

JEFFREY ARCHER

THE CLIFTON CHRONICLES

VOLUME FIVE

MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

MACMILLAN



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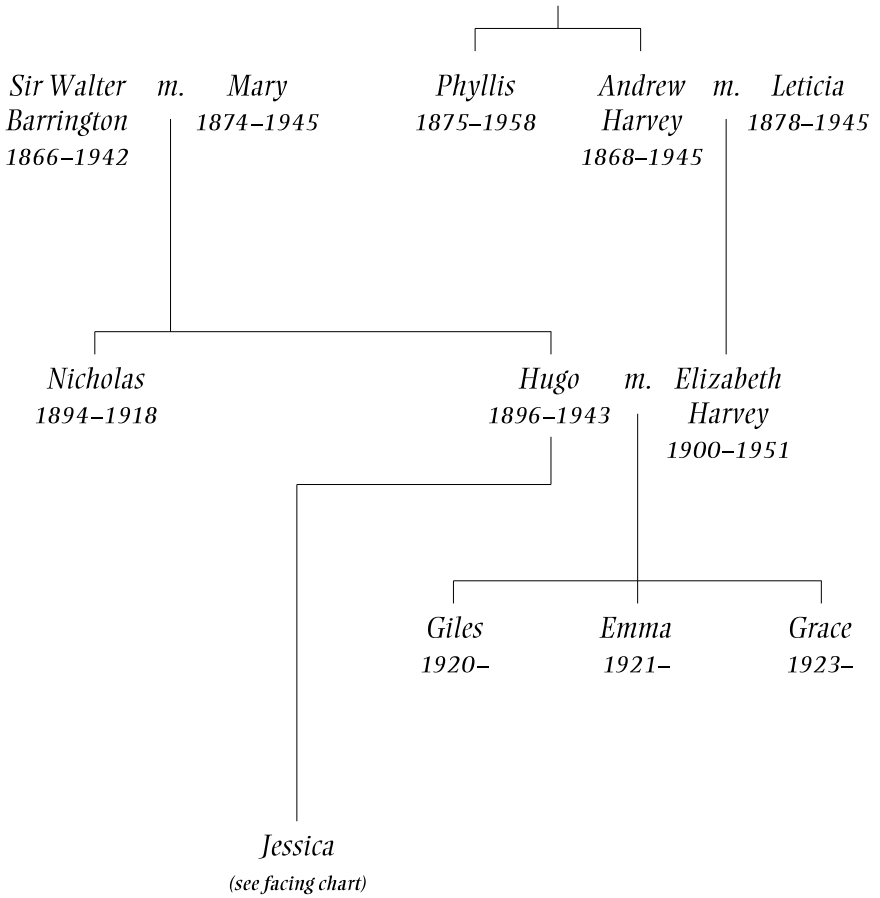
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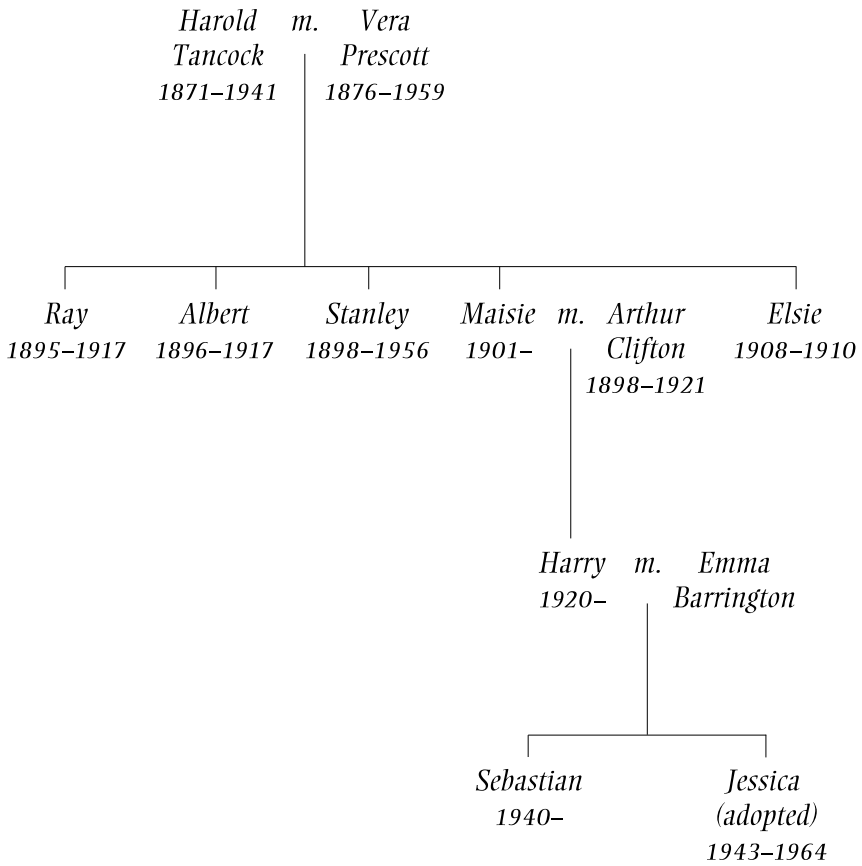
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THE BARRINGTONS



THE CLIFTONS



Beneath the rule of men entirely great
The pen is mightier than the sword

EDWARD BULWER-LYTTON 1803–1873

PROLOGUE

OCTOBER 1964

Brendan didn't knock on the cabin door, just turned the handle and slipped inside, looking back as he did so to be sure no one had seen him. He didn't want to have to explain what a young man from cabin class was doing in an elderly peer's room at that time of night. Not that anyone would have commented.

'Are we likely to be interrupted?' asked Brendan once he had closed the door.

'No one will disturb us before seven tomorrow morning, and by then there will be nothing left to disturb.'

'Good,' said Brendan. He dropped on his knees, unlocked the large trunk, pulled open its lid and studied the complex piece of machinery that had taken him over a month to construct. He spent the next half hour checking that there were no loose wires, that every dial was at its correct setting, and that the clock started at the flick of a switch. Not until he was satisfied that everything was in perfect working order did he get back off his knees.

'It's ready,' he said. 'When do you want it activated?'

'Three a.m. And I'll need thirty minutes to remove all this,' the elderly peer added, touching his double chin, 'if I'm to have enough time to get to my other cabin.'

Brendan returned to the trunk and set the timer for three o'clock. 'All you have to do is flick the switch just before you

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leave, and double-check that the second hand is moving, then you'll have thirty minutes.'

'So what can go wrong?'

'If the lilies are still in Mrs Clifton's cabin, nothing. No one on this corridor, and probably no one on the deck below, can hope to survive. There's six pounds of dynamite embedded in the soil beneath those flowers, far more than we need, but at least that way we can be sure of collecting our money.'

'Have you got my key?'

'Yes,' said Brendan. 'Cabin 706. You'll find your new passport and ticket under the pillow.'

'Anything else I ought to be worrying about?'

'No. Just make sure the second hand is moving before you leave.'

Doherty smiled. 'See you back in Belfast.'



Harry unlocked the cabin door and stood aside to allow Emma to enter first.

She bent down to smell the lilies the Queen Mother had sent to celebrate the launch of MV *Buckingham*. 'I'm exhausted,' she said, standing up. 'I don't know how the Queen Mother manages it day in and day out.'

'It's what she does, and she's good at it, but I bet she'd be exhausted if she tried a few days of being chairman of Barrington's.'

'I'd still rather have my job than hers,' said Emma as she stepped out of her dress, and hung it up in the wardrobe before disappearing into the bathroom.

Harry read the card from HRH the Queen Mother once again. Such a personal message. Emma had already decided to put the vase in her office when they got back to Bristol, and to fill it with lilies every Monday morning. Harry smiled. And why not?

When Emma came out of the bathroom, Harry took her place and closed the door behind him. She slipped off her dressing gown and climbed into bed, far too tired even to consider reading a few pages of *The Spy Who Came In From The*

PROLOGUE

Cold, by a new author Harry had recommended. She switched off the light by the side of her bed and said, ‘Goodnight, darling,’ even though she knew Harry couldn’t hear her.

By the time Harry came out of the bathroom, she was sound asleep. He tucked her in as if she were a child, kissed her on the forehead and whispered, ‘Goodnight, my darling,’ then climbed into his bed, amused by her gentle purr. He would never have dreamed of suggesting that she snored.

He lay awake, so proud of her. The launch of the new liner couldn’t have gone better. He turned on his side, assuming he’d drift off within moments but, although his eyes were leaden and he felt exhausted, he couldn’t get to sleep. Something wasn’t right.



Another man, now safely back in cabin class, was also wide awake. Although it was three in the morning and his job was done, he wasn’t trying to sleep. He was just about to go to work.

Always the same anxieties whenever you have to wait. Had you left any clues that would lead straight to you? Had you made any mistakes that would cause the operation to end in failure and make you a laughing stock back home? He wouldn’t relax until he was on a lifeboat and, better still, on another ship heading towards another port.

Five minutes and fourteen seconds . . .

He knew his compatriots, soldiers in the same cause, would be just as nervous as he was.

The waiting was always the worst part, out of your control, no longer anything you could do.

Four minutes and eleven seconds . . .

Worse than a football match when you’re one-nil up but you know the other side are stronger and well capable of scoring in injury time. He recalled his area commander’s instructions: when the alarm goes off, be sure you’re among the first on deck, and the first in the lifeboats, because by this time tomorrow, they’ll be searching for anyone under the age of thirty-five with an Irish accent, so keep your mouths shut, boys.

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Three minutes and forty seconds . . . thirty-nine . . .

He stared at the cabin door and imagined the worst that could possibly happen. The bomb wouldn't go off, the door would burst open and a dozen police thugs, possibly more, would come charging in, batons flailing in every direction, not caring how many times they hit him. But all he could hear was the rhythmical pounding of the engine as the *Buckingham* continued its sedate passage across the Atlantic on its way to New York. A city it would never reach.

Two minutes and thirty-four seconds . . . thirty-three . . .

He began to imagine what it would be like once he was back on the Falls Road. Young lads in short trousers would look up in awe as he passed them on the street, their only ambition to be like him when they grew up. The hero who had blown up the *Buckingham* only a few weeks after it had been named by the Queen Mother. No mention of innocent lives lost; there are no innocent lives when you believe in a cause. In fact, he'd never meet any of the passengers in the cabins on the upper decks. He would read all about them in tomorrow's papers, and if he'd done his job properly there would be no mention of his name.

One minute and twenty-two seconds . . . twenty-one . . .

What could possibly go wrong now? Would the device, constructed in an upstairs bedroom on the Dungannon estate, let him down at the last minute? Was he about to suffer the silence of failure?

Sixty seconds . . .

He began to whisper each number.

'Fifty-nine, fifty-eight, fifty-seven, fifty-six . . .'

Had the drunken man slumped in the chair in the lounge been waiting for him all the time? Were they now on the way to his cabin?

'Forty-nine, forty-eight, forty-seven, forty-six . . .'

Had the lilies been replaced, thrown out, taken away? Perhaps Mrs Clifton was allergic to pollen?

'Thirty-nine, thirty-eight, thirty-seven, thirty-six . . .'

Had they unlocked his lordship's room and found the open trunk?

PROLOGUE

‘Twenty-nine, twenty-eight, twenty-seven, twenty-six . . .’

Were they already searching the ship for the man who’d slipped out of the toilet in the first-class lounge?

‘Nineteen, eighteen, seventeen, sixteen . . .’

Had they . . . he clung to the edge of the bunk, closed his eyes and began counting out loud.

‘Nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one . . .’

He stopped counting and opened his eyes. Nothing. Just the eerie silence that always follows failure. He bowed his head and prayed to a God he did not believe in, and immediately there followed an explosion of such ferocity that he was thrown against the cabin wall like a leaf in a storm. He staggered to his feet and smiled when he heard the screaming. He could only wonder how many passengers on the upper deck could possibly have survived.

HARRY AND EMMA

1964–1965

1

‘HRH,’ MUMBLED HARRY as he came out of a drowsy half-sleep. He sat up with a start and switched on his bedside light, then slipped out of bed and walked quickly across to the vase of lilies. He read the message from the Queen Mother for a second time. *Thank you for a memorable day in Bristol. I do hope my second home has a successful maiden voyage.* It was signed, *HRH Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother.*

‘Such a simple mistake,’ said Harry. ‘How could I have missed it?’ He grabbed his dressing gown and switched on the cabin lights.

‘Is it time to get up already?’ enquired a sleepy voice.

‘Yes it is,’ said Harry. ‘We’ve got a problem.’

Emma squinted at her bedside clock. ‘But it’s only just gone three,’ she protested, looking across at her husband, who was still staring intently at the lilies. ‘So what’s the problem?’

‘HRH isn’t the Queen Mother’s title.’

‘Everyone knows that,’ said Emma, still half asleep.

‘Everyone except the person who sent these flowers. Why didn’t they know that the correct way to address the Queen Mother is as Her Majesty, not Her Royal Highness. That’s how you address a princess.’

Emma reluctantly got out of bed, padded across to join her husband, and studied the card for herself.

‘Ask the captain to join us immediately,’ said Harry. ‘We need to find out what’s in that vase,’ he added, before falling to his knees.

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‘It’s probably only water,’ said Emma, reaching out a hand.

Harry grabbed her wrist. ‘Look more closely, my darling. The vase is far too big for something as delicate as a dozen lilies. Call the captain,’ he repeated, with more urgency this time.

‘But the florist could just have made a mistake.’

‘Let’s hope so,’ Harry said as he began to walk towards the door. ‘But it’s not a risk we can afford to take.’

‘Where are you going?’ asked Emma as she picked up the phone.

‘To wake Giles. He has more experience with explosives than I do. He spent two years of his life planting them at the feet of advancing Germans.’

When Harry stepped into the corridor he was distracted by the sight of an elderly man disappearing in the direction of the grand staircase. He was moving far too quickly for an old man, Harry thought. He knocked firmly on Giles’s cabin door, but it took a second demanding bang with his clenched fist before a sleepy voice said, ‘Who’s that?’

‘Harry.’

The urgency in his voice caused Giles to jump out of bed and open the door immediately. ‘What’s the problem?’

‘Come with me,’ said Harry without explanation.

Giles pulled on his dressing gown and followed his brother-in-law down the corridor and into the stateroom.

‘Good morning, sis,’ he said to Emma, as Harry handed him the card and said, ‘HRH.’

‘Got it,’ said Giles after studying the card. ‘The Queen Mother couldn’t have sent the flowers. But if she didn’t, then who did?’ He bent down and took a closer look at the vase. ‘Whoever it was could have packed an awful lot of Semtex in there.’

‘Or a couple of pints of water,’ said Emma. ‘Are you sure you’re not both worrying about nothing?’

‘If it’s water, why are the flowers already wilting?’ asked Giles as Captain Turnbull knocked on the door before walking into the cabin.

‘You asked to see me, chairman?’

Emma began to explain why her husband and her brother were both on their knees.

‘There are four SAS officers on board,’ said the captain, interrupting the chairman. ‘One of them ought to be able to answer any questions Mr Clifton might have.’

‘I presume it’s no coincidence that they’re on board,’ said Giles. ‘I can’t believe they all decided to take a holiday in New York at the same time.’

‘They’re on board at the request of the cabinet secretary,’ replied the captain. ‘But Sir Alan Redmayne assured me it was just a precautionary measure.’

‘As usual, that man knows something we don’t,’ said Harry.

‘Then perhaps it’s time to find out what it is.’

The captain stepped out of the cabin and made his way quickly down the corridor, stopping only when he reached cabin 119. Colonel Scott-Hopkins responded to the knock on the door far more quickly than Giles had done a few minutes earlier.

‘Do you have a bomb-disposal expert in your team?’

‘Sergeant Roberts. He was with the bomb squad in Palestine.’

‘I need him now, in the chairman’s stateroom.’

The colonel wasted no time asking why. He ran along the corridor and out on to the grand staircase to find Captain Hartley charging towards him.

‘I’ve just spotted Liam Doherty coming out of the lavatory in the first-class lounge.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Yes. He went in as a peer of the realm, and came out twenty minutes later as Liam Doherty. He then headed down to cabin class.’

‘That may explain everything,’ said Scott-Hopkins as he continued down the staircase with Hartley only a pace behind. ‘What’s Roberts’s cabin number?’ he asked on the run.

‘Seven four two,’ said Hartley as they hurdled across the red chain on to the narrower staircase. They didn’t stop until they reached deck seven, where Corporal Crann stepped out of the shadows.

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‘Has Doherty passed you within the last few minutes?’

‘Damn,’ said Crann. ‘I knew I’d seen that bastard swaggering up the Falls Road. He went into seven zero six.’

‘Hartley,’ said the colonel as he charged on down the corridor, ‘you and Crann keep an eye on Doherty. Make sure he doesn’t leave his cabin. If he does, arrest him.’ The colonel banged on the door of cabin 742. Sergeant Roberts didn’t need a second knock. He opened the door within seconds, and greeted Colonel Scott-Hopkins with ‘Good morning, sir,’ as if his commanding officer regularly woke him in the middle of the night, dressed in his pyjamas.

‘Grab your tool kit, Roberts, and follow me. We haven’t a moment to waste,’ said the colonel, once again on the move.

It took Roberts three flights of stairs before he caught up with his commanding officer. By the time they reached the state-room corridor, Roberts knew which of his particular skills the colonel required. He dashed into the chairman’s cabin, and peered closely at the vase for a moment before slowly circling it.

‘If it’s a bomb,’ he said finally, ‘it’s a big one. I can’t begin to guess the number of lives that will be lost if we don’t defuse the bugger.’

‘But can you do it?’ asked the captain, sounding remarkably calm. ‘Because if you can’t, my first responsibility is for the lives of my passengers. I don’t need this trip to be compared with another disastrous maiden voyage.’

‘I can’t do a damn thing unless I can get my hands on the control panel. It has to be somewhere else on the ship,’ said Roberts, ‘probably quite near by.’

‘In his lordship’s cabin would be my bet,’ said the colonel, ‘because we now know that it was occupied by an IRA bomber called Liam Doherty.’

‘Does anyone know which cabin he was in?’ asked the captain.

‘Number three,’ said Harry, recalling the old man who had been moving a little too quickly. ‘Just along the corridor.’

The captain and the sergeant ran out of the room and into the corridor, followed by Scott-Hopkins, Harry and Giles. The

captain opened the cabin door with his pass key and stood aside to let Roberts in. The sergeant walked quickly across to a large trunk in the middle of the room. He tentatively raised the lid and peered inside.

‘Christ, it’s due to detonate in eight minutes and thirty-nine seconds.’

‘Can’t you just disconnect one of those?’ asked Captain Turnbull, pointing to a myriad different coloured wires.

‘Yes, but which one,’ said Roberts, not looking up at the captain as he cautiously separated the red, black, blue and yellow wires. ‘I’ve worked on this type of device many times before. It’s always a one-in-four chance, and that’s not a risk I’m willing to take. I might consider it if I were on my own in the middle of a desert,’ he added, ‘but not on a ship in the middle of the ocean with hundreds of lives at risk.’

‘Then let’s drag Doherty up here post haste,’ suggested Captain Turnbull. ‘He’ll know which wire to cut.’

‘I doubt it,’ said Roberts, ‘because I suspect Doherty isn’t the bomber. They’ll have a sparks on board to do that job, and God knows where he is.’

‘We’re running out of time,’ the colonel reminded them, as he stared at the second hand’s relentless progress. ‘Seven minutes, three, two, one . . .’

‘So, Roberts, what do you advise?’ asked the captain calmly.

‘You’re not going to like this, sir, but there’s only one thing we can do given the circumstances. And even that’s one hell of a risk, remembering we’re down to less than seven minutes.’

‘Then spit it out, man,’ rapped the colonel.

‘Pick the fucking thing up, throw it overboard and pray.’

Harry and Giles ran back to the chairman’s suite and took up positions on either side of the vase. There were several questions that Emma, who was now dressed, wanted to ask, but like any sensible chairman she knew when to remain silent.

‘Lift it gently,’ said Roberts. ‘Treat it like a bowl full of boiling water.’

Like two weightlifters, Harry and Giles crouched down and slowly raised the heavy vase from the table until they were both

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standing upright. Once they were confident they had it firmly in their grasp they moved sideways across the cabin towards the open door. Scott-Hopkins and Roberts quickly removed any obstacles in their path.

‘Follow me,’ said the captain, as the two men stepped into the corridor and edged their way slowly towards the grand staircase. Harry couldn’t believe how heavy the vase was. Then he remembered the giant of a man who’d carried it into the cabin. No wonder he hadn’t hung around for a tip. He was probably on his way back to Belfast by now, or sitting by a radio somewhere waiting to hear the fate of the *Buckingham*, and how many passengers had lost their lives.

Once they reached the bottom of the grand staircase, Harry began to count out loud as the two of them mounted each step. Sixteen steps later, he stopped to catch his breath, while the captain and the colonel held open the swing doors that led out on to the sun deck, Emma’s pride and joy.

‘We need to go as far aft as possible,’ said the captain. ‘That will give us a better chance of avoiding any damage to the hull.’ Harry didn’t look convinced. ‘Don’t worry, it’s not too far now.’

How far is not too far, wondered Harry, who would happily have dumped the vase straight over the side. But he said nothing as they progressed inch by inch towards the stern.

‘I know just how you feel,’ said Giles, reading his brother-in-law’s thoughts.

They continued their snail-like progress past the swimming pool, the deck tennis court and the sun loungers, neatly laid out in readiness for the sleeping guests to appear later that morning. Harry tried not to think how much time they had left before . . .

‘Two minutes,’ said Sergeant Roberts unhelpfully, checking his watch.

Out of the corner of his eye, Harry could see the rail at the stern of the ship. It was only a few paces away, but, like conquering Everest, he knew the last few feet were going to be the slowest.

HARRY AND EMMA

‘Fifty seconds,’ said Roberts as they came to a halt at the waist-high rail.

‘Do you remember when we threw Fisher into the river at the end of term?’ said Giles.

‘Could I ever forget?’

‘So on the count of three, let’s throw him into the ocean and be rid of the bastard once and for all,’ said Giles.

‘One—’ both men swung their arms back, but only managed a few inches, ‘two—’ perhaps a couple more, ‘three—’ as far as they could get, and then, with all the strength left in their bodies, they hurled the vase up into the air and over the back rail. As it came down, Harry was convinced it would land on the deck, or at best hit the rail, but it cleared it by a few inches, and landed in the sea with a faint splash. Giles raised his arms in triumph, and shouted ‘Hallelujah!’

Seconds later, the bomb exploded, hurling them both back across the deck.

2

KEVIN RAFFERTY had switched on the 'For Hire' sign the moment he saw Martinez step out of his house on Eaton Square. His orders couldn't have been clearer. If the client attempted to make a run for it, he was to assume he had no intention of making the second payment owed for the bombing of the *Buckingham*, and should be punished accordingly.

The original order had been sanctioned by the area commander of the IRA in Belfast. The only modification the area commander had agreed to was that Kevin could select which of Don Pedro Martinez's two sons should be eliminated. However, as both Diego and Luis had already fled to Argentina, and clearly had no intention of returning to England, Don Pedro himself was the only candidate available for the chauffeur's particular version of Russian roulette.

'Heathrow,' said Martinez as he climbed into the taxi. Rafferty drove out of Eaton Square and headed down Sloane Street in the direction of Battersea Bridge, ignoring the noisy protests coming from behind him. At four in the morning, with rain still pelting down, he only passed a dozen cars before he crossed the bridge. A few minutes later he pulled up outside a deserted warehouse in Lambeth. Once he was certain there was no one around, he jumped out of the taxi, quickly undid the rusty padlock on the building's outer door and drove inside. He swung the cab round, ready for a fast getaway once the job had been completed.

Rafferty bolted the door and switched on the naked, dust-covered light bulb that hung from a beam in the centre of the

room. He removed a gun from an inside pocket before returning to the taxi. Although he was half Martinez's age, and twice as fit as he had ever been, he couldn't afford to take any risks. When a man thinks he's about to die, the adrenalin begins to pump and he can become super-human in a final effort to survive. Besides, Rafferty suspected this wasn't the first time Martinez had faced the possibility of death. But this time it was no longer going to be simply a possibility.

He opened the back door of the taxi and waved the gun at Martinez to indicate that he should get out.

'This is the money I was bringing to you,' Martinez insisted, holding up the bag.

'Hoping to catch me at Heathrow, were you?' If it was the full amount, Rafferty knew he would have no choice but to spare his life. 'Two hundred and fifty thousand pounds?'

'No, but there's over twenty-three thousand. Just a down payment, you understand. The rest is back at the house, so if we head back—'

The chauffeur knew that the house in Eaton Square, along with Martinez's other assets, had been repossessed by the bank. Martinez had clearly hoped to make it to the airport before the IRA discovered he had no intention of fulfilling his side of the bargain.

Rafferty grabbed the bag and threw it on the back seat of the taxi. He'd decided to make Martinez's death somewhat more protracted than originally planned. After all, he had nothing else to do for the next hour.

He waved the gun in the direction of a wooden chair that had been placed directly below the light bulb. It was already splattered with dried blood from previous executions. He pushed his victim down with considerable force, and before Don Pedro had a chance to react, he had tied his arms behind his back, but then he'd carried out this particular exercise several times before. Finally he tied Martinez's legs together, then stood back to admire his handiwork.

All Rafferty had to decide now was how long the victim

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would be allowed to live. His only constraint being, he had to be at Heathrow in time to catch the early morning flight to Belfast. He checked his watch. He always enjoyed seeing that look on the victim's face when they believed there still might be a chance of survival.

He returned to the taxi, unzipped Martinez's bag and counted the bundles of crisp five-pound notes. At least he'd told the truth about that, even if he was more than £226,000 short. He zipped the bag back up and locked it in the boot. After all, Martinez would no longer have any use for it.

The area commander's orders were clear: once the job had been completed he was to leave the body in the warehouse and another operative would deal with its disposal. The only thing required of Rafferty was to make a phone call and deliver the message, 'Package ready for collection.' After that, he was to drive to the airport and leave the taxi, and the money, on the top level of the long-term car park. Another operative would be responsible for collecting it and distributing the cash.

Rafferty returned to Don Pedro, whose eyes had never left him. If the chauffeur had been given the choice, he would have shot him in the stomach, then waited a few minutes until the screaming died down, before firing a second bullet into his groin. More screaming, probably louder, until he finally forced the gun into his mouth. He would stare into his victim's eyes for several seconds and then, without warning, pull the trigger. But that would have meant three shots. One might go unnoticed, but three would undoubtedly attract attention in the middle of the night. So he would obey the area commander's orders. One shot, and no screaming.

The chauffeur smiled at Don Pedro, who looked up hopefully, until he saw the gun heading towards his mouth.

'Open up,' said Rafferty, like a friendly dentist coaxing a reluctant child. One common factor among all his victims was the chattering teeth.

Martinez resisted, and swallowed one of his front teeth in the unequal struggle. Sweat began to pour down the fleshy folds of skin on his face. He was only made to wait a few more

seconds before the trigger was pulled, but all he heard was the click of the hammer.

Some fainted, some just stared in disbelief, while others were violently sick when they realized they were still alive. Rafferty hated the ones who fainted. It meant he had to wait for them to fully recover before he could begin the whole process again. But Martinez obligingly remained wide awake.

When Rafferty extracted the gun, his idea of a blow job, the victims often smiled, imagining the worst was over. But as he spun the cylinder again, Don Pedro knew he was going to die. It was just a matter of when. Where and how had already been decided.

It always disappointed Rafferty when he succeeded with the first shot. His personal record was nine, but the average was around four or five. Not that he gave a damn about statistics. He thrust the barrel back into Martinez's mouth, and took a step back. After all, he didn't want to be covered in blood. The Argentinian was foolish enough to resist again, and lost another tooth for his trouble, a gold one. Rafferty pocketed it before he squeezed the trigger a second time, but was not rewarded with anything but another click. He pulled out the barrel in the hope of removing another tooth, well, half a tooth.

'Third time lucky,' said Rafferty as he thrust the muzzle back into Martinez's mouth and pulled the trigger. Another failure. The chauffeur was becoming impatient and was now hoping that his morning's work would be completed on the fourth attempt. He spun the cylinder a little more enthusiastically this time, but when he looked up, Martinez had fainted. Such a disappointment. He liked his victims to be wide awake when the bullet entered their brain. Although they only lived for another second, it was an experience he relished. He grabbed Martinez's hair, forced open his mouth and pushed the barrel back inside. He was about to pull the trigger a fourth time, when the telephone in the corner of the room began to ring. The insistent metallic echo in the cold night air took Rafferty by surprise. He had never known the phone to ring before. In the past, he had used it only to dial a number and deliver a four-word message.

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He reluctantly withdrew the muzzle of the gun from Martinez's mouth, walked across to the phone and picked it up. He didn't speak, just listened.

'The mission has been aborted,' said a voice with a clipped, educated accent. 'You won't need to collect the second payment.'

A click, followed by a burr.

Rafferty replaced the receiver. Perhaps he would spin the cylinder one more time, and if he succeeded, report back that Martinez was already dead by the time the phone had rung. He'd only ever lied to the area commander once, and there was a finger missing from his left hand to prove it. He told anyone who asked that it had been chopped off by a British officer during an interrogation, which few on either side believed.

He reluctantly returned the gun to his pocket and walked slowly back towards Martinez, who was slumped in the chair, his head between his legs. He bent down and untied the rope around his wrists and ankles. Martinez collapsed on to the floor in a heap. The chauffeur yanked him up by the hair, threw him over his shoulder as if he were a sack of potatoes and dumped him in the back of the taxi. For a moment, he had rather hoped he might resist, and then . . . but no such luck.

He drove out of the warehouse, locked the door and set off towards Heathrow, to join several other taxi drivers that morning.

They were a couple of miles from the airport when Martinez re-entered this world, and not the next. The chauffeur watched in the rear-view mirror as his passenger began to come round. Martinez blinked several times before staring out of the window to see rows of suburban homes rushing by. As the realization began to sink in, he leant forward and was sick all over the back seat. Rafferty's colleague wouldn't be pleased.

Don Pedro eventually managed to force his limp body upright. He steadied himself by clinging on to the edge of the seat with both hands and stared at his would-be executioner. What had caused him to change his mind? Perhaps he hadn't.

Perhaps only the venue had changed. Don Pedro eased his way forward, hoping to be given just one chance to escape, but he was painfully aware that Rafferty's suspicious eyes returned to the rear-view mirror every few seconds.

Rafferty turned off the main road and followed the signs for the long-term car park. He drove up to the top level and parked in the far corner. He stepped out of the car, unlocked the boot and unzipped the travel bag, pleased again by the sight of the neat rows of crisp five-pound notes. He would have liked to take the cash home for the cause, but he couldn't risk being caught with that amount of money, now there were so many extra security guards observing every flight to Belfast.

He removed an Argentine passport from the bag, along with a first-class, one-way ticket to Buenos Aires and ten pounds in cash, then dropped his gun in the bag; something else he couldn't afford to be caught with. He locked the boot, opened the driver's door and placed the keys and the parking ticket under the seat for a colleague to collect later that morning. Then he opened the rear door and stood aside to allow Martinez to step out, but he didn't move. Was he going to make a run for it? Not if he valued his life. After all, he didn't know that the chauffeur no longer had a gun.

Rafferty grabbed Martinez firmly by the elbow, pulled him out of the car and marched him towards the nearest exit. Two men passed them on the staircase as they made their way down to the ground floor. Rafferty didn't give them a second look.

Neither man spoke on the long walk to the terminal building. When they reached the concourse, Rafferty handed Martinez his passport, his ticket and the two five-pound notes.

'And the rest?' snarled Don Pedro. 'Because your colleagues obviously failed to sink the *Buckingham*.'

'Consider yourself lucky to be alive,' said Rafferty, then turned quickly and disappeared into the crowd.

For a moment, Don Pedro thought about going back to the taxi and retrieving his money, but only for a moment. Instead, he reluctantly headed towards the British Airways

MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

South American desk and handed his ticket to the woman seated behind the counter.

‘Good morning, Mr Martinez,’ she said. ‘I hope you’ve had a pleasant stay in England.’