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POINT OF HONOR

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# **POINT OF HONOR**

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ISBN-13 978-1-60145-196-5

ISBN-10 1-60145-196-2

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2007

# **POINT OF HONOR**

**MAURICE MEDLAND**

# chapter one

“Mr. Blake, sir. The cap’n wants you on the bridge.” The voice behind the flashlight sounded deferential, but insistent.

Daniel Blake rolled over into the beam of light and squinted at his watch. 0445. A long night was about to get longer. He swung out of his bunk and ground a pair of knuckles into his eyes.

“Evaporator unit again?”

“I don’t know, sir.” The captain’s messenger, a seaman named Durbin, had an accent that sounded like south Texas. “He just said, ‘Get Mr. Blake up here on the double.’”

“I’m on my way,” Blake said. The cool steel against his bare feet began to revive him. He ran a hand through his hair and reached for his khakis, still slung across the back of the chair where he’d thrown them.

Durbin peered into Blake’s bloodshot eyes, which must have looked worse under the red lens of the flashlight, and winced. “You want some coffee or something, sir?”

“No, thanks,” Blake said, rummaging in his wardrobe. “I’m still wired from that stuff they brew in the engine room.”

“Yeah, I heard y’all pulled an all-nighter again. This old bucket’s falling apart, ain’t it, sir?”

Blake nodded. He’d spent most of the night making emergency repairs to the freshwater evaporator unit while the aging destroyer steamed through the perimeter of a tropical storm, and he was in no mood for conversation.

“Don’t know how y’all stand it down there belowdecks all the time. Makes me glad I’m a deck-ape,” Durbin said, disappearing through the curtain.

“You chose well,” Blake said to the empty stateroom. He retrieved a seldom-used foul-weather jacket from his wardrobe. “Lt. (jg) Daniel F. Blake, USN” was stamped in gold letters above the pocket. Lieutenant junior grade. His first promotion had come through along with his billet as OIC of engineering. He should have been grateful—it was normally a job for a full lieutenant—but heading up the engineering department was exactly what he didn’t want at this stage of his career.

He pulled on the new foul-weather jacket with a grimace, knowing he'd look out of place on the bridge. He hadn't yet qualified to stand deck watches on the destroyer and it was a sore point. He liked engineering well enough, had majored in marine engineering systems at Kings Point, but after sailing in the merchant fleet for two years after graduation, he'd come to realize what he really wanted. He wanted to command his own ship, a route that was closed to him in the merchant marine if he followed the career path of an engineer. He could be chief engineer someday, but never captain. The Navy was his only shot at command. Vicki had been shocked and a little angry when he gave up a high-paying job with APL and activated his reserve commission. But he'd found that the Navy didn't want to let him break out of the mold, either. His first two years of active duty had been spent patching up the aging machinery of an obsolete destroyer, and he was getting anxious. At twenty-eight, he couldn't afford to be stuck belowdecks much longer. Others were passing him by.

Blake made his way from his stateroom to the weather deck and climbed the starboard ladder to the bridge, grateful for the salt spray that stung his face. He felt a measure of pride in the steady hum of the main engines coming through the steel handrails, but nothing felt like being above deck on the old ship in the cool morning air. He pulled the clean air deep into his lungs and paused on the bridge wing, just to enjoy the sight and feel of her moving beneath his feet. His eyes took in every detail in the predawn glow: the undulating bow, the sweeping radar antenna, the stern light twinkling over the white wake which fanned out behind the destroyer, then dissipated into the sea.

Blake glanced over the antiquated ship, her once awesome technology now sadly outdated. *A gallant old lady*. Commissioned after World War II, and named for a Medal of Honor winner, the U.S.S. *Carlyle* was one of the last of her class of destroyers still on active duty. Scuttlebutt had it she'd been headed for the bone yard in Bremerton when the war on drugs heated up, amidst much political posturing between the American and Colombian governments, giving her a new lease on life. The ship was into her third week of patrolling the Pacific Ocean waters off the coast of South America in this highly publicized joint venture, but not much was happening. *Nothing like being on the fast track—stuck in the engine room of an obsolete destroyer assigned to fight a nonexistent drug war.*

A light rain began to fall. Blake took a deep breath and stepped through the door leading to the bridge. Dawn was breaking as Captain Hammer and Lieutenant Commander Mayfield, the ship's executive officer, stared intently through the bridge windows with

binoculars.

“Right standard rudder, all ahead one-third,” Captain Hammer said.

“Right standard rudder, all ahead one-third, aye, sir,” the helmsman echoed.

Blake heard the clang of the engine-order telegraph and felt the turbines begin their gradual decline. In his mind’s eye, he could see Chief Kozlewski and his people scrambling into action in the engine room.

“Morning, Captain,” Blake said.

“Well, at last, our resident expert on the merchant marine,” Captain Hammer said without lowering his binoculars. “Mr. Harrington, let’s get an expert opinion.” He motioned with his head for the Officer of the Deck to hand his binoculars to Blake. “Take a look at that ship on the horizon, Mr. Blake, and tell me what you see.”

Blake took the binoculars and tried to blink the fog out of his eyes. The sun was coming up behind the destroyer and he could just make out the outline of the ship. “Looks like a breakbulk freighter, a stickship,” he said, referring to the sticklike cargo booms emanating from deck. “I would say she’s an older cargo vessel, possibly a C-2.”

“And what else do you see, Mr. Blake?”

Blake stiffened at the captain’s condescending tone. It had not gone unnoticed in the wardroom that Captain Hammer had singled out the junior officers who were Kings Point and Annapolis grads—“ring knockers,” the captain called them—for this kind of patronizing treatment. For a while, he tried not wearing the heavy gold class ring that seemed to irritate the captain, but it didn’t seem to help. He wore it openly now, a small fuck-you.

“She appears to be dead in the water, and I don’t see any running lights, sir,” Blake said, handing the binoculars back to the OOD.

“Well, Mr. Blake,” the captain said, still staring through his binoculars, “we can’t just let her drift in the middle of the sea lanes without running lights, can we?”

“No, sir,” Blake said, staring at the back of Captain Hammer’s head. He glanced at the executive officer, then the OOD. Both looked away.

“Mr. Harrington, you have the conn,” the captain said, returning control of the ship to the Officer of the Deck. He hung his binoculars on a hook and turned to Blake. “I want you to board that freighter and check it out. Take some of your engineering people, you may have to help get her under way. If she’s been abandoned, you’ll need to rig some power to the running lights. Take a corpsman and a supply of medication, there could be illness aboard. We can’t rule

out a drug connection, so you'd better draw side arms. Oh, and take that Colombian marine, Sergeant whatever-the-hell-his-name-is." The captain flashed a wry smile. "We want to be politically correct."

Blake grimaced. *You wouldn't know the meaning of the word.* He'd caught only an occasional glimpse of the quiet marine who had reported aboard three weeks ago in Buenaventura, courtesy of the Colombian Government. He'd been assigned to the ship as a result of the highly publicized, and highly political, joint venture between the two countries to bring the influx of drugs into North America under control. Blake could see that the enlisted troops were impressed with him, but the deployment of the lone sergeant from the tiny Colombian Marine Corps was seen in the wardroom as a joke, a token effort done more to ease political pressure from the Americans than any attempt to fight a drug war.

"Captain, may I have a word with you in private, sir?" Lieutenant Commander Mayfield said, turning his head to one side.

"Make it quick," the captain said, stepping a few paces away with the exec.

The wind buffeting the bridge whistled down to a low howl and Blake could overhear the strained conversation. "Captain," he heard the exec say, "there's no telling what they could run into aboard that freighter. We haven't been able to raise anyone; could be she's been abandoned, or her crew's disabled. In either case, it's risky to put people aboard without knowing why—"

"Only way to find out why is to put people aboard, Commander."

"Yes, sir, but it's getting a bit rough to be launching small craft. The barometer's falling and the wind's picking up. We can get a whaleboat over the side but it might be tough to recover in a few hours—"

"Every situation has risks, Commander."

"I agree, Captain, but I think we're out of our league on this one. I'd suggest we contact the Coast Guard station in Panama and ask them to send out a cutter with people trained to handle this. We can stand by until they get here."

Blake saw a tinge of red creeping up the captain's neck, into his face. "We're not standing by for anybody. That ship's a hazard to navigation. It would take two days to get a cutter out here and we're not going to let her drift in the sea lanes another night without running lights. What's the problem, Commander? Blake's a qualified engineer. All we're asking him to do is check it out. It's a simple assignment. No reason why he can't handle it."

"I don't think it's quite that simple, sir—"

"And I don't like to give orders twice, Commander."

Blake watched, mesmerized, as the executive officer coolly

returned the captain's stare.

"Aye, aye, Captain," the exec said finally.

"With the storm moving this way, time is of the essence," Captain Hammer said, turning back to Blake. "Muster your party on the boat deck and be ready to shove off at 0600."

Blake pitched forward, nearly colliding with the captain, as the forecastle of the destroyer was submerged under a huge wave that appeared out of nowhere. He struggled to regain his footing as the bow of the ship slowly broke through the surface, shedding tons of green water through the scuppers. The old destroyer resumed its familiar creaking roll as though nothing had happened. Blake glanced at the captain, then the exec, then out at the whitecaps being whipped around by the wind. He was grateful to Commander Mayfield for intervening, but the exec had struck out, and Blake knew it would be pointless to object. More to the point, he knew if he crossed the captain on this one, it would be the equivalent of career suicide. He would be stuck in the engine room for as long as Captain Hammer was in command of the *Carlyle*, and the die would be cast; he would never be seen as a line officer with the potential for command.

"Aye, aye, Captain," he heard himself say.



## chapter two

Jorge Cordoba awoke to the gentle snore of the two girls sleeping beside him. He stretched and yawned and blinked impassively at the crumpled forms, black hair askew on satin pillows. Another gift from Rafael Ayala. The director of security never missed an opportunity to ingratiate himself with Don Gallardo's godson.

Ayala had said the girls were twins, but Jorge doubted it, now that he saw them in the morning light. Sisters, perhaps, but not twins. It was hard to tell their ages—Indians tended to age quickly—but the oldest couldn't have been more than sixteen. He felt guilty, dallying with ones so young. Still, the thought pleased him. At twenty-eight, he could still exhaust two young wildcats such as these.

He rubbed his face in his hands. Enough self-indulgence. Today would be a busy day. He climbed over the one on his left—he thought her name was Margarita—and padded into the bathroom.

He stood naked on the cold tile and relieved himself, resisting the impulse to glance over his shoulder at his image in the mirror. Shaking himself off, he drew himself up straighter and turned sideways, increasing the tension in his stomach muscles. His olive skin took on a golden glow in the soft light. Tall and trim, with square, European features, he stood out from his Colombian associates. He knew what they called him behind his back. *El Bicho de Oro*. The Golden Cock. Let the jealous bastards talk. Soon they would have a new title to cluck about: *El Jefe de Finanzas*—what his classmates at Harvard would call Chief Financial Officer—of one of the richest and most powerful organizations on earth.

"*El Jefe de Finanzas*," he said aloud, daubing shaving cream under his nose. He liked the way it sounded, echoing around the white marble of the bathroom. It was a goal he had pursued for the past eight years, and Don Gallardo had hinted that the announcement would be made at the next board meeting. It would come as no surprise. Everyone in the organization knew the prize would be his. And why should it not be? He had demonstrated his unique talents well enough. Under Jorge's management, hundreds of millions of dollars from the world's slums and barrios had been

converted into legitimate investments which continued to grow each year at a prodigious rate.

The telephone in the bathroom chimed. He picked it up and cradled it against his cheek. "Yes?"

"Good morning, Señor Cordoba," the voice of his secretary purred. "I trust you slept well?"

"Yes, Elena."

"And your guests?"

Jorge pulled the razor down his cheek and smiled. "Still sleeping. They are quite exhausted."

"No doubt."

Jorge chuckled at the venom in Elena's voice. The tantrum of a jealous wife was not as interesting as the controlled restraint of a possessive secretary.

"Surely you have not called to inquire about my guests."

All business again, Elena said, "Señor Ayala called."

Jorge jerked and nicked his chin. "What does that *rana* want?"

Elena giggled. Jorge thought she took a perverse delight in working for the only man in Don Gallardo's organization who would dare to call the director of security a frog.

"He won't say, just that it's urgent. He's been calling since I got here at five."

Jorge glowered at the tiny red dot welling up in the cleft of his chin. "Everything is urgent with him."

"He says he's coming over if you won't take his call."

"I have no time for that fool and his idiotic schemes." Jorge dabbed at the cut with a scrap of tissue paper. "We're closing the deal in Montevideo this morning. Call Rodriguez and remind him to be here for the conference call at six."

"As you wish, Señor."

Jorge replaced the phone in its wall mount and stepped into the shower, letting the steam take him. The stinging spray was like a baptism, washing the dried residue of the two girls down the drain, releasing him from his sins. He finger-combed his hair in the dripping silence and paused to examine the small bald spot forming on the back of his head. No bigger than a peso, it worried him constantly, though it didn't seem to be spreading. He fluffed his hair around it and stepped out into the apartment to towel off.

Jorge loved the solitude of the place, high above the city. He had managed to consolidate his financial operations by expropriating the entire top floor of the Augusto Gallardo Building, a circular tower of glass and steel rising phalliclike in the heart of the financial district. Unmarked, the financial nerve center of the organization was never acknowledged; the only clue to its existence was a key slot in a private elevator.

He stood at the foot of the bed, buffing his skin with the warm towel, and watched the sun begin its rise over the mountains. A lone hawk drifted by on air currents.

“Wake up, little birds. Time to fly away.”

The girls began to stir. The one called Margarita stretched and spread her legs under the silk sheet, looking coy. “But the cock hasn’t crowed yet. Is the golden one still asleep?”

“Out, my little chickens.” Jorge whipped the sheet off, exposing the two girls. They lay open before him, gooseflesh rising on coffee-colored skin, little game hens waiting to be stuffed. He tightened his gut against the temptation. “I have work to do.”

Jorge turned to walk away. The girls scrambled out of bed and tackled his legs, laughing and giggling like small children.

The door opened and Juan, his valet, entered, carrying a silver tray. In a world where silence and longevity went hand in hand, the sight of three naked people tussling in the center of the room drew not so much as a glance. Jorge stepped toward the bathroom and jerked a thumb toward the door. “Get these *puta* out of here.” He spoke English, the language of finance, most of the time, but preferred some Spanish words. Whore was too sharp for ones as lovely as these.

By the time he’d finished drying his hair, the girls were gone. The bed had been made up, and Juan had placed fresh flowers around the room, which now seemed unnaturally quiet and empty. Juan pressed a button on the wall, and the doors on a mirrored wardrobe drew back, exposing a row of dark suits.

Jorge looked over the array of garments, custom tailored on Fifth Avenue and Savile Row, while Juan laid out a selection of silk ties in muted shades of red and blue. Today would be the completion of a milestone event that could result in a congratulatory call from the Don himself, and Jorge wanted his appearance to reflect the moment. He selected a navy suit, with barely visible pinstripes, and a maroon foulard tie—the international uniform of corporate finance.

He stepped into the office adjacent to the bedroom and paused, as he did each morning, to admire his collection. The walls were lined with the paintings and drawings of Gregorio Vasquez de Arce y Ceballos, the most famous of Colombia’s colonial artists. He studied his latest acquisition, a painting his agent had picked up last week at auction in Bogotá. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and gently wiped a speck of dust from the frame. He now owned twelve of the most sought-after pieces. Someday it would be known as the Jorge Cordoba collection in one of the great museums of the world. He wouldn’t die and be forgotten the way his parents had.

He glanced at his watch, took his place behind the mahogany desk and buzzed for his secretary. The outer door to his office

opened and Elena walked in. Two secretaries worked in shifts to accommodate Jorge's sixteen-hour-a-day schedule. Elena was his favorite. He watched the slight sway of her hips as she approached.

"Buenos di—"

Jorge raised a finger.

Elena stopped, then smiled. "Good morning, Señor Cordoba."

"Good morning," Jorge said deliberately.

Elena placed the overnight mail on his desk and turned to pour his coffee. Jorge watched the long dark hair cascade down the back of her cotton blouse, just touching the waist of her skirt, wondering what charms were hidden beneath that plain skirt and white blouse. He shook off the thought; now that the confederation had been formed, discipline would be more important than ever.

"Did you call Rodriguez?"

"Yes, sir, he's on his way."

"I've scheduled a conference call at six with Señor Quintero and his staff in Montevideo. See that we're not disturbed."

"As you wish." Elena finished pouring the cup of *tinto*, and placed it on his desk.

Jorge watched her walk out, her perfume lingering behind. He picked up the tiny cup of mild black coffee and swiveled his chair around to face the window. Inhaling the vapors from the steaming brew, he took a sip, letting the bite of the coffee beans sit on his tongue while he watched the sun rise over the mountains. From the inside looking out, the windows surrounding the top floor gave a sweeping view of the fertile Valle del Cauca, nestled between the Western and Central Cordillera, two of the three massive Andes mountain ranges which divide Colombia from North to South. From the outside looking in, the windows were a dark mirror, impenetrable to machine gun fire from a helicopter.

He leaned back in his chair, basking in the feeling of exuberance from the caffeine and the glorious sunrise. By the end of the day phase one of the plan would be fully in effect. Finally, he would show the arrogant *yanquis*. He was grateful to Don Gallardo for arranging his graduate studies in North America, but his stay there had left him with an intense hatred of all *Norte Americanos*. His classmates at Harvard had thought they were being clever with their knowing smirks and their snorting noises behind his back. That was humiliating enough, but the thing that galled him most was the implication that any fool could be successful as a financial executive with unlimited amounts of cash pouring in, an implication that negated his skills as a businessman. He would soon show them who was the businessman. In his fantasies, he could see them crawling to him, begging him for a job in his industries when the whole North American economy collapsed.

He turned back to his desk and leafed through his mail. An array of facsimile machines sat on his left, and a bank of video monitors blinked changing stock prices and foreign currency translations on his right. Before him sat a compact telephone console which kept him in daily contact with the investment banks and brokerage houses in New York, Montevideo, Paris, Rome and The City, London's main financial district, where Jorge transacted most of his business.

A white telephone handset with a single line stood prominently in the corner of the desk. The black console showed the wear of daily use, but the white telephone looked new. A direct line to the Don himself, it almost never rang. Jorge was proud of that; his operation was known for its efficiency.

He glanced at his watch for the third time in as many minutes, impatient for Rodriguez and the conference call. Uruguayans tended to work at a more leisurely pace than Jorge was accustomed to, but he enjoyed doing business there. Long known as South America's Switzerland, bank transactions were kept strictly secret. The stupid *yanquis* wondered how the organization disposed of such massive amounts of cash, but it was really quite simple. The friendly government of Uruguay had no awkward laws requiring banks—or those making deposits—to report large cash transactions. Not even the customs office required cash from foreign visitors to be declared. Tons of cash could be unloaded, like cargo, from ports in Montevideo and carted to banks for deposit into dollar-denominated accounts. From there, offshore banking services were available to transfer U.S. dollars into, and out of, any bank in the world, leaving no trace of their origin. It was called *El Enjuague Uruguayo*, The Uruguayan Wash, and Jorge was grateful to the succession of military governments in Uruguay, all eager to attract foreign capital, that made it possible.

The intercom on the console buzzed. Jorge picked up the handset. "Yes?"

"Señor Rodriguez is here for your conference call," Elena said.

"Send him in."

The door opened, and Ernesto Rodriguez, Jorge's chief accountant, bustled into the room carrying a manila folder crammed with papers. Rodriguez pulled a chair out and sat down without being asked. He retrieved one of the pens arrayed across his plastic pocket protector and tapped it against the file folder.

"Ten days."

"And a very good morning to you, Ernesto." The musky smell of overheated accountant drifted across Jorge's desk.

"I'm serious. We've got ten days."

"Relax, Ernesto. It's on its way."

“We’re leveraged to the hilt. Do you realize what you’ve committed to?”

“Nothing we can’t handle.”

The chief accountant opened a spreadsheet. “On the seventh, 300 million, on the fifteenth, 400 million, on the twenty-third, 350 million. With what we’re closing this morning, you’ve bought 1.3 billion dollars worth of gold bullion on a thirty-day contract with borrowed money. The first payment is due now in ten days. Three hundred fifty million. U.S.”

“I tell you it’ll be there in plenty of time. Stop worrying. This is only the beginning.” Jorge had purchased the bullion as the first step in the long-range plan he’d developed for Don Gallardo. The gold was of Brazilian origin, but he’d arranged for it to be purchased in Uruguay, which had no reporting and registration requirements on precious metals commerce. It was a plan that Jorge alone among the senior officers of the organization was privy to, but he suspected the canny chief accountant had an inkling of what they were doing.

“And look at this.” Rodriguez spread out a chart showing gold exports by country. “You can’t just keep buying gold at these levels in Montevideo. At this rate, it won’t be long before Uruguay becomes the number one gold exporter in the world.”

Jorge yawned. “So what?”

“So what? The country itself has no gold reserves. How long do you think it’ll take the *Norte Americanos* to figure out what you’re doing?”

Jorge leveled his eyes at him. “And what are we doing?” He liked the way it sounded. Polite, with just the right touch of menace.

Rodriguez retrieved a balled-up handkerchief and mopped at a thin film of perspiration on his forehead. “I don’t know and I don’t want to know. It’s my job to advise you, and I’m advising you.”

“You worry too much,” Jorge said, leaning back. “No one will pay the slightest attention, least of all the *Norte Americanos*. The industrialized nations despise gold. It imposes too much discipline on their ability to print money. They all dropped the gold standard years ago. A ‘barbarous relic,’ they call it. No, my friend, they know what keeps them in power. Print money and spread it out among the people. A gold standard won’t let them do that. They have no use for it and couldn’t care less who buys it up.”

“Even if they don’t, we’re moving too fast, taking too big a bite. If we stub our toe, we’ll lose half our holdings in Argentina—”

“Nonsense,” Jorge said. “You’re a good man, Ernesto, but you lack vision. This is the beginning of a major event in history. Someday, you’ll be able to tell your grandchildren you were there.” He leaned farther back in his chair with his hands behind his head and flashed a self-satisfied smile. It was a global transaction worthy

of a Harvard MBA, the largest of his career, and he had pulled it off without putting up a peso. The gold had been secured by the organization's massive real-estate and industrial holdings in Uruguay and Argentina, through a series of complex, short-term financings. Phase one had gone well. His promotion was assured. All that remained was the final confirmation from Montevideo, and for Jorge to deliver the cash.

The intercom on the console buzzed. He glanced at his watch, irritated. The conference call was due at any moment. He picked up the line. "Yes?"

"Señor Ayala is here," Elena said.

"I told you I can't see that fool. Tell him I'm busy."

"I did."

"What does he want?"

"He refuses to say, Señor Cordoba, and demands to see you at once."

Jorge glanced at his watch, then at the silent telephone console and blew out a deep breath. "Tell him he's got two minutes."

The door clicked open, and Rafael Ayala burst into the room. His eyes were bloodshot, his face was ashen. He looked over his shoulder, waiting for the door to close behind him.

Jorge remained seated, a calculated show of disrespect for this frog-faced, runt of a man who was more concerned with maintaining a full belly and an empty scrotum than taking care of business.

"And what brings our eminent director of security out at this hour of the morning?"

Rafael Ayala swallowed. "I need to see you alone."

"We're waiting for a call. You can speak in front of Ernesto."

"No." The chief accountant stood up. "I'll wait outside. Call me when you're ready."

Jorge smiled to himself, watching the bearlike Rodriguez walk out. The chief accountant never wanted to know more than he needed to. That made him smart. He waited for the door to click shut. "Now, what is so damned important?"

Rafael Ayala ran his tongue over dry lips. "*La Estrella Latina*." His voice was barely audible.

Jorge felt the blood drain from his face. He pushed himself up from the chair. "What did you say?"

"*La Estrella Latina*—"

"What about it? Speak English!"

"The *Latin Star*. It's missing."

Jorge stood, disbelieving, stomach churning, fighting for control, gazing at this Neanderthal whose stupidity was about to ruin him.

"*¡Bastardo!* You did it, didn't you?"

“Now don’t get excited. Just because we’ve lost radio contact, doesn’t mean—”

The black telephone console began to ring. Jorge lunged across the desk, knocking over his coffee, and grabbed Ayala by the throat.

“*¡Hijo de puta!* Son of a whore! I told you this would happen.”

On the third ring, someone picked up the call. The intercom buzzed, and the light on the console flashed.

Jorge shoved the bug-eyed security director away. He could feel the blood raging in his eyes. He straightened his coat and picked up the phone. “Yes?”

“It’s your conference call from Montevideo, Señor Cordoba,” Elena said. “Señor Quintero on line one.”

“Tell him I’m not in.”

“But—”

“Are you deaf? Tell him I’m not in!” Jorge slammed down the receiver.

“I beg you, Señor Cordoba, don’t jump to conclusions,” Rafael Ayala said, rubbing his throat. “It could be anything, perhaps a faulty radio, or—”

“Shut up, you fool,” Jorge said, staring at the white telephone now ringing in the corner of his desk. “We both know what it is.”

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