, weaved through the light traffic and, without looking back, crossed to the far side of the street. He disappeared into a crowded restaurant, where a group of noisy fans were seated around a large-screen television.

Nobody gave him a glance. Their only interest was in watching endless replays of the three goals Colombia had scored the previous year. He took a seat at a corner table. Although he couldn't see the television screen clearly, he had a perfect view across the street. A battered sign with the words '*J. Escobar. Monte de Piedad, establecido 1946*' flapped in the afternoon breeze above the pawn shop.

Several minutes passed before a police car screeched to a halt outside the shop. Once Fitzgerald had seen the two uniformed officers enter the building, he left his table and walked nonchalantly out of the back door onto another quiet Saturday afternoon street. He hailed the first empty taxi and said in a broad South African accent, '*El Belvedere on the Plaza de Bolívar, por favor.*' The driver nodded curtly, as if to make it clear that he had no wish to become involved in a prolonged conversation. As Fitzgerald slumped into the back of the battered yellow cab, he turned up the radio.

Fitzgerald checked his watch again. Seventeen minutes past one. He was running a couple of minutes behind schedule. The speech would have already begun, but as they always lasted for well over forty minutes, he still had more than enough time to carry out his real reason for being in Bogotá. He moved a few inches to his right, so as to be sure the driver could see him clearly in the rear-view mirror.

Once the *policia* began their enquiries, Fitzgerald needed everyone who had seen him that day to give roughly the same description: male, Caucasian, fiftyish, a shade over six foot, around 210 pounds, unshaven, dark unruly hair, dressed like a foreigner, with a foreign accent, but not American. He hoped that at least one of them would be able to identify the South African nasal twang. Fitzgerald had always been good at accents. In high school he had regularly been in trouble for mimicking his teachers.

The taxi's radio continued to pump out the views of expert after expert on the likely outcome of the annual fixture. Fitzgerald mentally switched off from a language he had little interest in mastering, although he had recently added '*falta*', '*fuera*' and '*gol*' to his limited vocabulary.

When the little Fiat drew up outside the El Belvedere seventeen minutes later, Fitzgerald handed over a ten-thousand-peso note, and had slipped out of the cab before the driver had a chance to thank him for such a generous tip. Not that the taxi drivers of Bogotá are well known for their overuse of the words '*muchas gracias*'.

Fitzgerald ran up the hotel steps, past the liveried doorman and through the revolving doors. In the foyer, he headed straight for the bank of elevators opposite the check-in desk. He had to wait only a few moments before one of the four lifts returned to the ground floor. When the doors slid open he stepped inside and pressed the button marked '8', and the 'Close' button immediately afterwards, giving no one a chance to join him. When the doors opened on the eighth floor, Fitzgerald walked down the thinly carpeted corridor to room 807. He pushed a plastic card into the slot and waited for the green light to glow before he turned the handle. As soon as the door opened, he placed the '*Favor de no Molestar*' sign on the outside knob, closed the door and bolted it.

He checked his watch yet again: twenty-four minutes to two. By now he calculated that the police would have left the pawn shop, having concluded that it was a false alarm. They would phone Mr Escobar at his home in the country to inform him that everything appeared to be in order, and would suggest that when he returned to the city on Monday, he should let them know if anything was

missing. But long before then, Fitzgerald would have replaced the battered leather case in the window. On Monday morning the only items that Escobar would report stolen would be the several small packets of uncut emeralds that had been removed by the *policia* on their way out. How long would it be before he discovered the only other thing that was missing? A day? A week? A month? Fitzgerald had already decided he would have to leave the odd clue to help speed up the process.

Fitzgerald took off his jacket, hung it over the nearest chair and picked up the remote control from the table by the side of the bed. He pressed the 'On' button and sat down on the sofa in front of the television. The face of Ricardo Guzman filled the screen.

Fitzgerald knew that Guzman would be fifty next April, but at six foot one, with a full head of black hair and no weight problem, he could have told the adoring crowd that he had not yet turned forty, and they would have believed him. After all, few Colombians expected their politicians to tell the truth about anything, especially their age.

Ricardo Guzman, the favourite in the upcoming presidential election, was the boss of the Cali cartel, which controlled 80 per cent of the New York cocaine trade, and made over a billion dollars a year. Fitzgerald had not come across this information in any of Colombia's three national newspapers perhaps because the supply of most of the country's newsprint was controlled by Guzman.

'The first action I shall take as your President will be to nationalise any company in which Americans are the majority shareholders.'

The small crowd that surrounded the steps of the Congress building on the Plaza de Bolívar screamed their approval. Ricardo Guzman's advisors had told him again and again that it would be a waste of time making a speech on the day of the match, but he had ignored them, calculating that millions of television viewers would be flicking through the channels in search of the soccer, and would come across him on their screens, if only for a moment. The same people would then be surprised, only an hour later, to see him striding into the packed stadium. Football bored Guzman, but he knew that his entrance moments before the home team were due to take the field would divert the crowd's attention away from Antonio Herrera, the Colombian Vice-President and his main rival in the election. Herrera would be seated in the VIP box, but Guzman would be in the midst of the crowd behind one of the goals. The image he wished to portray was of a man of the people.

Fitzgerald estimated that there was about six minutes of the speech left. He had already heard Guzman's words at least a dozen times: in crowded halls, in half-empty bars, on street corners, even at a coach station while the candidate had addressed the local citizens from the back of a bus. He pulled the leather case off the bed and onto his lap.

'... Antonio Herrera is not the Liberal candidate,' hissed Guzman, 'but the American candidate. He is nothing more than a ventriloquist's dummy, whose every word is chosen for him by the man who sits in the Oval Office.' The crowd cheered again.

Five minutes, Fitzgerald calculated. He opened the case and stared down at the Remington 700 that had been out of his sight for only a few hours.

'How dare the Americans assume that we will always fall in line with whatever is convenient for them?' Guzman barked. 'And simply because of the power of the God-almighty dollar. To hell with the God-almighty dollar!' The crowd cheered even more loudly as the candidate took a dollar bill from his wallet and tore George Washington into shreds.

'I can assure you of one thing,' continued Guzman, scattering the tiny pieces of green paper over the crowd like confetti.

'God isn't an American . . .' mouthed Fitzgerald.

'God isn't an American!' shouted Guzman.

Fitzgerald gently removed the McMillan fibreglass stock from the leather case.

'In two weeks' time, the citizens of Colombia will be given the opportunity to let their views be

heard right across the world,' Guzman shouted.

'Four minutes,' murmured Fitzgerald, as he glanced up at the screen and mimicked the smile of the candidate. He took the Hart stainless steel barrel from its resting place and screwed it firmly into the stock. It fitted like a glove.

'Whenever summits are held around the world, Colombia will once again be sitting at the conference table, not reading about it in the press the following day. Within a year I will have the Americans treating us not as a Third World country, but as their equals.'

The crowd roared as Fitzgerald lifted the Leupold 10 Power sniper scope from its place and slid it into the two little grooves on the top of the barrel.

'Within a hundred days you will see changes in our country that Herrera wouldn't have believed possible in a hundred years. Because when I am your President . . .'

Fitzgerald slowly nestled the stock of the Remington 700 into his shoulder. It felt like an old friend. But then, it should have done: every part had been hand-crafted to his exact specifications.

He raised the telescopic sight to the image on the television screen, and lined up the little row of mil dots until they were centred an inch above the heart of the candidate.

' . . . conquer inflation . . .'

Three minutes.

' . . . conquer unemployment . . .'

Fitzgerald breathed out.

' . . . and thereby conquer poverty.'

Fitzgerald counted three . . . two . . . one, then gently squeezed the trigger. He could barely hear the click above the noise of the crowd.

Fitzgerald lowered the rifle, rose from the sofa and put the empty leather case down. It would be another ninety seconds before Guzman reached his ritual condemnation of President Lawrence.

He removed one of the hollow-point bullets from its little leather slot inside the lid of the case. He broke the stock and slipped the bullet into its chamber, then snapped the barrel shut with a firm upward movement.

'This will be a last chance for the citizens of Colombia to reverse the disastrous failures of the past,' cried Guzman, his voice rising with every word. 'So we must be sure of one thing . . .'

'One minute,' murmured Fitzgerald. He could repeat word for word the final sixty seconds of a Guzman speech. He turned his attention from the television and walked slowly across the room towards the french windows.

' . . . that we do not waste this golden opportunity . . .'

Fitzgerald pulled back the lace curtain that obscured the view of the outside world, and stared across the Plaza de Bolívar to the north side of the square, where the presidential candidate was standing on the top step of the Congress building, looking down on the crowd. He was about to deliver his *coup de grâce*.

Fitzgerald waited patiently. Never leave yourself in the open for longer than is necessary.

'*Viva la Colombia!*' Guzman cried. '*Viva la Colombia!*' the mob screamed back in a frenzy, although many of them were no more than paid flunkies strategically placed among the crowd.

'I love my country,' declared the candidate. Thirty seconds of the speech left. Fitzgerald pushed open the french windows, to be greeted by the full volume of the masses repeating Guzman's every word.

The candidate dropped his voice almost to a whisper: 'And let me make one thing clear – my love of my country is my only reason for wishing to serve as your President.'

For a second time, Fitzgerald pulled the stock of the Remington 700 slowly up into his shoulder. Every eye was looking at the candidate as he boomed out the words, '*Dios guarde a la Colombia!*'

noise became deafening as he raised both arms high in the air to acknowledge the roars of his supporters shouting back, '*Dios guarde a la Colombia!*' Guzman's hands remained triumphantly in the air for several seconds, as they did at the end of every speech. And, as always, for a few moments he remained absolutely still.

Fitzgerald lined up the tiny mil dots until they were an inch above the candidate's heart, and breathed out as he tightened the fingers of his left hand around the stock. 'Three . . . two . . . one,' he murmured under his breath, before gently squeezing the trigger.

Guzman was still smiling as the boat-tailed bullet tore into his chest. A second later he slumped to the ground like a string-less puppet, fragments of bone, muscle and tissue flying in every direction. Blood spurted over those who were standing nearest to him. The last Fitzgerald saw of the candidate was his outstretched arms, as if he were surrendering to an unknown enemy.

Fitzgerald lowered the rifle, broke the stock and quickly closed the french windows. His assignment was completed.

His only problem now was to make sure he didn't break the Eleventh Commandment.



‘SHOULD I SEND a message of condolence to his wife and family?’ asked Tom Lawrence.

‘No, Mr President,’ replied the Secretary of State. ‘I think you should leave that to an Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs. It now looks certain that Antonio Herrera will be the next President of Colombia, so he’ll be the person you’ll have to do business with.’

‘Will you represent me at the funeral? Or should I send the Vice-President?’

‘Neither of us, would be my advice,’ replied the Secretary of State. ‘Our Ambassador in Bogotá can represent you quite adequately. As the funeral will take place this weekend, we couldn’t be expected to be available at such short notice.’

The President nodded. He had become accustomed to Larry Harrington’s matter-of-fact approach to everything, including death. He could only wonder what line Larry would adopt were he himself to be assassinated.

‘If you have a moment, Mr President, I think I should brief you in greater detail on our present policy in Colombia. The press may want to question you on the possible involvement of . . .’

The President was about to interrupt him when there was a knock on the door, and Andy Lloyd entered the room.

It must be eleven o’clock, thought Lawrence. He hadn’t needed a watch since he had appointed Lloyd as his Chief of Staff.

‘Later, Larry,’ said the President. ‘I’m about to give a press conference on the Nuclear, Biological, Chemical and Conventional Arms Reduction Bill, and I can’t imagine many journalists will be interested in the death of a presidential candidate in a country that, let’s face it, most Americans couldn’t even place on a map.’

Harrington said nothing. He didn’t feel it was his responsibility to point out to the President that most Americans still couldn’t place Vietnam on a map either. But once Andy Lloyd had entered the room, Harrington knew that only the declaration of a world war would have given him priority. He gave Lloyd a curt nod and left the Oval Office.

‘Why did I ever appoint that man in the first place?’ Lawrence asked, his eyes fixed on the closed door.

‘Larry was able to deliver Texas, Mr President, at a moment when our internal polls showed that the majority of southerners considered you a northern wimp who would quite happily appoint a homosexual as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.’

‘I probably would,’ said Lawrence, ‘if I thought he was the right man for the job.’

One of the reasons Tom Lawrence had offered his old college friend the post of White House Chief of Staff was that after thirty years, they had no secrets from each other. Andy told it as he saw it, without any suggestion of guile or malice. This endearing quality ensured that he could never hope to be elected to anything himself, and would therefore never be a rival.

The President flicked open the blue file marked 'IMMEDIATE' that Andy had left for him earlier that morning. He suspected that his Chief of Staff had been up most of the night preparing it. He began to go over the questions Andy considered were the most likely to be asked at the midday press conference:

How much taxpayers' money do you anticipate saving by this measure?

'I suppose Barbara Evans will be asking the first question, as usual,' said Lawrence, looking up. 'Do we have any idea what it might be?'

'No, sir,' Lloyd replied. 'But as she's been pressing for an Arms Reduction Bill ever since the day you beat Gore in New Hampshire, she's hardly in a position to complain now that you're ready to deliver it.'

'True. But that won't necessarily stop her asking an unhelpful question.'

Andy nodded his agreement as the President glanced at the next question.

How many Americans will lose their jobs as a result of this?

Lawrence looked up. 'Is there anyone in particular you want me to avoid?'

'The rest of the bastards,' said Lloyd with a grin. 'But when you wrap it up, go to Phil Ansanch.'

'Why Ansanch?'

'He backed the Bill at every stage, and he's among your dinner guests tonight.'

The President smiled and nodded as he continued to run his finger down the list of anticipated questions. He stopped at number seven.

Isn't this another example of America losing its way?

He looked up at his Chief of Staff. 'Sometimes I think we're still living in the Wild West, the way certain members of Congress have reacted to this Bill.'

'I agree, sir. But as you know, 40 per cent of Americans still consider the Russians our greatest threat, and nearly 30 per cent expect us to go to war with Russia in their lifetime.'

Lawrence cursed, and ran a hand through his thick, prematurely grey hair before returning to the list of questions, stopping again when he reached nineteen.

'How much longer am I going to be asked questions about burning my draft card?'

'As long as you're the Commander-in-Chief, would be my guess,' replied Andy.

The President mumbled something under his breath and moved on to the next question. He looked up again. 'Surely there's no chance of Victor Zerimski becoming the next President of Russia?'

'Probably not,' said Andy, 'but he's moved up to third place in the latest opinion poll, and although he's still well behind Prime Minister Chernopov and General Borodin, his stand against organised crime is beginning to make a dent in their leads. Probably because most Russians believe Chernopov is financed by the Russian Mafya.'

'What about the General?'

'He's been losing ground, since most of the Russian army haven't been paid for months. The press have been reporting that soldiers are selling their uniforms to tourists on the streets.'

'Thank God the election's still a couple of years away. If it looked as if that fascist Zerimski had the slightest chance of becoming the next President of Russia, an Arms Reduction Bill wouldn't get past first base in either House.'

Lloyd nodded as Lawrence turned the page. His finger continued to run down the questions. He stopped at twenty-nine.

'How many members of Congress have weapons manufacturing and base facilities in their

districts?' he asked, looking back up at Lloyd.

'~~Seventy-two Senators and 211 House members,~~' said Lloyd, ~~without having to refer to his~~ unopened file. 'You'll need to convince at least 60 per cent of them to support you to guarantee a majority in both Houses. And that's assuming we can count on Senator Bedell's vote.'

'Frank Bedell was demanding a comprehensive Arms Reduction Bill when I was still in high school in Wisconsin,' said the President. 'He has no choice but to support us.'

'He may still be in favour of the Bill, but he feels you haven't gone far enough. He's just demanded that you reduce our defence expenditure by over 50 per cent.'

'And how does he expect me to pull that off?'

'By withdrawing from NATO and allowing the Europeans to be responsible for their own defence.'

'But that's totally unrealistic,' said Lawrence. 'Even the Americans for Democratic Action would come out against that.'

'You know that, I know that, and I suspect that even the good Senator knows that. But it doesn't stop him appearing on every television station from Boston to Los Angeles, claiming that a 50 per cent reduction in defence expenditure would solve America's health-care and pension problems overnight.'

'I wish Bedell spent as much time worrying about the defence of our people as he does about their health care,' said Lawrence. 'How do I respond?'

'Lavish praise on him for his tireless and distinguished record of defending the interests of the elderly. But then go on to point out that, as long as you are Commander-in-Chief, the United States will never lower its defences. Your first priority will always be to ensure that America remains the most powerful nation on earth, *et cetera, et cetera*. That way we should keep Bedell's vote, and perhaps even sway one or two of the hawks as well.'

The President glanced at his watch before turning to the third page. He gave out a deep sigh when it came to question thirty-one.

How can you hope to get this Bill enacted, when the Democrats don't have a majority in either House?

'OK, Andy. What's the answer to that one?'

'You explain that concerned Americans are making it clear to their elected representatives right across the country that this Bill is long overdue, and no more than common sense.'

'I used that line last time, Andy. For the Drugs Enforcement Bill, remember?'

'Yes, I do remember, Mr President. And the American people backed you all the way.'

Lawrence let out another deep sigh before saying, 'Oh, to govern a nation that doesn't have elections every two years and isn't hounded by a press corps convinced it could do a better job than the democratically elected government.'

'Even the Russians are having to come to terms with the phenomenon of the press corps,' said Lloyd.

'Who would have believed we'd live to see that?' said Lawrence, as he scanned the final question. 'My hunch is that if Chernopov promised the Russian voters that he intended to be the first President to spend more on health care than on defence, he'd romp home.'

'You may be right,' said Lloyd. 'But you can also be certain that if Zerimski were elected, he'd start rebuilding Russia's nuclear arsenal long before he considered building new hospitals.'

'That's for sure,' said the President. 'But as there's no chance of that maniac being elected . . .'

Andy Lloyd remained silent.



FITZGERALD KNEW that the next twenty minutes would decide his fate.

He walked quickly across the room and glanced at the television. The crowd were fleeing from the square in every direction. Noisy elation had turned to blind panic. Two of Ricardo Guzman's advisors were bending over what remained of his body.

Fitzgerald retrieved the spent cartridge and replaced it in its slot inside the leather case. Would the owner of the pawn shop notice that one of the bullets had been used?

From the other side of the square, the unmistakable whine of a police siren rose above the noise of the screaming crowd. This time the response had been a lot quicker.

Fitzgerald unclipped the viewfinder and placed it in its sculpted slot. He then unscrewed the barrel, slipped it into position, and finally replaced the stock.

He glanced at the television screen for the last time and watched the local *policia* pouring into the square. He grabbed the leather case, pocketed a book of matches from an ashtray on top of the television, then crossed the room and opened the door.

He looked up and down the empty corridor, then walked quickly in the direction of the freight elevator. He jabbed the little white button on the wall several times. He had unlocked the window that led to the fire escape only moments before he left for the pawn shop, but he knew that if he had to fall back on his contingency plan, a posse of uniformed police would probably be waiting for him at the bottom of the rickety metal staircase. There would be no Rambo-type helicopter, blades whirring, offering him an escape to glory as bullets flew past his ears, hitting everything except him. This was the real world.

When the heavy lift doors slid slowly open, Fitzgerald came face to face with a young waiter in a red jacket carrying an overloaded lunch tray. He had obviously drawn the short straw, and not been given the afternoon off to watch the match.

The waiter was unable to hide his surprise at the sight of a guest standing outside the freight elevator. 'No, señor, perdone, no puede entrar,' he tried to explain as Fitzgerald brushed past him. But the guest had jabbed the button marked '*Planta Baja*' and the doors had closed long before the young man could tell him that particular lift ended up in the kitchen.

When he reached the ground floor, Fitzgerald moved deftly between the stainless steel tables covered with row upon row of *hors d'oeuvres* waiting to be ordered, and bottles of champagne that would only be uncorked if the home side won. He had reached the far end of the kitchen, pushed his way through the swing doors and disappeared out of sight long before any of the white-clad staff could think of protesting. He ran down a poorly-lit corridor – he had removed most of the lightbulbs from their sockets the previous night – to a heavy door that led to the hotel's underground car park.

He removed a large key from his jacket pocket, closed the door behind him and locked it. He headed straight for a small black Volkswagen parked in the darkest corner. He took a second, smaller key from his trouser pocket, unlocked the car's door, slipped behind the wheel, placed the leather case under the passenger seat and turned on the ignition. The engine immediately sprang into life, even though it had not been used for the past three days. He revved the accelerator for a few seconds before easing the gear lever into first.

Fitzgerald manoeuvred the vehicle unhurriedly between the rows of parked cars and drove up the steep ramp out onto the street. He paused at the top of the slope. The *policia* were breaking into a parked car, and didn't even glance in his direction. He turned left and headed slowly away from the Plaza de Bolívar.

And then he heard the whining sound behind him. He glanced at the rear-view mirror to see two *policia* outriders bearing down on him, their flashing lights full on. Fitzgerald pulled over to the side of the road as the outriders and the ambulance carrying Guzman's lifeless body sped past him.

He took the next left down a side street and began a long, circuitous route to the pawn shop, often doubling back on himself. Twenty-four minutes later he drove into an alley and parked behind a truck. He retrieved the battered leather case from under the passenger seat and left the car unlocked. He planned to be back behind the wheel in less than two minutes.

He quickly checked up and down the alley. There was no one in sight.

Once again as Fitzgerald entered the building, the alarm went off. But this time he was not worried about the speedy arrival of a passing patrol – most of the *policia* would be fully occupied, either at the stadium, where the game was due to kick off in half an hour, or arresting anyone who was still within a mile of the Plaza de Bolívar.

Fitzgerald closed the back door of the pawn shop behind him. For the second time that day he moved quickly through the rear office and, sweeping back the bead curtains, stopped behind the counter. He checked for passers-by before returning the battered leather case to its original place in the window.

When Escobar returned to the shop on Monday morning, how long would it be before he discovered that one of the six boat-tailed magnum bullets had been fired, and only the casing remained in place? And even then, would he bother to pass on the information to the police?

Fitzgerald was back behind the wheel of the Volkswagen in less than ninety seconds. He could still hear the clanging alarm as he drove onto the main street and began to follow the signs for Aeropuerto El Dorada. No one showed the slightest interest in him. After all, the game was just about to kick off. In any case, what possible connection could there be between an alarm going off in a pawn shop in the San Victorina district and the assassination of a presidential candidate in the Plaza de Bolívar?

Once Fitzgerald had reached the highway, he stuck to the centre lane, never once exceeding the speed limit. Several police cars shot past him, on their way into the city. Even if anyone had stopped him to check his papers, they would have found that everything was in order. The packed suitcase on the back seat would reveal nothing unusual for a businessman who was visiting Colombia to sell mining equipment.

Fitzgerald slipped off the highway when he reached the exit for the airport. After a quarter of a mile he suddenly swung right and drove into the parking lot of the San Sebastian hotel. He opened the glove compartment and removed a much-stamped passport. With the book of matches he had taken from the El Belvedere, he set Dirk van Rensberg alight. When his fingers were about to be burnt, he opened the car door, dropped the remains of the passport on the ground and stamped out the flames, making sure the South African crest was still recognisable. He put the matches on the passenger seat, grabbed his suitcase from the back and slammed the door closed, leaving the keys in the ignition. He walked towards the front door of the hotel and deposited the remains of Dirk van Rensberg's passport and a

large, heavy key in the litter bin at the bottom of the steps.

Fitzgerald pushed through the revolving doors behind a group of Japanese businessmen, and remained in their slipstream as they were ushered towards an open elevator. He was the only passenger to step out on the third floor. He headed straight for room 347, where he extracted another plastic card that unlocked another room, booked in another name. He tossed the suitcase onto the bed and checked his watch. One hour and seventeen minutes until take-off.

He removed his jacket and threw it over the only chair, then opened the suitcase and took out a washbag before disappearing into the bathroom. It was some time before the water was warm enough for him to place the plug in the basin. While he waited he cut his nails, then he scrubbed his hands as thoroughly as a surgeon preparing for an operation.

It took Fitzgerald twenty minutes to remove every trace of his week-old beard, and several handfuls of shampoo needed to be rubbed in firmly under the warm shower before his hair returned to its natural wavy state and sandy colour.

Fitzgerald dried himself as best he could with the single thin towel the hotel had provided, then returned to the bedroom and put on a clean pair of jockey shorts. He walked over to the chest of drawers on the far side of the room, pulled open the third drawer and felt about until he found the packet taped to the drawer above. Although he hadn't occupied the room for several days, he was confident that no one would have come across his hiding place.

Fitzgerald ripped open the brown envelope and quickly checked its contents. Another passport in yet another name. Five hundred dollars in used notes and a first-class ticket to Cape Town. Escaping assassins don't travel first class. Five minutes later he left room 347, his old clothes strewn all over the floor and a '*Favor de no Molestar*' sign on the door.

Fitzgerald took the guest elevator to the ground floor, confident that no one would give a fifty-one year-old man in a blue denim shirt, striped tie, sports jacket and grey flannels a second look. He stepped out of the elevator and strolled across the lobby, making no attempt to check out. When he'd arrived eight days earlier, he had paid cash in advance for the room. He had left the mini-bar locked, and never once rung room service, made an outside call or watched a pay film. There would be no extra charges on this guest's account.

He only had to wait for a few minutes before the shuttle bus swept up to the entrance. He checked his watch. Forty-three minutes to take-off. He wasn't at all anxious about missing Aeroperu's Flight 63 to Lima. He felt sure nothing was going to run on time that day.

Once the bus had dropped him at the airport he made his way slowly in the direction of the check-in counter, where he was not surprised to be told that the flight to Lima had been held up by over an hour. Several *policia* in the overcrowded, chaotic departures hall were suspiciously eyeing every passenger, and although he was stopped and questioned several times, and his case searched twice, he was eventually allowed to proceed to Gate 47.

He slowed his pace when he saw a couple of backpackers being dragged off by airport security staff. He idly wondered just how many innocent unshaven male Caucasians would spend the night being questioned in cells because of his actions earlier that afternoon.

When Fitzgerald joined the queue that led to Passport Control, he repeated his new name under his breath. It was his third that day. The blue-uniformed official in the little cubicle flicked open the New Zealand passport and carefully studied the photograph inside, which bore an undeniable resemblance to the smartly dressed man standing in front of him. He handed back the passport and allowed Alistair Douglas, a civil engineer from Christchurch, to stroll through to the departure lounge. After a further delay, the flight was finally called. A stewardess guided Mr Douglas to his seat in the first-class section.

'Would you care for a glass of champagne, sir?'

Fitzgerald shook his head. 'No, thank you. A glass of still water will be just fine,' he replied, trying to put out his New Zealand accent.

He fastened his seatbelt, sat back and pretended to read the in-flight magazine as the aircraft began its slow progress down the bumpy runway. Because of the extended line of planes waiting to take off in front of them, there was enough time for Fitzgerald to choose the dishes he would eat and the movie he would watch long before the 727 began its acceleration for takeoff. When the wheels finally left the ground, Fitzgerald started to relax for the first time that day.

Once the aircraft had reached its cruising altitude, he disposed of the in-flight magazine, closed his eyes, and began to think about what needed to be done once he landed in Cape Town.

'This is your captain speaking,' said a sombre voice. 'I have an announcement to make which I know will cause some of you considerable distress.' Fitzgerald sat bolt upright. The one eventuality he hadn't planned for was an unscheduled return to Bogotá.

'I'm sorry to have to inform you that a national tragedy has taken place in Colombia today.'

Fitzgerald lightly gripped the armrest of his seat and concentrated on breathing evenly.

The captain hesitated for a moment. 'My friends,' he declared gravely, 'Colombia has suffered a terrible loss.' He paused. 'Our national team has been defeated by Brazil, by two goals to one.'

An audible groan went through the cabin, as if crashing into the nearest mountain would have been a preferable alternative. Fitzgerald allowed the suggestion of a smile to cross his lips.

The stewardess reappeared by his side. 'Can I fix a drink for you now we're on our way, Mr Douglas?'

'Thank you,' Fitzgerald replied. 'I think I'll have that glass of champagne after all.'



AS TOM LAWRENCE ENTERED the packed room, the press corps rose to their feet.

‘The President of the United States,’ declared the Press Secretary, just in case there was a visitor from outer space.

Lawrence climbed the one step up to the podium and placed Andy Lloyd’s blue file on the lectern. He waved at the assembled journalists in a now-familiar gesture to let them know they could resume their seats.

‘I am delighted to announce,’ began the President, sounding relaxed, ‘that I will be sending to Congress a Bill which I promised the American people during the election campaign.’

Few of the senior White House correspondents seated in front of him wrote down a word, as most of them knew that if there was going to be a story worth printing, it was much more likely to come during the question-and-answer session than from any prepared statement. In any case, the President’s opening remarks would be handed to them in a press kit as they left the room. Old pros only fell back on the prepared text when they had to fill extra column inches.

This did not stop the President from reminding them that the passing of an Arms Reduction Bill would allow him to release more revenue for long-term health care, so that elderly Americans could expect a better standard of living during their retirement.

‘This is a Bill that will be welcomed by any decent, caring citizen, and I am proud to be the President who will guide it through Congress.’ Lawrence looked up and smiled hopefully, feeling satisfied that his opening statement at least had gone well.

Shouts of ‘Mr President!’ came from every direction as Lawrence opened his blue file and glanced down at the thirty-one likely questions. He looked up and smiled at a familiar face in the front row. ‘Barbara,’ he said, pointing to the veteran UPI journalist whose right it was, as the doyenne of the press corps, to ask the first question.

Barbara Evans rose slowly to her feet. ‘Thank you, Mr President.’ She paused for a moment before asking, ‘Are you able to confirm that the CIA had no involvement in the assassination of the Colombian presidential candidate, Ricardo Guzman, in Bogotá on Saturday?’

A buzz of interest rippled around the room. Lawrence stared down at the redundant thirty-one questions and answers, wishing he hadn’t dismissed Larry Harrington’s offer of a more detailed briefing quite so casually.

‘I’m glad you asked that question, Barbara,’ he responded, without missing a beat. ‘Because I want you to know that while I’m President, such a suggestion doesn’t even arise. This administration would

never in any circumstances interfere with the democratic process of a sovereign state. In fact, only this morning, I instructed the Secretary of State to call Mr Guzman's widow and pass on my personal condolences.'

Lawrence was relieved that Barbara Evans had mentioned the dead man's name, because otherwise he wouldn't have been able to recall it. 'It may also be of interest to you to know, Barbara, that I have already asked the Vice-President to represent me at the funeral, which I understand will be held in Bogotá this weekend.'

Pete Dowd, the Secret Service agent in charge of the Presidential Protective Division, immediately left the room to warn the Vice-President before the press got to him.

Barbara Evans looked unconvinced, but before she could follow up with a second question the President had turned his attention to a man standing in the back row who, he hoped, would have no interest in the presidential election in Colombia. But once he had asked his question, Lawrence began to wish he had. 'What chance does your Arms Reduction Bill have of becoming law if Victor Zerimski looks likely to be the next Russian President?'

For the next forty minutes Lawrence answered several questions about the Nuclear, Biological, Chemical and Conventional Arms Reduction Bill, but they were interspersed with demands to be told about the CIA's current role in South America, and how he would deal with Victor Zerimski should he become the next Russian President. As it became all too apparent that Lawrence didn't know a great deal more than they did about either subject, the hacks, scenting blood, began to badger him on them to the exclusion of all others, including the Arms Reduction Bill.

When Lawrence at last received a sympathetic question from Phil Ansanch on the subject of the Bill, he gave a long, discursive reply, and then without warning wrapped up the press conference by smiling down at the baying journalists and saying, 'Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. It's been a pleasure, as always.' Without another word he turned his back on them, quickly left the room and headed in the direction of the Oval Office.

The moment Andy Lloyd had caught up with him, the President growled under his breath, 'I need to speak to Larry Harrington immediately. As soon as you've tracked him down, call Langley. I want the Director of the CIA in my office within the hour.'

'I wonder, Mr President, if it might be wiser . . .' began the Chief of Staff.

'Within the hour, Andy,' said the President, not even looking at him. 'If I find out that the CIA had any involvement in that assassination in Colombia, I'll hang Dexter out to dry.'

'I'll ask the Secretary of State to join you immediately, Mr President,' said Lloyd. He disappeared into a side office, picked up the nearest phone and dialled Larry Harrington at the State Department. Even over the phone the Texan was unable to disguise his pleasure at being proved right so quickly.

When Lloyd had put the phone down, he made his way back to his own office, closed the door and sat silently at his desk for a few moments. Once he had thought through exactly what he needed to say he dialled a number that only one person ever answered.

'The Director,' was all Helen Dexter said.



Connor Fitzgerald handed over his passport to the Australian customs official. It would have been ironic if the document had been challenged, because for the first time in three weeks he was using his real name. The uniformed officer tapped out the details on his keyboard, checked the computer screen and then pressed a few more keys.

Nothing untoward appeared, so he stamped the tourist visa and said, 'Hope you enjoy your visit to Australia, Mr Fitzgerald.'

Connor thanked him and walked through to the baggage hall, where he took a seat opposite the

motionless console and waited for his luggage to appear. He never allowed himself to be the first to pass through customs, even when he had nothing to declare.

When he had landed in Cape Town the previous day, Connor had been met off the plane by his old friend and colleague Carl Koeter. Carl had spent the next couple of hours debriefing him before they enjoyed a long lunch discussing Carl's divorce and what Maggie and Tara were up to. It was the second bottle of 1982 Rustenberg Cabernet Sauvignon that nearly caused Connor to miss his flight to Sydney. In the duty-free shop he hurriedly chose presents for his wife and daughter that were clearly stamped 'Made in South Africa'. Even his passport gave no clue that he had arrived in Cape Town via Bogota, Lima and Buenos Aires.

As he sat in the baggage collection zone waiting for the console to start up, he began to think about the life he had been leading for the past twenty-eight years.



Connor Fitzgerald had been brought up in a family dedicated to the cause of law and order.

His paternal grandfather, Oscar, named after another Irish poet, had emigrated to America from Kilkenny at the turn of the century. Within hours of landing at Ellis Island he had headed straight for Chicago, to join his cousin in the police department.

During Prohibition Oscar Fitzgerald was among the small band of cops who refused to take bribes from the mob. As a result he failed to rise above the rank of sergeant. But Oscar did sire five Godfearing sons, and only gave up when the local priest told him it was the Almighty's will that he and Mary wouldn't be blessed with a daughter. His wife was grateful for Father O'Reilly's words of wisdom – it was difficult enough raising five strapping lads on a sergeant's salary. Mind you, if Oscar had ever given her one cent more than she was entitled to from his weekly pay packet, Mary would have wanted to know in great detail where it came from.

On leaving high school, three of Oscar's boys joined the Chicago PD, where they quickly gained the promotion their father had deserved. Another took holy orders, which pleased Mary, and the youngest Connor's father, studied criminal justice at De Paul on the GI Bill. After graduating, he joined the FBI. In 1949 he married Katherine O'Keefe, a girl who lived two doors away on South Lowe Street. They only had one child, a son, whom they christened Connor.

Connor was born in Chicago General Hospital on 8 February 1951, and even before he was old enough to attend the local Catholic school it had become clear that he was going to be a gifted football player. Connor's father was delighted when his son became captain of the Mount Carmel High School team, but his mother still kept him working late into the night, to make sure he always completed his homework. 'You can't play football for the rest of your life,' she continually reminded him.

The combination of a father who stood whenever a woman entered the room and a mother who verged on being a saint had left Connor, despite his physical prowess, shy in the presence of the opposite sex. Several girls at Mount Carmel High had made it only too obvious how they felt about him, but he didn't lose his virginity until he met Nancy in his senior year. Shortly after he had led Mount Carmel to another victory one autumn afternoon, Nancy had taken him behind the bleachers and seduced him. It would have been the first time he'd ever seen a naked woman, if she'd taken off all her clothes.

About a month later, Nancy asked him if he'd like to try two girls at once.

'I haven't even had two girls, let alone at once,' he told her. Nancy didn't seem impressed, and moved on.

When Connor won a scholarship to Notre Dame, he didn't take up any of the numerous offers that came the way of all the members of the football team. His team-mates seemed to take great pride in scratching the names of the girls who had succumbed to their charms on the inside of their locker

doors. Brett Coleman, the team's place-kicker, had seventeen names inside his locker by the end of the first semester. The rule, he informed Connor, was that only penetration counted: 'The locker doors just aren't big enough to include oral sex.' At the end of his first year, 'Nancy' was still the only name Connor had scratched up. After practice one evening he checked through the other lockers, and discovered that Nancy's name appeared on almost every one of them, occasionally bracketed with the name of another girl. The rest of the team would have given him hell for his low scoring if he hadn't been the best freshman quarterback Notre Dame had seen for a decade.

It was during Connor's first few days as a sophomore that everything changed.

When he turned up for his weekly session at the Irish Dance Club, she was putting on her shoes. He couldn't see her face, but that didn't matter much, because he was unable to take his eyes off those long, slim legs. As a football hero, he had become used to girls staring at him, but now the one girl he wanted to impress didn't seem aware that he even existed. To make matters worse, when she stepped onto the dance floor, she was partnered by Declan O'Casey, who had no rival as a dancer. They both held their backs rigidly straight, and their feet moved with a lightness Connor could never hope to match.

When the number came to an end, Connor still hadn't discovered her name. And, worse, she and Declan had left before he could find some way of being introduced to her. In desperation, he decided to follow them back to the women's dorms, walking fifty yards behind and always remaining in the shadows, just as his father had taught him. He grimaced as they held hands and chatted happily. When they reached Le Mans Hall she kissed Declan on the cheek and disappeared inside. Why, he wondered, hadn't he concentrated more on dancing and less on football?

After Declan had headed off in the direction of the men's dorms, Connor began to stroll casually up and down the sidewalk below the dormitory windows, wondering if there was anything he could do. He finally caught a glimpse of her in a dressing gown as she drew the curtain, and hung around for a few more minutes before reluctantly returning to his room. He sat on the end of his bed and began composing a letter to his mother, telling her that he had seen the girl he was going to marry, although he hadn't actually spoken to her yet – and come to think of it, he didn't even know her name. As Connor licked the envelope, he tried to convince himself that Declan O'Casey was nothing more to him than a dancing partner.

During the week, he tried to find out as much as he could about her, but he picked up very little other than that she was called Maggie Burke, had won a scholarship to St Mary's, and was in her freshman year studying Art History. He cursed the fact that he had never entered an art gallery in his life; in fact the nearest he'd come to painting was whenever his father asked him to touch up the fence surrounding their little back yard on South Lowe Street. Declan, it turned out, had been dating Maggie since her last year at school, and was not only the best dancer in the club, but was also considered the university's brightest mathematician. Other institutions were already offering him fellowships to pursue a postgraduate degree, even before the results of his final exams were known. Connor could only hope that Declan would be offered an irresistible post far away from South Bend as soon as possible.

Connor was the first to turn up at the dance club the following Thursday, and when Maggie appeared from the changing room in her cream cotton blouse and short black skirt, the only question he had to consider was whether to stare up into those green eyes or down at her long legs. Once again she was partnered by Declan all evening, while Connor sat mutely on a bench, trying to pretend he wasn't aware of her presence. After the final number the two of them slipped off. Once again Connor followed them back to Le Mans Hall, but this time he noticed that she wasn't holding Declan's hand.

After a long chat and another kiss on the cheek, Declan disappeared off in the direction of the men's dorms. Connor slumped down on a bench opposite her window and stared up at the balcony of the

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