

## CHAPTER 11

### MANHATTAN, NEW YORK

It was ten o'clock in the morning in New York. Conrad Redek looked out his twentieth floor office window. It was a clear, bright day. The view was of Brooklyn across the East River. The large ventilation tower for the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel on Governors Island marred the otherwise pastoral view of the wooded landscape and the nineteenth century buildings.

Redek's office had full floor to ceiling windows facing to the southeast. The decor was modern; large glass desk, chrome plated metal furniture with white leather upholstery, indirect lighting. The walls were decorated with abstract art in brilliant colors. The impression was the art had been selected on the basis of the color impact not artistic merit. The effect was designer chic sterile.

Conrad Redek sat at his desk working on a notebook computer. A second notebook computer sat on the opposite end of the large desk. Medium build, in his mid-forties, with a dark complexion, he could be considered handsome were it not for his eyes. Some might describe them as cold, but threatening would be more descriptive. Coupled with thin lips, the overall impression was frequently menacing. With his blunt style and substantial power, Conrad Redek was menacing.

His intercom buzzed. The secretary announced, "Mr. Pablo Reyes from Columbia is on the line, Sir."

"The problem situation that originated in New York was unfortunately not resolved," Pablo Reyes said. Reyes managed not only the large coffee distribution firm, República Agrícola, but was the senior Martinelli Global official in Columbia. His influence ran to the Columbian President's inner circle.

"That is unfortunate. It seemed like an easy task," Redek responded with a tone emphasizing the implicit criticism.

There was a pause before Reyes answered. "Yes. It should have been dealt with more efficiently. Steps are being implemented to correct the failure."

"Thank you. Please keep me informed," Redek said and disconnected the call.

Pablo Reyes was not used to such treatment. Redek was a gringo *pendejo* with no manners. He was coarse with no sense of culture. Reyes had only contempt for Americans, Redek especially. However, Redek was powerful and the partnership with Martinelli Global had multiplied the Reyes family fortune several times over. So he would ignore the disrespect.

#### BOGOTÁ, COLUMBIA

Mark Reynolds had been sitting in an office with barred windows for over an hour. There was no ventilation. The temperature was well over ninety. The walls were once white but now yellowed. Rust stains from the anchor bolts of the bars on the windows traced lines to the floor. The air smelled of old smoke and perhaps urine.

Eventually a police officer entered the room. "Señor Reynolds, this was a serious incident you were involved in. Two men and a woman were killed and another person may not live."

“What the hell are you talking about? Those guys were trying to kill us. Christ, didn’t you see their weapons?”

“I suggest you calm down Señor Reynolds. There is much to sort out here. Your driver also carried a firearm. It is not at all clear what was going on. So perhaps you can tell me what you were doing this evening,” the police officer asked. He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. The gesture signaled he was in no hurry to resolve this matter.

Two more hours passed. The alternating officers questioning Reynolds made no attempt to pressure him to reveal anything incriminating. Coffee and cigarettes were offered. After a time a more senior officer entered the room and told Reynolds he was being transported to police headquarters for further questioning. Reynolds’ questions about Cortina went unanswered.

“I am a U.S. citizen, I must be allowed to contact my embassy.”

“Your embassy has already been notified, Señor Reynolds. You were involved in a most serious incident. I am sure you understand that a thorough investigation must be conducted, no different than in the United States,” the senior officer replied in good English. He opened the door and ordered two policemen into the room.

The police started to handcuff Reynolds. “If this is only routine, and I assume I am not a suspect in a crime, can we forego the handcuffs?” Reynolds asked.

The senior officer thought for a moment, then said something in Spanish to his men. To Reynolds he said, “Very well, Señor Reynolds. I will extend you that courtesy.”

Reynolds was placed in the back seat of a Toyota Land Cruiser. In the front were two police officers and a third sat with him in the back. That officer was a young man in his early twenties, on the chubby side, also sweating profusely.

The SUV set out through the streets of Bogotá. The officer in the back seat kept looking around nervously, particularly to the

rear of their vehicle. Reynolds looked to the rear and saw a black SUV behind them.

The traffic was heavy, moving at no more than twenty miles per hour. The police vehicle was in the right hand lane with another lane of traffic to their left. Parked vehicles were to their right.

Suddenly the police vehicle slammed on the brakes to avoid hitting a truck stopped ahead of him. The driver and the other officer in the front seat opened their doors and jumped out. The chubby officer in the rear was trying frantically to open his door. He could not find the button to release the lock. His eyes were wide in panic when he looked back at Reynolds.

Reynolds knew this must be some sort of a trap. And he must be the target.

As the officer finally found the lock release for the door, Reynolds grabbed the man's gun. It was a .357 magnum Colt revolver, an older police weapon. The man did not even register the theft of his weapon in his rush to exit the vehicle. As he stumbled from the high profile vehicle, he fell against a parked car.

From between two parked cars to the right, Reynolds saw a man with a weapon pointed toward him through the open SUV door. Reynolds slid to the floor of the vehicle as the man opened up with a burst of automatic fire from the compact weapon. Partly because of the high profile of the vehicle, the first rounds went high smashing the left side window but missing Reynolds. It was only a burst of little more than one second. In return, Reynolds held the heavy revolver in both hands and fired four times at his assailant. Two rounds caught the man in chest.

Reynolds scrambled up from the floor and opened the left rear door. A large truck passing on the left hand lane of traffic caught the door. The door was wrenched from its hinges. The truck halted. The police SUV's door was now wedged between the two vehicles. A man had come from the truck that had

stopped in front of the police SUV. He brandished a weapon but could not get to Reynolds.

From the rear, the driver of the black SUV behind the police SUV exited his vehicle. He too carried a short automatic weapon. Closing his door, he was startled to find himself looking at Reynolds pointing the large revolver. His reflex caused him to raise his weapon. Reynolds' own reflex caused him to shoot this second assailant in the face.

Reynolds dodged between cars and then dashed for an alleyway. Somewhere behind him was at least one more attacker. With his adrenaline pumping, he ran full out for at least ten minutes, zigzagging from alley to alley. He still carried the large revolver.

Hiding behind a dumpster, he rested to regain his breath. He was drenched in sweat. After several minutes there was no indication that he had been followed. There were only distant sounds of police sirens. Looking at the revolver he flipped open the cylinder. Only one round remained. Not much of a defense. Worse yet was the liability if the police caught him with the weapon. He had just shot two men - probably killed them. Remembering the scene from the movie *The Godfather*, he wiped the gun thoroughly with his shirttail to remove any fingerprints. He dropped it in the first trash container he passed.

Reynolds walked another few blocks finding a modest commercial section. At a small hotel, the receptionist called him a taxi. He told the driver to take him to the U.S. Embassy. He hoped it was not far since he had only forty U.S. dollars secreted in his sock. The police had kept his wallet and passport.

It took forty minutes of waiting before he could see a U.S. consular official. The man was in his late twenties, probably very junior in rank. They went into a small office with no windows, a steel table and a couple of chairs. It looked like any police interrogation room you would see on television. It did have

decidedly better air conditioning than the Columbian police facility.

Reynolds told officials the basics of the first attempt on his and Cortina's life, then his transport by the police and the second incident. He omitted the part about shooting two of his assailants saying only that there was an attack on the police vehicle and he managed to escape in the gunfire.

"That's a hell of a story, Mr. Reynolds. First of all, how can we verify your identity?" the bureaucrat asked. He registered little emotion, obviously skeptical of Reynolds' fantastic story.

"First of all, I know my passport number. You can then retrieve my photo from your system can't you?"

"Yes we can. Let's do that right away. Who can we contact at your newspaper?"

The young man took the number and left the room. Returning after fifteen minutes, he said, "We verified your identity. It also seems that there was in fact some sort of violence involving you." The man was now clearly more interested. "We have a notification from the Columbian police that you are wanted for questioning in a murder, Mr. Reynolds. Just what have you been up to?"

"Fuck. The bastards are trying to set me up. Anything I did was in self-defense."

"Jesus! Are you saying you did kill someone?"

"Listen. I'm an American citizen. You can't turn me over to the Columbian police for christsakes! Those assholes were bribed to look the other way so someone could kill me."

The door to the room opened. A distinguished looking middle-aged man in a white shirt and tie entered. Behind him was a Marine sergeant with a holstered sidearm. The younger official jumped to his feet.

"Mr. Reynolds? I am Lorenzo Aznar, U.S. Ambassador to Columbia. Mr. Kramer, you and Mr. Reynolds will accompany me to my office."

The Ambassador's office could be described as official elegance in its style. The furniture was first-rate and two walls were comprised of bookshelves in expensive wood. But there was no art, just government photographs.

"Sit down, Mr. Reynolds," Ambassador Aznar said. The Marine guard and the junior consular officer remained standing.

"I had a call from a very senior police official, just ten minutes ago. They know that you are here. He requested that you be turned over to Columbian authorities. So, let's hear your story."

Reynolds recited the events again much as he had told the young staffer, except in this case, he did explain the full details of the police setup and his shooting of two men. He declined to explain the nature of the story that brought him to Columbia. However, he did indicate that he had information to share with U.S. law enforcement.

"That's very interesting, Mr. Reynolds. The police official that called me made no mention of what you describe as the first incident that led to you being taken into custody. He claims you assaulted police and escaped custody as you were being transported to police headquarters. No mention of you shooting anyone either. According to him, you were being held for questioning in the murder of a Columbian journalist, Juan Cortina."

"What! You mean Cortina is dead? Shit!" Reynolds felt as if he had been hit in the gut. "Listen, Mr. Ambassador, look at this." Reynolds reached into his sock and pulled out the small digital storage card he had removed from his digital camera. "Do you have a way of downloading this to a PC?"

The Ambassador looked to the younger official.

"Yes, Sir. I can. I'll get a computer right away."

"So what did you tell the police official, Sir?" Reynolds asked as they waited for the junior official to return.

“Well, I told General Ortega that he would have to make a formal request. After that, I would take it under consideration. I am inclined to believe you Mr. Reynolds. I am not inclined to . . . This is off the record?”

“Of course, Sir,” Reynolds said.

“I’m not inclined to believe General Ortega. My position precludes me from saying what I really think. My guess is the story you’re researching has something to do with drug trafficking. What else? After all, this is Columbia. At any rate, Ortega is dirty. Again that’s not a quote for attribution to me.

“I’m a former Congressman, obviously Latin, Spanish speaking. But you see, I’m also ex-FBI. Perfect choice to represent the U.S. in this pesthole. Don’t get me wrong, this is a wonderful country, wonderful people, breathtaking scenery. But the drug trafficking dominates everything, even the diplomacy with the U.S.”

The junior official returned with a notebook computer. He attached a device to allow the digital camera file storage device to load the photographs into the computer.

“These are the guys that were chasing us. Just luck that our driver swerved. These guys smashed into a car, killed the woman driving, and then slammed into a utility pole. See the automatic weapons?” Reynolds explained, however the photos showed the weapons clearly.

“And this shot. That’s my colleague, Juan Cortina with the wrecked SUV in the background. Both Cortina and I were taken away by the police. Once at the police station, we were separated. That’s the last time I saw him. If they’re now talking about his murder then it’s the police who are responsible.”

“Interesting material. Not surprising. To say this country is corrupt is like saying Antarctica is cold. I have no intention of cooperating with the likes of Ortega. But that still makes you a real problem, Mr. Reynolds. So, I need to get rid of you. The

longer you're here the more of a diplomatic headache you become."

"Kramer, get Mr. Reynolds something to eat and a change of clothes. It'll take a little time to put this together," Ambassador Aznar said.

Reynolds stood to go. "Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. I know this puts you in an awkward situation.

An hour later, Reynolds was back in Aznar's office.

"This is Special Agent Collins of the FBI. Mr. Collins is the agent in charge down here." Reynolds shook hands with the agent.

Aznar continued, "I don't know what you have to share with the FBI, but I have convinced Brian to consider you to be in U.S. custody. A material witness. That way when you are transported to the airport there will be no interference from Columbian authorities. One of Brian's agents will accompany you back to the States."

"I appreciate all you're doing, Sir. Too bad I can't write it up for publication," Reynolds said.

"It's not all altruistic on my part," Aznar said. "By the FBI's involvement, any flap the Columbians raise will not be an issue with my superiors at State. With you out of here, by the time Ortega can muster higher powered support from the Columbian President's office, you will not be a diplomatic issue I have to deal with. Now with that said, you do actually have information that will be of interest to give to the FBI, don't you?"

"Absolutely," Reynolds said, then looked at the FBI agent. "Not to be coy Agent Collins, but the information is in New York. It should definitely be of interest to U.S. law enforcement."

"Very well, Mr. Reynolds. I'm told that you must leave in the next few minutes," Ambassador Aznar said and shook Reynolds hand. "Unfortunately, there is just one more detail." Reynolds waited for Aznar to explain. "I'm afraid that to preclude any

potential confrontation with the Columbians, you need to be handcuffed to the agent that will accompany you on the flight.”

“The handcuffs will be removed once we’re in the air, Mr. Reynolds,” Agent Collins said.

“Wonderful,” Reynolds said sarcastically.

Reynolds’ entourage piled into the ubiquitous SUV for the drive to the airport. The junior consular officer Kramer and two armed security staff accompanied Reynolds, now handcuffed to an FBI agent. All but Reynolds had diplomatic passports. The Columbians could prevent the plane from leaving, but they would not dare to take Reynolds from U.S. custody. Besides that he was chained to a U.S. federal agent. The Ambassador was counting on quickly getting Reynolds out of the country before General Ortega could better organize a plan.

Nothing eventful took place. The worse part was the wait at the airport before the flight departed. People stared wondering what he had done to be taken back to the States in handcuffs.