

“The Titans of the Pacific”

by Robert Gammon

Prologue

In 1930, the world was hurtling towards one of the most terrible periods in human history.

Yet, the 20th century started well for that emerging world power, the United States of America (USA). The USA accumulated great wealth whilst the European imperial powers (Great Britain, Germany, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary and Turkey) were locked in a futile war of attrition – the Great War (later called World War I) – with horrendous human and economic destruction.

While the USA partied through the 1920s, storm clouds gathered on the other side of the Atlantic. Struggling to recover from the Great War’s devastation, Europe held its breath. First, the Communist revolution erupted in Russia, sweeping the Tsar from power after centuries ruling a vast feudal empire from Europe to the Far East.

Then, a charismatic leader called Mussolini came to power in Italy, vowing to restore the nation to the greatness of the Roman Empire, invading weaker countries. In Germany, destroyed and demoralised by defeat in the Great War, a former army corporal named Hitler drew large crowds to meetings espousing restoration of German pride by challenging the nations that had defeated them. Pessimists even predicted a second Great War.

In the prosperous USA, bankers were delighted to lend money to almost any company and family. Folk bought new houses, cars, and latest domestic electrical appliances. Many owed money to the bank, but it wasn’t a problem – people earned enough to pay the bank every month. Life had never been so good. And many poor Europeans, with their continent ravaged by war, crossed the Atlantic in search of a better future – to share in the American dream.

And the New York Stock Exchange was a real cash machine. Share prices went up and up, defying gravity. Even the stock value of loss-making companies rose. Nobody wasted time trying to understand why.

Until one day, Black Tuesday arrived: 29th October 1929. Hardly anyone saw it coming. Only days before, President Hoover and business leaders had predicted continued prosperity. But a dramatic downward spiral in share prices began, ruining investors, businesses, and millions of citizens who were to lose their jobs.

President Hoover pleaded for calm – things would return to normal. But what came after Black Tuesday was even worse. Banks stopped lending money. People no longer had money to spend. Factories had no buyers for their products and had to sack workers. Banks couldn’t get sacked workers or loss-making companies to repay their loans. Banks didn’t have enough cash to pay depositors who rushed to withdraw their savings. American banks cut lending to European and Latin American borrowers. These borrowers then couldn’t buy goods from American companies. Countries raised import tariffs to protect their national industry, which caused an international trade war. Families, companies and banks went bankrupt.

And so, the world became engulfed in a whirlwind towards ruin – The Great Depression, which developed into a hurricane, striking far parts of the world, and sweeping away many governments.

The new Communist regime in Russia, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or USSR, was seen by many as a solution to the crises suffered by capitalism and the major democratic countries as a result of the Great Depression.

In South America, Peru had been ruled mostly by military strongmen since independence from Spain in 1821 – three hundred years after Spain conquered the Inca Empire and most of the American continent – but a period of stable civilian government finally arrived in 1919 under President Augusto Leguía.

After losing a disastrous war against Chile in 1883, Peru was ruled by the army. But the big landowners and exporters, who controlled the Peruvian economy, formed the Civilista political party to defend their business interests and wrest power from the army.

Leguía, married into a landowning family, joined the Civilista party and was first elected president of Peru in 1908. He didn't care much for democracy and held on to power for more than fifteen years by whatever means necessary: rigging elections, bribery, intimidation, and imprisoning or deporting opponents.

Leguía wanted to modernise his country and was popular with the Peruvian elite and foreign business. His regime built roads, hospitals, urban sewerage, and irrigation for agriculture, mostly paid for by borrowing from foreign banks.

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But did President Leguía believe his regime would last forever?

Rumours of military coups against Leguía came to nothing. Restless army officers included Lieutenant Colonel Luis Miguel Sánchez-Cerro, born into a poor provincial family. Life wasn't easy: war, military coups, imprisonment and deportation hardened him. He was even expelled from the army by Leguía for plotting against him. A humbled Sánchez-Cerro begged Leguía to allow him back into the army. Leguía magnanimously agreed – a grateful Sánchez-Cerro would surely owe him loyalty.

Despite Leguía's repression, radicals supported the Peruvian Communist party, which controlled the main workers' trade union, the CGTP. But the Communist party only represented a minority on the left of the political spectrum. The socialist APRA (Americas Popular Revolutionary Alliance) had a stronger influence over intellectuals, students and workers.

APRA was founded by Víctor Raúl Haya-de-la-Torre, who came from a landowning family that had hit hard times. Leguía soon marked Haya as a dangerous opponent and exiled him abroad. In Central America, Haya saw how American business exerted direct control over governments. In Mexico, he witnessed the long and bloody civil war between the local haves and have-nots. In the USA he became familiar with the new imperial power. In England he studied at Oxford University and was impressed by the tradition of parliamentary debate. In Russia he experienced the Communist party's so-called dictatorship of the proletariat, which he dismissed as inapplicable in Latin America.

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But our story begins with one John Fitzgerald in Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

PART 1 - Leaving port

Chapter 1

John's father buried his head in his hands and wept when he was told. John had been arrested at a drunken brawl in a speakeasy bar, ending in manslaughter, and thrown into Charles Street jail. Everyone knew what happened if you ended up in that terrible place.

If you were picked up by the police and delivered to the jail, the guards smiled like kids with a new Christmas toy. Their unfortunate guests were not princes at a luxury hotel. Innocent until proved guilty? Yes, but if you were taken to Charles Street jail, you deserved whatever happened to you there.

When Desmond Fitzgerald first arrived in Boston, penniless, from his native Ireland, he soon learned the Irish immigrant ghetto in West End, Boston, was the opposite of the West End of London, playground of the British Empire's ruling class.

Desmond couldn't stop shaking his head. John had always been a good student: top of his class *every* year at Saint Joseph's school and then on to Harvard University.

John liked to go out for a furtive drink with his friends who, reared in a tough place like West End, were unlikely to grow up to be angels. But *manslaughter*? Hadn't those priests at Saint Joseph's school whipped the boys into God-fearing men?

Desmond wondered if it was his fault. Had he failed as a father, despite trying his best? Perhaps he'd worked too long hours to become a lecturer at Harvard University, instead of spending more time with his son. West End's immigrants admired his success, but now everyone would be aghast: his own son had also ended up at Charles Street jail.

Old Desmond felt relieved his wife wasn't alive to face this ordeal. He cursed himself for this thought and pleaded for God's forgiveness. Many fellow Irish immigrants in the area were jobless, destitute and desperate. Many ended up in drunken brawls; but, not his Johnny. What was going on?

Earlier that evening, John had also wondered what was going on when he was bundled through the gates of Charles Street jail. He'd gone past its damp, grimy walls many times and heard gruesome stories about what went on inside. The iron gates whined and slammed closed behind him. With his arms handcuffed behind his back, a shiver rushed down his spine. Now he was on the *inside* of those dreaded walls. He looked back at the gate, with a knot in his throat. For the first time in his life, he was trapped.

The priests at Saint Joseph's school had assured the boys they'd end up in hell if they sinned. On that dark and drizzly night, Charles Street jail seemed what they'd meant.

John was well built, with light brown hair and lively green eyes, lighting up in conversation. A ready smile distracted from a scar under his chin, lacerated by an unfriendly blade. Acquaintances remarked on his polite tongue – uncommon on the rough streets of West End – and willingness to help anyone in need. He was usually seen in an old but well pressed suit, clean white shirt and ageing but smart college tie. Recently graduated in history from Harvard University, he was the image of a young man with a bright future. Yet, that night, he looked a real mess.

Without a word, the jail guards shoved him into a cold and dreary office. A guard pressed down on his shoulders, forcing him into a chair. In front of him, an officer yawned as he filled in the standard form with their new inmate's details. A shadow tugged at John's feet. He heard the clicking of chains and looked down to see his legs in shackles.

His heart pounded in his chest and he struggled to breathe. He looked up at the guard, begging for mercy in silence. An icy cold grin was all he got in return.

He turned towards the doorway: another guard smirked and gently patted his truncheon – a wolf circling its prey. As the guard patted his truncheon harder and faster, John read the look on his face: I'll be in charge when the paperwork is over, and then I'll have some fun, you little worm.

John screamed as he was wrenched to his feet – did the damn guard want to rip his ear out of his head? A truncheon slamming into his back was the reward for his swearing. He fell and smashed his head. The officer at the table looked up and just shook his head. John's lips felt moist and salty, as blood trickled from his forehead into his mouth.

“Who the hell do you think you are, kid? No swearing. The sooner you learn our rules, the better for you,” said the guard, pressing his face against John’s. The sickly warmth of the guard’s breath filled his ear.

“Now, get your ass down that hall!” shouted the guard, pointing left outside the office. With his arms and legs in shackles, John struggled to move forward as the guard shoved him. Moving down the dark hallway, the light in the office became dimmer and dimmer behind him. He tripped and fell again. Struggling back to his feet, he pleaded: sweet Jesus, help me, *help me*.

It was some time since he’d last been to Mass, and even longer since last confession. Did God hold this against him? He’d been taught the Lord never abandoned his flock, but John’s face creased up and his eyes swelled with tears.

Blood continued to trickle from his forehead as he wrestled on into the darkness; his shackles clinking on the floor. The image of Jesus came before him, struggling to carry the cross on his way to be crucified on Calvary and wearing a crown of thorns on his bloodied forehead. Would he end up like Jesus?

“Dear God, please forgive me,” wailed John. The guard laughed and struck him again with his truncheon.

“*Shut up* – God can’t hear you here. Charles Street jail is hell on earth, boy, and God doesn’t listen to anyone condemned to hell,” said the guard, chuckling at the ingenuity of his own remark. The job of a good jail guard was to crush new inmates into submission; enjoying their horror as they descended into hopelessness.

In the dark, he heard voices, crying with fear or pain. A small iron door creaked open into a tenebrous cavern. Click, click – his shackles were unlocked. Your new home, sniggered the guard as he pushed him inside, slammed the cell door and double locked it.

John’s face hit the floor – it felt rough, damp and slimy. Urine, vomit, maybe blood too – the stench of a dark alley outside a speakeasy, where drunkards relieve themselves before staggering home. In a corner he heard rustling little paws – rats. He struggled to his feet. He’d seen rats gnaw the face of a baby, as its mother begged in the street. His hand felt a bench, bed or whatever the creaking wooden surface he found to sit on in the dark was supposed to be. The little bastards wouldn’t bite him there.

With the guard gone, fear dissipated. He wiped the slime trickling down his face – whatever scum on the floor had smeared him. He rubbed his sore wrists and ankles, relieved to be freed from the irons. He felt heavy between his legs – he needed to relieve himself. In the dark, he found his way to a corner and heard his urine trickling over the floor. He staggered back to the bench. His body ached but his head soon hit the bench and he closed his eyes. He heard the little feet rustling over the floor again and lifted his legs on to the bench for safety.

Suddenly, he opened his eyes. Mick – what the hell had happened to Mick? As inebriation subsided, he recalled that Mick had been there in the speakeasy with him. Too much drinking; men tottering and shouting; the barman threatening to kick them out; glass smashing on the floor; swearing and pushing; punches flying; men falling over; Mick grabbing him by the arm and shouting in his ear; John not hearing much; only feeling a gush of warm breath of stale whiskey on his face. Next, he was sitting on the floor, engulfed in a cloud of drunken stupor.

Two big men in uniforms pulled him to his feet. Yes, now he remembered – then, click, click, and his arms were fastened behind his back. Outside, the damp, cold air helped to lift the haze from his brain. Moments later he was looking up at those grey walls of Charles Street jail but, wait a minute, what was *he* doing there?

Exhausted, he just couldn’t keep his eyes open.

John only had vague memories of his mother, like random photographs stuffed in an envelope – yellowing pictures of a smiling Irish mother with her baby in arms. What would she have been like? She’d died of pneumonia when he was just a baby.

Mrs O’Reilly, in the apartment opposite, had told John how his father hadn’t moved from his wife’s bedside as she shivered with fever, struggled to breathe and lapsed into stillness. Her frail fingers clenched her rosary beads and refused to let go, of the beads and of life. But, finally, the angel of death took her away, leaving Desmond murmuring thanks to God for

having given her to him for those years, and entrusting her into the Lord's care from then onwards.

His father couldn't afford the medicine his wife needed to stay alive and a decent Catholic funeral was only possible thanks to the generosity of fellow Irishmen in West End.

During childhood, John often sighed, seeing other children hand-in-hand with their mothers. Mothers who washed, dried and combed them; shouted at them when they were naughty, for sure, but also tucked them away in bed at night with a kiss. Perhaps with a bedtime story to help them sleep, on those long winter nights when many poor immigrant children went to bed cold and hungry.

He'd heard his mother had had a big heart. A heart that stopped beating one day, after weeks of coughing blood and pus, until she stopped spluttering and John began to feel that deep solitude that was to stay with him throughout his childhood.

At least he was lucky to have a good father. Before coming to America with his wife, Desmond Fitzgerald had been a good student in his native Ireland. The village priest had made sure the bright boy got through school and even helped him into a Catholic university, where he'd graduated in literature.

In West End – Boston, kids gathered on the street steps of the decrepit building where the Fitzgeralds lived with other poor immigrants, to hear Desmond's stories of Irish fairies and leprechauns. Even the most fidgety of kids listened in mesmerised silence. The adults listened with pride to his stories of how the Irish had fought their way to independence from the British Empire.

One day, one of his regular listeners introduced Desmond to his boss, a Mr Randall, to whom he was chauffeur. Randall was apparently an important businessman and some sort of philanthropist – his Foundation for the Freedom of the Americas, or FFA, was involved in Latin American, a part of the world that John and his father came to love.

Mr Randall took a liking to Desmond and got him an office job at Harvard University in nearby Cambridge, across the Charles River from West End. Once inside, he worked hard to earn his doctorate, funded by Mr Randall's foundation, and became an academic. His salary afforded a home for himself and his son, and they no longer shared an apartment with other immigrant families, kept awake at night by children crying endlessly. Yes, the Fitzgeralds were grateful to Mr Randall.

Desmond didn't beat John like other fathers did, venting out on their children their frustrations from poverty and despair, belting the first child that crossed them on their way back from the speakeasy, half drunk, half aware of what they were doing.

The 1920s West End streets were unsafe and John's father was relieved he had two good friends, fellow Irish schoolmates, living in the same building. Mick Faughnan lived at the top of the building, just above the Fitzgeralds. Mick was a quiet boy, the son of a heavy drinker unable to hold down a job for long. West End buildings had no elevator, and Mick's father could be heard most nights, struggling up the stairs after leaving the speakeasy nearby.

Tired of her abusive husband, Mick's mother left home when Mick was young. An aunt came now and again to clean the apartment, kick Mick's father out of bed and give them a hot meal. When needing to escape from his drunken father's aimless punches, Mick sought refuge in the Fitzgeralds' apartment, and John helped him with his homework.

Mick had long black hair, bright dark eyes, and usually looked scruffy, unless his aunt had time to iron his shirts and give him a haircut. Time to shave – you could look like a nice young man, if you wanted, she'd say. He was skinny and pale but, behind his sickly appearance, there was a steely determination to survive and not yield to his brutal father. It was Mick who enticed John and Gerry to join the local boxing club, where he strove to become robust and gain respect on the street.

Gerry Murray was not as clever as John, but was bullied into doing his homework by his father, who worked all hours of the day at the grocery store down the street. He'd come to America to find a future and was determined his children would never face the poverty he'd known back in Ireland. He admired Dr Desmond Fitzgerald for working his way into Harvard University. John was a good friend for Gerry to have.

Gerry was confident, affable and always willing to please his father. From a young age he was popular with the girls, who fell for the tall, handsome and silky-tongued lad who resembled Gary Cooper.

Mick and Gerry saw less of John when he went to Harvard. He was eternally in the university library. He'd always been a bookworm, but now there was something else – that stupid smile on his face, not listening to their jokes when they were having a drink in the speakeasy and rarely turning up for boxing practice with them. And that whiff about him – cologne, it was.

“Hey, Johnny, you smell like a damn pansy,” said Gerry.

“Guys, she’s not like you – she’s got class; she appreciates me taking care of myself,” said John.

Gerry smiled as he nudged Mick, “You see, Mick: there’s nothing wrong with him – Johnny’s *in love*,” and they both broke out laughing as they grabbed John by the neck.

To get to the History section in the university library, John had to walk past Law – how boring he thought but, then, he saw her. She looked up from her desk and smiled as he walked by. Their eyes locked. He continued down the aisle, turning his head to keep eye contact with her. Then... damn it, sorry, as he bumped into Jones, the librarian, and books flew out of his arms. She was giggling when he looked up at her as he knelt, helping an irritated Jones to pick up the books. He shrugged and smiled back at her.

“Man, you should have been there the first time I saw Lisa. I swear those grey winter clouds disappeared and sunshine lit up her auburn hair. And those deep blue eyes and her skin – the softest pink you’ve ever seen. She beats Greta Garbo any day,” said John, daydreaming. Gerry and Mick had never heard their friend so soppy and resorted to horseplay to wake him up as they walked into the boxing gym.

Lisa Barrett was determined to succeed in the male-dominated Harvard Law School. Her father was a lesser-known but ambitious lawyer in New York who expected his daughter to follow him into his firm. She didn’t want to disappoint him – perhaps out of respect or fear; probably not love. He’d been a concerned but distant father; always away at important meetings and business trips. She felt closer to her warmer but submissive mother – with her husband it had always been: Yes, dear; of course; you’re right. She nudged Lisa to do likewise: Don’t make your father angry; just do what he says and let’s have some peace.

Studying law was okay but Lisa was bored of all those preppies, showing off their wealthy backgrounds and connections. She was surprised when John stopped by her desk in the library one day.

“Hi... umm, you look tired digesting that thick book – maybe you could do with a break. How about joining me for a coffee?” said John. She was open-mouthed at first, but then nodded.

As they chatted, she found it refreshing speaking to a relaxed and friendly young man, who didn’t talk about money and being a winner. She told her girlfriends his suit wasn’t, well, from the best tailor in New York or Boston, but he looked smart enough and was definitely handsome. He loved studying history; wanting to know why the world had come to be as it was and anticipating future events. She was spellbound when he talked about the rights of mankind or centuries of oppression in distant lands. He spoke fluent Spanish, loved Latin America, and his dream was to explore that mysterious part of the world.

“So, do you like studying law?” he asked.

“Yeah, I think so... but it’s really what my father wants me to study,” she replied.

Eyes widening into a frown, John looked at this intelligent and attractive girl and couldn’t help asking,

“But, with all your life ahead of you – why on earth don’t you study something you’re passionate about?”

“Well... what I really love is painting.”

“Great, I’d love to see your paintings.”

She giggled, “My paintings are nothing special. Anyway, they’re all at my home in New York.”

“I’ve never been to New York, but I’d go just to see your paintings,” he said.

She laughed, “Are you kidding? Never been to New York... and you’d go just to see my paintings?” As John nodded, she couldn’t tell him there was no way he could go to see her in New York. She imagined her father’s frosty reaction. He expected her to attract someone, let’s say, with better pedigree.

One day, John *did* get to New York – a Saturday, when Lisa’s parents were out for the day. She pulled out the paintings of which she was proudest. John studied them in silence. Bright colours, sunshine, lush green nature, happy families strolling in New York’s Central Park, mothers with children in arms, and smiling faces. John could almost hear the people laughing in Lisa’s paintings. Was this it? What Lisa dreamed of... was she painting scenes missing in her own life?

“Well, aren’t you going to say anything?” she said, after never ending minutes without a word from him.

He looked at her – she really cared, and worried, about what he thought – and his serious expression broke into a smile, “Lisa, they’re great. In fact, they’re fantastic – you’ve got real talent.”

“Oh... you’re only saying that to keep me happy,” she said.

“No, seriously – I think they’re great. They say so much about you...” he said; immediately regretting his words – would she think he was being patronising or intruding into her life... seeing through her?

John was relieved when she smiled and said, “Come on, it’s a beautiful day. Let’s go for a walk in Central Park and I’ll show you my favourite spots – the ones I’ve painted.”

The Barretts lived just opposite Central Park, on the grand Fifth Avenue – but a bit too close to Harlem, away from the wealthier end of the city. Their apartment was large but furnished frugally, in one of those new, nondescript blocks replacing the old mansions. John didn’t care if the Barretts were trying to climb the social ladder.

She took him on a whirlwind tour of New York and, by the evening, exhausted, they rested in a cafeteria beside an art museum. They smiled – how similar their tastes in art were, and John was surprised how much Lisa knew about history through her love of art.

“Lisa, why don’t you switch from law to art? I’m sure you’d be happier,” said John.

“*Are you crazy?* No way could I face my father if I dropped law for art at Harvard,” she said scowling.

He laughed, took her hand, stroked it softly and then leaned over and kissed her cheek. She blushed, but then her scowl melted into a smile.

Time went by and John and Lisa saw more and more of each other. One day, John looked at her, open-mouthed, when she told him about a confrontation with her father, after telling her parents about him.

“I told them I didn’t want to hurt them but my life was my own to live. You’re not like all those Harvard law preppies. I told them I love you and, if we want to, we’ll get married,” she said, grinning before she continued, “huh... I’ve never seen a graver expression on my father’s face.”

John smiled, but they hadn’t talked about marriage before.

Lisa continued, “I know it’s tough finding a job, everyone’s worried about the economic crisis, but I’m sure you could find a job in a library or somewhere. I could do legal or secretarial work, and we could rent a little apartment.” Yes, anything to break away from your father’s grasp, thought John. He loved Lisa, but maybe things were going too fast.

And, so, John took refuge in his dreams as he festered away in his dark hole inside Charles Street jail.

Meanwhile, Dr Fitzgerald swallowed his pride and sought help from old Martin Lomasney, a fellow Irishman who’d become the powerful boss of West End ward. Lomasney enjoyed helping fellow citizens – he’d been doing so for fifty years – but sighed when he heard that now even Dr Fitzgerald’s son had ended up at Charles Street jail.

Visits to new jail inmates weren’t allowed, but Lomasney made a telephone call and arranged to go with Dr Fitzgerald.

Dr Fitzgerald put on his best coat, rushed downstairs and joined the bustle in the street, jostling his way towards the jail nearby. John had already spent two days in Charles Street jail and his father worried in what state he'd find him.

"Nobody can visit a new inmate without an order," was the curt official line they got from the officer in charge.

Lomasney produced a letter. The officer stared at the text and his expression changed from bureaucratic indifference to annoyance – he didn't like being challenged. Then, he looked up at Lomasney, pursed his lips and finally nodded in the face of the letter from Mayor James Crowley, stating that Mr John Fitzgerald was to be released on bail under court order.

Crowley, another fellow Irishman, wouldn't have been re-elected Mayor of Boston without Lomasney's support. Crowley owed him a favour, just like Lomasney owed Dr Fitzgerald a favour for getting his godson into Harvard University. The link was completed by the judge, who granted John bail, owing Crowley some favour. That's how things worked.

"We want to see John Fitzgerald *immediately*," said Lomasney.

"Uh... not possible," said the jail officer.

"Why not?"

"Because he's not ready."

"What do you mean?"

"Amm... we have procedures to follow... okay, I'll be back in a moment..." said the officer before he disappeared.

Lomasney smiled at Dr Fitzgerald, "Don't worry, Des, this is normal: they just need time to get John looking like nothing happened to him since he arrived. You know: clean any cuts, freshen him up, un-ruffle his clothes – that sort of thing." Dr Fitzgerald shuddered.

John woke up and gulped as the key turned in his cell's lock. They were coming for him. What would they do to him now? Jesus picked himself up, with that enormous wooden cross astride his shoulder and struggled up Calvary, stumbling towards his fate.

The door sighed open and a painful ray of light rushed in, piercing John's eyes, used to darkness. They tipped over his bench and he rolled on to the filthy floor. His empty stomach stung with pain when the guard's boot ordered him to get up. Spluttering, he struggled to his feet and his arms were pulled behind his back; click, click, he was in shackles again.

"Come on, get up, they've come to collect you," John heard the disappointed voice and sullen face of the guard confronting him. "You're a lucky boy, *this time*."

When John was ready, the guard confronted him, "Now, listen: even outside jail you won't get away from us. If you say anything that happened inside, you'll live to regret it. *Do you understand you little worm?* Yes? And, one final thing: smile when you see your father. Good boy." The guard patted John's cheek.

Chapter 2

John gulped – besides his father and Martin Lomasney, there was scowling Father Joseph, his old school master. Without a word spoken, Father Joseph marched up to John and smacked him, once and then twice. After muttering something John was too feeble to understand, the priest stormed out. John was left with his cheek burning and his soul frozen.

On their way home from Charles Street jail, satisfied that John hadn't suffered any serious injury, Dr Fitzgerald started:

"I can't believe it, Johnny. All those poor kids in the neighbourhood, pickpocketing... stealing in shops... I can understand *them* ending up at Charles Street jail. But *my own son*? For sweet Jesus, you've made it through Harvard, everyone's proud of you in West End; our friends won't believe it. And I don't want to imagine what Lisa's father will say when he hears."

John could only nod, as his head drooped lower and lower. He wanted to get away, to disappear, but he couldn't, "You're right, dad, you're absolutely right, but please stop."

Back home, after a thorough scrub, a desperately needed change of clothes and a warm meal, John sought refuge in his bedroom. Lying on his bed, nursing his bruises, gaping up at the

ceiling, with its paint peeling like watery eyes, tears arrived. What the hell was he doing with his life? He was a Harvard University graduate, he had a loving girlfriend, a marvellous father and all his life ahead of him. But something was missing.

His father had specialised in Hispanic literature at Harvard University and, for as long as he could remember, John had listened to marvellous stories told by an exotic array of visitors from Latin America. Let's see, there were university lecturers, journalists, lawyers and politicians – yes, many exiled politicians. Some of their accents were difficult to understand, but John doggedly improved his Spanish. The Peruvians were his favourites. Could it be the books he'd read, the country's history, amazing geography – long desert coast, snow-capped Andes mountains and tropical jungle – or its tasty, spicy food... his mouth watered. Lying on his bed, he smiled. Magical, he sighed.

One day, John accompanied his father to a special dinner in Boston with Peruvian acquaintances. There must have been at least twenty people at the table and the honourable host was Juan Leguía, son of mighty President Leguía and visiting the USA. Only in his thirties, fair-skinned, dark eyes and clean shaven, his black hair was fashionably combed backwards and plastered down with hair gel, showing the lines of the comb running through. Juan was impeccably dressed, of course, in an expensive suit – looking like any successful Wall Street financier. Still, his real passion was flying aeroplanes: it was said he'd flown with the British in the Great War and his papa's regime made him Air Force Colonel.

Juan Leguía treated his guests to a glorious parade of lavish dishes and continuous flow of champagne.

Despite the magnificent cuisine, John's stomach turned as pandering guests clapped when Juan Leguía extolled the virtues of his father's regime, 'Patria Nueva' – the New Fatherland – they called it. John squirmed when Juan smiled as one of his guests called his father 'The Titan of the Pacific', echoing an American diplomat, and another toasted to the Leguía regime's next ten, no, twenty years.

President Leguía resolved entrenched border disputes with neighbouring countries. Foreigners were enticed to invest in Peru. New roads linking remote corners of Peru to the capital, railways to export minerals and agricultural produce, irrigation projects magically turning desert into arable land, new housing estates for the growing middle-class – marvellous, absolutely marvellous, agreed the enthusiastic guests.

Marvellous? John had heard otherwise. His friend Gerry worked on Wall Street and had told him Juan Leguía demanded so-called 'arrangement fees' for himself from bankers for increasing Peruvian government borrowing to finance his father's spending spree. Government ministers showed off their new houses and latest cars. But, funnily enough, the Peruvian government was unable to pay teachers' salaries. Well, they did pay them, eventually – this was how it worked: teachers were given IOUs promising payment at a later date, but provincial politicians offered to cash them for the poor teachers, with the regime thieves – yes, that's what they were – keeping up to 25% for themselves.

John had also heard stories of Peruvian Indians coughing out their contaminated lungs in American-owned mines high up in the Andes for miserable salaries and living in freezing tin shacks. Sugar cane croppers toiling from dawn to dusk, far from their families and indebted to agents who brought them from the Andes as cheap labour for the coastal haciendas. Anyone disagreeing with the regime was locked up or sent into exile, like some of Dr Fitzgerald's friends.

No, John couldn't find it in him to clap at the marvellous achievements rolled-out by Juan Leguía about his father. Meanwhile, the champagne flowed and the parade of dishes continued. But all parties do end.

John had grown up in a USA that enjoyed ever growing prosperity. And the New York Stock Exchange? It was the latest wonder of the world, with share prices rising towards heaven. Until, one day, Black Tuesday arrived. It was 29th October 1929. That day, hardly anyone went to class at Harvard. Everyone had their ears glued to the radio.

Even Charlie, the Arts faculty building janitor, spent all day in his cubby hole, with his head in his hands, sulking he'd lost everything. How could a poor janitor have lost everything on the stock exchange, for Christ's sake?

With share values rocketing, Charlie wasn't going to miss out. Instead of borrowing to buy a house he'd borrowed to buy shares, of course, like everyone else.

When share prices plummeted on Black Tuesday, nobody understood why. Investors bleated and, like a flock of sheep, rushed to sell. Poor Charlie's shares became worthless, but his bank demanded repayment of the loan he'd taken out to buy the shares in the first place. How on earth was he going to repay the damn bank?

The week after Black Tuesday, Charlie didn't turn up to work. He just sat on his bed, in his dingy little apartment, shaking his head and mumbling to himself. He was nearly sixty years old. He'd been working since he was a kid, twelve hours a day, often seven days a week. He'd never got married, his alcoholic brother had died years ago and he hadn't heard from his sister for thirty years. He was alone, barely able to pay his rent, his life savings gone and, now, hopelessly in debt. He looked up at the window as dirty dark clouds gathered. Trembling, he picked up the weapon and felt the cold metal on his forehead.

For days, the neighbours complained of a terrible smell. They found Charlie lying on his bed, with the right side of his head blown out, his brains scattered all over the pillow and a rusty gun on the floor. Only John attended the funeral. Nobody else cared about poor old Charlie.

John noticed those proud leaders of industry, who'd boasted about delivering prosperity throughout America and the world, stopped featuring on the front pages of newspapers or on radio interviews. They simply disappeared.

President Hoover begged for calm; things would return to normal. Nobody believed him. Who could American citizens look to for leadership? Who could they trust? Americans felt as if they were aboard the Titanic, sinking fast.

Banks didn't have enough cash to pay depositors rushing to withdraw their savings. Many banks simply ran out of cash and went bankrupt. Following an insider tip from his patron, Mr Randall, Dr Fitzgerald withdrew his savings the day before his bank closed, never to reopen.

Everyone became engulfed in the downward spiral towards ruin. The Great Depression had only just begun.

And John Fitzgerald longed to travel and see the world. But, which world? The one he'd dreamed about or that almighty mess the world was becoming, very, very fast.

Chapter 3

In his Boston boxing club, Mick Faughnan punched the bag harder and harder. That bastard, Mr Kelly, owner of the grocery store where Mick had worked since he'd left school, hadn't even bothered to listen to him – he'd just sacked him. What would his customers think of his establishment employing a drunken brawler suspected of manslaughter? No, Mick had to go – his apron was snatched from his waist and he found himself on the street, like a stray dog.

But Mick was the only breadwinner at home. He didn't want his little brother to drop out of school to work and his father, well, better forget about him – he was rarely sober enough to get out of bed, let alone work.

As the hideous face of Mr Kelly fused into the punch bag in front of him, Mick kicked it with all his might – take that, you son-of-a-bitch. Then, two big arms appeared behind the punch bag, grabbed it and a towel landed on Mick's head.

"Hey, what the hell are you doing, boy? I don't want anyone in my gym who ain't serious about training. You'd better come back another day. Besides, that guy over there wants to speak to you," said his boxing trainer pointing.

Out of the corner of his eye, Mick saw a balding man in a smart suit and silver tie smiling at him. Not again – that damn vulture, he thought. They always scented when someone was available to do their dirty work: collect money, deliver an unpleasant message or even rough someone up. It was easy money to be made – a lot if you took a contract to stick a knife into some poor guy.

“Hi Mick, I heard you’ve had some trouble with that swine Kelly. What are you going to do now? How’s your dad going to pay the rent?”

“I’ll think of something,” said Mick, wiping his sweaty face. But they both knew that ‘something’ wouldn’t come around; not for all the pleading to sweet Jesus. No, when you most needed him, it seemed Jesus didn’t listen. Perhaps it was Mick’s fault. Father Joseph had told the boys it was no good turning to God only when they were in trouble – they couldn’t expect anything if they didn’t follow the teachings of Christ *every* day.

“Well, you know where to find me,” said the smiling vulture, as he walked out. Then, he stopped, “Hey, Mick, want to come outside to see my new car?” Mick just looked down and shook his head.

Father Joseph had warned the boys to have nothing to do with the Irish mob. Once you were in their clutches, there was no escape – you were enslaved to them or ended up in prison, or even dead.

Mick cursed at the thought of his family being evicted for not paying the rent. Damn it, he’d have to borrow money from his friend Gerry.

After leaving school, Gerry had joined an investment bank in New York – Seligman, or some such name – as a runner on the Wall Street Stock Exchange floor. Somehow, he’d become well-off making complicated financial deals with borrowed money. Now, he’d even bought his own apartment and moved out of West End, into the centre of Boston. He’d got married and now had two kids. Mick couldn’t even dream of affording to get married. Gerry also had an apartment in New York, where he stayed on work days, coming back to Boston in his brand new car to spend the weekend with his family.

Not again – Gerry shook his head as he fumbled for his wallet in his fashionable suit. He couldn’t let his friend down, but they both knew that Mick would never be able to repay him. They sat, sipped Gerry’s champagne and enquired about each other’s families. An awkward silence followed. They’d shared a classroom bench at school and mischief in the run-down building where they’d been brought up but, now, Gerry lived on another planet.

When the money borrowed from Gerry ran out, Mick only had one way out. As he walked down the street, he looked up at the top floor of the newest building in the neighbourhood. When he arrived at the door, he raised his clenched fist to knock, then froze, cursed and, finally, knocked.

The smiling vulture opened and, engulfed in a cloud of aromatic cigar smoke, and a pat on the shoulder, Mick was invited in. Mick saw a shadowy figure, with a gun protruding from his waistcoat, locking the door behind him. Yes, today he *would* like to see the friendly vulture’s new car.

Meanwhile, Lisa hugged John when she heard the news – he’d just been offered a job in Harvard University’s library. He’d start putting books on shelves, helping old Jonesy – that glum, expressionless being labouring in the library reception.

“Isn’t it great? In a few years you’ll get through your doctorate and I’m sure your dad will find you a teaching position at the university, *somehow*,” said Lisa, smiling from ear to ear.

“Yeah, *somehow*,” said John, groaning.

“Isn’t it marvellous?” said Lisa; but her smile melted when John sighed – what was wrong with him?

Anyway, Lisa pondered how best to explain to her parents that John had a job – their condition to agreeing to her marrying him. It wouldn’t exactly be the job Mr Barrett considered appropriate for a young man to sustain his beloved daughter to the standard of living she was used to, and... yes, papa would find another objection, another line of defence against giving his consent... but she was determined. She fell asleep, dreaming about how she’d decorate their apartment. It would be small, of course, as they couldn’t afford more than a one-bedroom apartment, but it didn’t matter – she’d turn it into a happy home, welcoming their offspring’s pattering little feet. She smiled at the thought of a little grandchild thawing her father’s resistance. Could her dreams come true?

The following evening, John joined his father and an excited group of Peruvian exiles for a drink.

“Dr Fitzgerald, my friend, have you heard the news?” said an ecstatic deported journalist.

“No. What’s happened?” asked Dr Fitzgerald.

Smiles all around: after eleven long years, President Leguía’s authoritarian regime was over. News was sketchy – a coup d’etat had been staged, by an army officer called Sánchez-Cerro.

“Who?”

“Has anyone heard of him?”

“Yeah, he’s not a senior officer but he’s been a troublemaker for years, hasn’t he... but toppling President Leguía... *who* could have imagined him doing that?”

“So, what will happen now?”

“Now is the chance,” said an exiled politician, “it’s time for Víctor-Raúl Haya and his APRA party.” Heads nodded.

When the almighty storm unleashed by the Great Crash of the New York Stock Exchange developed into the global cyclone that was the Great Depression, many governments, like that of Leguía in Peru, collapsed. One day panderers and idolaters bowed to mighty President Leguía, the next he was imprisoned, his house ransacked by an angry mob, and his supporters nowhere to be seen – the proverbial rats escaping the sinking ship. Peru was plunged into uncertainty.

As days went by, John listened avidly to the Peruvian exiles in Boston and, as news trickled through about Leguía’s last moments in power, a picture emerged of how events must have unfolded.

Surely, Leguía must have known he couldn’t hold on eternally. Yet in 1929, he had himself re-elected president once again. Still, he couldn’t have known the worst global economic crisis was just around the corner. And that was too much even for mighty, perennial old Leguía.

Another plot – who was it this time, Leguía would have thought: Lieutenant Colonel Sánchez-Cerro – hadn’t he promoted him just a few months earlier? Leguía had survived plots before, but this time he didn’t smile. He knew Sánchez-Cerro, his dogged ambition and his appeal to the plebeians.

Leguía telephoned Sánchez-Cerro: time to negotiate. *Negotiate?* With a junior officer whom, not many years ago, he’d quite rightly dismissed from the army for plotting against him? Later, Leguía allowed him back into the army, assuming a grateful Sánchez-Cerro would owe him loyalty. He twisted his elegant moustache – how wrong he’d been.

Sánchez-Cerro smiled when he was told President Leguía was on the telephone. Yesterday he’d have rushed to pick up the receiver and, with military discipline, carried out his president’s orders. But now, things were different. *He* was now in charge in Peru – or soon hoped to be – and *he* now had Leguía under his thumb. He clenched his right fist: the old man would now have to pay for past humiliations.

Sánchez-Cerro’s smile turned sardonic remembering how Leguía had been called ‘The Titan of the Pacific’ by some flattering foreign diplomat – how stupid. He swore that Peru would soon learn what a *real* titan looked like.

Leguía put the telephone down, after suffering the little soldier’s arrogance with as much dignity as he could muster. He stroked his shapely white moustache, considering his options. Not civil war – he couldn’t trust enough army officers to support him. There was no point in a futile massacre. And his family wouldn’t have enough time to escape. Who could he call? He bit his lip – none of his close aides or friends, who for years had lined their pockets with his patronage, would come to his side in time of need. He shook his head. He looked up from his desk and sighed – he was alone in his magnificent presidential office.

Leguía called a meeting of his cabinet ministers. They listened aghast as Leguía announced his intention *not* to resist Sánchez-Cerro’s rebellion, avoid a bloodbath and resign the presidency before Congress. The ministers stared at each other and then, one by one, left silently. Leguía was again alone with his thoughts.

All was lost but Leguía kept a stiff upper lip and, that same afternoon, donned his smartest attire and followed his scheduled visit to his beloved Santa Beatriz racecourse. Two of his own

horses won their races – he smiled and gracefully waved his top hat to lukewarm applause. On his way back to the presidential palace, he heard shouting and even shots in the distance.

In the early hours of the following morning, Leguía was woken up by a large group of soldiers, assembled outside the palace, demanding his resignation.

Leguía got dressed, surveyed his regal surroundings for the last time and left the presidential palace unseen, through a back door, heading for the port of Callao. Yesterday, he'd been lord and master of Peru – The Titan of the Pacific. Today, he was creeping away before the crack of dawn, like a burglar after breaking into a bank overnight. Day and night. Power and impotence. Heights and depths of a distinguished life in a matter of hours.

Hastily, he embarked on a battle cruiser – destination: Panama. He smiled sadly: none of his ministers, collaborators or so-called friends came to bid farewell as he went into exile.

Sánchez-Cerro hadn't arrived in Lima yet but ordered Leguía's ship be prevented from leaving port. Old Leguía's health started deteriorating but, still, he was confined in a navy jail on the island of San Lorenzo. Sánchez-Cerro showed no mercy and vowed that Leguía would remain in prison for the rest of his days.

Two weeks later, Leguía was transferred from his island prison to Lima's Central Penitentiary, together with his son Juan – his days of champagne-drenched banquets in New York now long forgotten.

John had no sympathy for autocrats like Leguía, but couldn't help reflecting on the fate of fallen titans, as he imagined what must have been going through the old man's head.

Alone in his dungeon, as he slowly lost consciousness, Leguía sighed, wondering why they hated him so much. He'd done everything he could to transform Peru from a backward to a modern country. He loved his country but despaired of his compatriots – they never deserved him. They bowed to the mighty but trampled on them when they fell. Now they called him a tyrant – only because he'd imposed order for so long. And there was no news from his foreign friends. Not a word from the USA embassy – after everything he'd done for those demanding diplomats and greedy American businessmen and bankers.

Sensing the twilight of his life, the great little man recalled a remarkable career, for someone who was *not* born into the Peruvian ruling class.

A child ran along a sunny beach in a town in northern Peru and stumbled, gasping with bronchitis. He grew up and worked as an accountant and in insurance, but entered a dark tunnel when he volunteered to fight in the futile defence of Lima during the disastrous war with Chile.

He basked in bright sunlight again when he married the daughter of Henry Swayne, wealthy British immigrant owner of some of Peru's best sugar plantations. His marriage unlocked the doors to the Peruvian ruling class and to their Civilista party, which had wrested political power from the army. The Civilista president made him Minister of Finance and, later, became the party's successful candidate to president of Peru.

When his first term as president ended after four years, he was deported by his political enemies. But when he returned to Peru and became president again in 1919, he was determined not to give up power. That is, until Lieutenant Colonel Sánchez-Cerro rebelled against him in 1930.

As darkness closed in, Leguía smiled as he looked back. Peru had never had a president like him, ruling for as long as fifteen years. Throughout the country, statues of him had been erected and avenues named after him. Yesterday, everyone had feted him. Now, looking forward into obscurity, he was alone.

In Boston, John's father told him to be at his Harvard office at 3pm, sharp. He wanted to introduce him to none other than his patron, Mr James W. Randall III.

Randall's father had made a fortune importing bananas with his International Food Company, or IFC. Childhood had been comfortable, but his father soon drew him into his business. The boy wouldn't be softened by home comforts. He soon learned that nothing in life was free, that although bananas grew on trees, money didn't.

Randall was a big man in his fifties, with a shiny bald head, and impeccably dressed – his suit would cost Dr Fitzgerald a year's salary. He sported the prosperous belly of a sedentary businessman, whose only physical exertion was strolling around exclusive golf courses, closing

deals. You couldn't help noticing those keen eyes scrutinising you, but with an expression of stifled disinterest. Whenever he made the effort he could be a charming conversationalist, but with a short temper.

After barging into Dr Fitzgerald's university office, puffing an enormous cigar and showering him with ash, Randall bellowed about his pet topic:

"For 400 years those damn European colonialists plundered Latin America and took their wealth back to Europe. That's over. Now American companies will invest in Latin America to create wealth, jobs, and—"

"... create a neo-colonial dependence where the new plunderer is the United States?" Dr Fitzgerald was an aging academic, with untidy white hair and thick rimmed glasses, and physically shrivelled by decades of poverty, but intellectually superior to Mr Randall and enjoyed challenging him.

"Huh... Fitzgerald, if I didn't know you I'd think you were one of those damn communists."

"But it's not me saying it, Mr Randall, it was former United States president, Bill Taft, who said: The whole American hemisphere will be ours due to the superiority of our race."

"Listen, hard work, free enterprise, and the pursuit of profit – that's what's made our nation great. But now those communists... they're contaminating stupid little presidents all over Latin America with their evil ideas," said Randall.

"But—" said Dr Fitzgerald, as Randall ignored him and continued,

"That man in Peru, Haya, is the greatest menace to business and prosperity in our continent. They kicked him out of Peru and he ended up in Moscow, listening to those damn communists. Now he's travelling around Latin America preaching subversion against us. The name of his sect says it all: APRA – Alliance for a Popular Revolution in the Americas."

"Mr Randall, I know Víctor-Raúl Haya. I assure you he's intelligent, devoted to his country and certainly not a communist. APRA is no sect. It's a political movement with clear ideas about how to develop Latin America, distribute wealth more fairly and—"

"Look, Fitzgerald, I admire you as an academic, you know a lot about literature, but you are... *floating* in the clouds at this university, far from reality. First it's necessary to create wealth before it can be distributed. Those miserable countries only have *poverty* to distribute. Our foundation will help American businesses invest in Latin America and—"

John marched into his father's office, trying to look smart in his worn-out suit, and managed to catch the end of their conversation.

"Is this your boy, Fitzgerald?" said Randall, puffing his cigar, as he turned to meet John's smiling face.

"So, young man, I hear you want to be a university lecturer like your father." John nodded. "But first you need a doctorate, which you can't afford." John gulped in agreement. "And you have a pretty girl you want to marry, but first you need a job." Randall seemed to know everything. "I might be able to help you" said Randall, as he engulfed John in a cloud of cigar smoke.

"Here's the deal: we want to invest in Peru, but we need to know if we can trust their new government. Will they stand firm against those socialists and communists? For years we had a man we could trust, a businessman: that President Leguía. But the idiot has thrown it all away and been kicked out by that soldier, Sánchez-Cerro. He's not even a general for God's sake, only a lieutenant colonel. How long will *he* last? And to make matters worse, people are going crazy about that man Haya. He's a damn communist, in my opinion, although your father doesn't agree."

John briefly switched eye contact to his father, who could only shrug, as Randall continued:

"Our foundation is sending a mission of university professors and financiers to Peru to advise the government. Kemmerer's an eminent man but can do with a Spanish-speaking assistant like you. He could help you get your doctorate," said Randall, pausing to allow the proposal to sink into John and before launching into what most interested him:

"What I will need from you is information about the decision makers in the new government and what is needed to get, how can I put it, favourable treatment for our investments. You'll have help from our contact at our embassy in Peru: Peter Bush."

John's chest was bursting with excitement at the opportunity to work with none other than Professor Edwin Kemmerer – the world-renowned 'money doctor' – economic advisor to governments. But, why choose him?

"Young man, your father will explain the details. But, Fitzgerald, don't fill the boy's head with your fantasies. It's business we're after, not dreams."

John turned to his father once Randall had left, "Dad, sounds fantastic, but what's *really* the deal?"

"Come on son, let's go for a drink. There's a lot you need to know."

It was 1930 and 'Prohibition' ruled – the production and consumption of alcoholic drinks was illegal in the USA. However, Dr Fitzgerald had his favourite speakeasy bar where he could get a drink without much risk of a police raid.

They looked around – no police in sight. A smart Italian-American opened the door, smiled at Dr Fitzgerald, and hurriedly locked the door behind them. They walked into a large hall and sat down at a quiet table. A waiter opened the first bottle and filled their glasses.

"So, Dad, you were going to tell me what this *Foundation* is all about."

Dr Fitzgerald took a long drink, smiled and looked around, "This place – this speakeasy: it's illegal sale of liquor. It's run by the mob. Everyone knows it. The president of the United States knows it. He probably buys liquor himself, for Christ's sake. But why does he allow his own laws to be broken?" John shrugged. "Business, John – its business. We live in the land of freedom and opportunity, but nothing will get in the way of business."

"Okay, but what's it got to do with Mr Randall's foundation?"

"If big business does what it likes under our noses, what do you think they do abroad, in desperately poor countries where they can buy a whole government to, let's say, cooperate with their business interests?"

Dr Fitzgerald took another long drink, whilst John just stared at him, and then continued, "John, we love Latin America, its culture, its people, but for these businessmen it's only money. They think it's like our old Wild West was: steal land and cattle, kill Indians with impunity, sheriffs that turn a blind eye, laws that aren't enforced."

Dr Fitzgerald looked around again and lowered his voice:

"You know, John, Randall's family have been in business for many years. His father first shipped bananas from Central America. Then bought bananas himself, to squeeze prices and cut out competing shippers. After that he bought banana plantations. And so, once Randall became a monopolist, he could coerce those banana republic governments to do what he wanted."

John learned that Randall's businesses helped fund USA presidential campaigns – all for the benefit of ordinary folk eating good, cheap bananas. Randall wanted to be more successful than his father. Politicians owed him support and partners served his interests.

"Randall demands his friends in Congress get the president to send in American marines to protect his business in Central America. He says Washington politicians plead for his money to help them win elections, and he expects a return on his investment in Capitol Hill."

"Umm... but what's he got going in Peru?" said John.

"Now he's not only interested in bananas but also sugar – he's talking of sending ships to Peru," said Dr Fitzgerald.

Once in Peru and in control of sugar, why not also control supplies of oil and minerals? During the prosperous 1920s, the USA had guzzled more and more oil for its growing number of factories and cars, and more copper for its increasing demand for electric cabling.

"But the Foundation for the Freedom of the Americas is much more than Randall – oil, mining, banking, shipping... *they're* the real backbone of the FFA. The big boys are happy for Randall to enjoy the limelight," said Dr Fitzgerald.

"So, is this foundation only about business?" said John.

"No. For sure, the Foundation does much good philanthropic work but, clearly, its members are corporations driven by profit," said Dr Fitzgerald.

High on enthusiasm following Randall's offer, John nodded, "Sounds reasonable, doesn't it?"

After another long drink, it was time for Dr Fitzgerald's final advice:

“John, I can’t deny Randall’s been good to me: I’d never have got where I am without his help. But with him it’s black or white: you’re either with him, all the way, or against him.”

“Okay Dad, I’ve got it. Wow, work with Professor Kemmerer in Peru. Get my doctorate. Become a university lecturer, like you. This is the train I’ve been waiting for and I’m going to get on it.”

Dr Fitzgerald hadn’t seen John so happy for a long time. He sipped his beer and changed the subject.

The following day, John broke the news to Lisa:

“Honey, isn’t it great? I couldn’t have dreamed of a better opportunity. I can start researching for my doctorate immediately and won’t need to take that boring library job. I’ll only be away for a year or so.”

But instead of the warm smile and congratulatory kiss he expected, she stared at him and tears started rolling down her cheeks. What was wrong with her?

“*A year or so...?* But we’re supposed to get married. We’ve been looking for a nice apartment we can afford... I’ve got my mother on our side and I’m going to work on my father as soon as we have a place of our own,” she said, and turned away, bursting into tears.

As John struggled to think what to say, her tears dried up and she confronted him,

“I should have known better: you never wanted that job at the library. It wasn’t good enough for you, was it? You always wanted to go off travelling around Latin America,” she said, whilst John could only shake his head, open-mouthed and gulped. Then, she pushed him away.

“John, I can see it clearly now: you didn’t want to marry me... at least not now. And what do you expect me to do? Just wait until you decide to come back? And, if you don’t come back?”

As she turned to walk away he grabbed her arm, with every conceivable thought going through his mind – he couldn’t bare losing Lisa. He agonised to find the words that would make her stay. He pulled her towards him, embraced her and stroked her hair.

“Okay, okay... it’s not like that. I love you and I *do* want to marry you... I’ll tell Mr Randall I can’t go to Peru. Perhaps I can help him from Boston or something.” Lisa stopped struggling to get away from him but continued sniffing and said nothing.

He held her at arms’ length from her shoulders and looked into her eyes, but she looked down. Christ, she doesn’t believe me, he thought, so he tried again:

“Lisa, look at me. I’ll go to the library on Monday and take the job. And this weekend we’ll go back to see that apartment you liked. The one on the top floor – although you said it would be a struggle carrying a baby all the way up those stairs. It won’t be a problem. I’ll take care of it...” he bleated.

Now, she looked up at him. “John Fitzgerald, are you sure? You’re not kidding me, are you?”

John looked at her, shook his head and she managed a smile. He kissed her and then kept her in a strong embrace, swinging her gently, for what seemed like an eternity.

He sighed with relief – he’d done it. What the heck – he’d never meet another girl like Lisa. Only a fool would let her go. Yes, of course he wanted to marry her. As for the job in the library, well, it probably wouldn’t be that bad.

Chapter 4

In the days following Black Tuesday, when the New York Stock Exchange crashed, the radio told stories of investors who, having lost everything and suddenly finding themselves bankrupt, now faced disgrace, destitution and even prison.

In the offices of investment bank J.W. Seligman & Company, in one of New York’s tallest skyscrapers, a cleaner mopped the floor and scowled, sensing doomsday.

He looked up and saw a young executive – maybe Gene or Gerry – staring at a report on his desk, holding his head in his hands and groaning something like, “Christ, how could this have ever happened? What on earth can I do?”

The cleaner shook his head and continued with his toil. He didn’t notice the young man looked faint and needed air. He didn’t see him stumble towards the window and open it. Far below him, a crowd gathered, like a swarm of ants, in front of the New York Stock Exchange.

The young man gasped, unable to comprehend what was going on. He looked around – his large office, always buzzing with excited brokers, bragging about their latest deal or buttering up a wealthy client on the telephone, was now empty. Even that latest machine, the telex, continuously spewing out reams of paper with market prices, was dead. His boss had left town. His colleague on the desk beside him had rushed to the bank, to rescue his savings.

As he held the window wide open, the cold air on his face gave him a chilling sense of impending liberation. He shuddered and thought of his lovely wife and two small kids. He started sobbing but knew there was no other way out. He didn’t turn around when the cleaner screamed, “*Don’t do it!*”

The NYPD policeman patted the old cleaner on the shoulder once he’d finished his terrible tale, and kept the newspaper reporters at bay.

In Boston, John came home to find his apartment building in commotion. His father met him on the stairs and the old man’s face crumbled – John had never seen him in tears before. Gerry Murray was dead.

What the hell happened? Everyone admired how Gerry pulled himself out of poverty. Nobody really fathomed how he’d done it – an investment bank clerk living it up. Now it emerged those financial deals he’d dabbled in had gone sour and his investments had become worthless when the stock market crashed. His father sobbed: Gerry had become bankrupt almost overnight – unable to repay his large loan. And who had he borrowed from? The Irish mob.

Gerry would have known the mob would come after him and the only way out for him was to kill himself.

His father poured him a furtive glass of whiskey and John dried his tears. At least Mick Faughnan wouldn’t have to harass his childhood friend Gerry for repayment, he thought.

Mick had done well for himself since joining the Irish mob. A new suit or two, a gold watch and that voluptuous, blonde girlfriend, Sally – always willing to help Mick spend his money – impressed his new friends but worried his family. His father’s landlord loved him but not so his old boss, Mr Kelly – Mick visited him monthly and smirked at the look of disgust on Kelly’s face as he handed over the protection money.

Protection from what... from whom? Those hoodlums, of course; nobody dared say who they were, but they enjoyed smashing shop windows and looting. The police just shrugged when Kelly implored help.

The following day, John summoned the strength to break the tragic news about Gerry at the boxing club. Best to go early in the morning, before the funeral, he thought, so he could also see Mick, who trained hard every day, building his body and sharpening the tools of his trade, as he put it.

They’d already heard the news at the boxing club, but Mick wasn’t there.

“Haven’t you heard? He’s back at Charles Street jail,” said the club receptionist.

“What the hell happened?” said John, wailing.

The boxing gym trainer took John aside, “Do you remember that night in the speakeasy when a man fell and died after the brawl?” How could John have forgotten: he’d also ended up in jail that night. “Well, the prosecutor needed to find someone to charge for manslaughter and a witness – a guy called Kelly – swore Mick was to blame.”

But the Irish mob would wade in to defend one of their own, wouldn’t they? Well, apparently, Mayor Crowley needed to show he was cleaning up his town – a deal had been struck, with a mobster to be sacrificed.

The trainer gave John a hug, “See you later at Gerry’s funeral.”

Back home, John embraced his father and they stood in silence. What the hell was going on? First they’d lost Gerry and now Mick was in danger. It had always been like that – success was

a mirage for the poor. In reality, they either sought a patron like Mr Randall, played high stakes games like Gerry or flouted legality like Mick.

John swallowed hard: the only way for him was to get that doctorate and secure an academic job like his father. He sighed as the smiling faces of Gerry and Mick tormented him.

John craved consolation. At least he was seeing Lisa this weekend. He needed to share *some* good news. So, better get down to the library to see when that job started.

Sure enough, there was Jones, looking as sullen as he'd been for the past ten years.

"Hi Jonesy, how's it going?" said John. Jones looked up and his index finger found his lips – silence. Good, at least we've established contact, thought John.

"I just came to see when I can start work," said John, smiling.

Jones appeared surprised but, eventually, his face managed a smile. Something's up: Jonesy's never been seen smiling, mused John. After what felt like an eternity, Jones spoke,

"Ah, yes, the job... bad news, I'm afraid... err, John, is it?"

Although it was a struggle, John managed to extract the news from Jones, "The university has cut the library's budget. There's a shortfall in funds from usual benefactors. You know... the economic crisis. So they can't employ another person in the library."

"*Oh no*... when do you think there'll be a job?" said John.

"Umm... maybe next year, maybe never," was the best Jones could offer.

In the past days, hours, John's life had been turned upside down. First Gerry, then Mick, and now the job he needed to marry Lisa. Jones had hammered the last nail in the coffin. Damn it, where had he gone wrong? Why had Jesus abandoned him?

At first, Lisa couldn't find words when he told her. Then, her lips twitched and her eyes moistened. John could almost read what was going through her mind. Gerry, Mick... she knew they were John's best friends; and now, no job. Her mind processed the facts and reported to her heart – it felt numb; nature's protection. She couldn't think, so she said nothing. What had been a few days ago, was no longer. Their little apartment, the simple furniture she'd chosen; struggling upstairs with a small baby – no longer a problem. Simply, no job meant no confrontation with her father, no wedding, no children and no life together. No, don't think. Cry, just cry and find comfort.

She turned to John and kissed him. Which of them needed more consolation, her or him? A hurricane had engulfed them and right now they had to seek refuge. Sitting there, in each other's arms, somehow, they fell asleep. Yes, that was the best way to pull through.

When they woke, Lisa was still in shock, but John had prepared himself. There was only one way out.

"Honey, you know I've got to take Randall's offer," he said.

"Yes, I know. Perhaps it's all worked out for the better. You never really wanted that boring job in the library, did you?" she said.

"Of course I did – I told you I was going to accept it," he said.

"No, John, you were suffering when you told me you'd turn down Randall's offer: it was what you really wanted, wasn't it?" she said and then sighed, "When will you go to Peru?"

"Umm... soon."

"And when will you return?" He shook his head, "Don't know."

Lisa sighed: instead of marrying and living together, there'd only be letters with stale news; pieces of paper arriving in the post every other week. Would she be able to bear it?

She *did* know that continuing to live under her father would be unbearable. She sniffled, then pulled herself together, pursed her lips and nodded. John said nothing – there wasn't anything he could say.

I'll never get another opportunity like Randall's, thought John. And I'll get away from here and not end up like poor Gerry and Mick.

The Santa Clara ship would leave Boston on 3rd November. A long but exciting trip, with stops in New York, Panama and Guayaquil, before arriving at Callao, Peru's main port, near the capital, Lima.

Randall summoned John the day before embarkation. For the first time, John saw him smile.

“Now, listen to me, boy. The sweeter life is... the more sugar we consume. Until this crisis arrived, the American economy grew, year after year, and so did our consumption of candy, soft drinks like Coca Cola and ice cream. So we needed to import more and more sugar.” John nodded – where was Randall leading?

“This economic crisis won’t last long, so now is the time to secure supplies of sugar. If we can buy Peruvian sugar plantations cheaply *now*, we can earn bigger profits selling sugar in the USA in the future” said Randall, his eyes shining brighter and... had John noticed him on the verge of drooling?

“And if we send ships to Peru to load sugar, we can also bring bananas from Ecuador instead of Central America. That son-of-a-bitch Sandino even wants to take over my banana plantations, for God’s sake. If we stopped buying their bananas, you’d see how soon those miserable Central American peasants ditched Sandino and begged us to buy from them again,” said Randall, chuckling as he puffed on his cigar.

But Randall’s smile swiftly vanished as he waved an arm in the air and fumed, “Sandino, Leguía, Sánchez-Cerro, Haya – why do these *stupid* Latin American politicians have to interfere with my business?”

Then, Randall recovered his composure, “Anyway, the Foundation has important business in Peru and you have a role to play. I’ll be waiting for your information. Now, Peter Bush, our man at the embassy in Lima, will explain everything and introduce you to Professor Kemmerer,” said Randall.

John nodded, “Yes, sir.”

“By the way, Peter has arranged for you to be met at the port in Peru by a young man called...” Randall checked his papers, “Yes: Pedro Vargas – apparently a law student. He’ll arrange your accommodation and help you find your way around.”

“Great, sounds really great, sir,” said John as he bid farewell to Randall, recalling his father’s words: “With Randall it’s black or white: you’re either with him, all the way, or against him.” So far, so good, thought John.

The Santa Clara was a cargo ship with a section to accommodate the crew and a few passengers in cheap cabins. Due to the economic crisis, the ship hold was half empty, but it would return to the USA full of raw materials and foodstuff bought at rock bottom prices in South America.

The first night on board, John was walking across the deck to join the crew and fellow passengers for dinner when he made out a female silhouette coming towards him out of the darkness.