

**THE
SHEPHERD'S
BETRAYAL**

William Congdon

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1

MINING WAS ALL he knew. A month shy of his forty-fifth birthday, his routine hadn't varied in the last ten years, except for the day almost five years ago, when he buried his wife. The cancer that had killed Faith had nearly killed him as well. If it hadn't been for the mine occupying his thoughts and actions, he most assuredly would have died. In the last year, he'd finally come out of his dream state and was returning to his former self.

He woke at 4:00 a.m., with the smell of strong coffee already brewing in the kitchen, thanks to the wonders of Mr. Coffee and a self-timer. It was late July but he dressed warmly. The prediction the night before was of a light snow for the higher elevations, not uncommon for Montana this time of year. Or for any time of year. So many people yearn for the white powdery crystals during the winter months so they could ski and snowboard again. To him this weather is nothing to get excited or upset about. The summer tourists will be put off, but to him the crisp air during a snowfall is exhilarating. He slipped on his cardigan, let Rosie his golden retriever out to do her thing, then sat at the kitchen table. The wood stove in the corner began to throw heat, and his small, comfortable two-bedroom home nestled between the pines on a hilltop overlooking the Big Hole river exuded warmth that could not be purchased by the richest of the rich.

But Jason McClintock was not a poor man. He was a graduate of the Colorado School of Mines with a doctorate in geological engineering. His expertise in mining enabled him to contract his work all over the world, and not necessarily to the highest bidder. With a worldwide reputation and more work than he could handle, he'd paid off his home, the mine, and had accumulated an impressive nest egg. The interest that the money generated, along with the little gold he pulled from the shaft, some twenty miles away, allowed him to slow down considerably and still keep food on the table and gas in his battered 1955 Jeep.

McClintock shook his head every time he thought about it. Did he really want to go to Uruguay? Uruguay's economy was being adversely affected by the serious problems facing its neighbors, Argentina on the south and Brazil to the north. Argentina, he thought was the primary problem. That the country had defaulted on their debt was unbelievable, amounting to billions of dollars lost to lenders that trusted in the country's ability to repay. The devaluation of Argentina's currency hadn't helped the situation either. McClintock knew both issues put extreme pressure on Uruguay's currency. Perhaps helping Uruguay raise cash (through the sale of gold that he might help produce) was a good thing. Enough about international economics; the world would be better off if he'd leave that subject to the experts and focus on what he knew best—minerals.

A whimpering at the door pulled him from the clouds. He stretched his six-foot athletic frame out of the chair and headed towards the sound. With his wavy blond hair and blue eyes, McClintock looked ten years younger. "You done already, girl?" Jason asked as he opened the door. Rosie looked as though she nodded and smiled, as she trotted past him and headed for her bed in the corner. McClintock sat down at the kitchen table with his coffee and thought about Nelson.

Dan Nelson was a State Department special attache assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Montevideo, Uruguay (he was really a CIA liaison, a

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fact that he kept from his closest friends, except for Jason). He worked both sides of the fence with legitimate credentials from both organizations. Dan and Jason had roomed together during their freshman year in prep school and got along so well that they made sure they were roommates for the next three years. After prep school, when Jason left for Colorado and the School of Mines, Dan went to Yale, where he eventually earned his doctorate in international studies. Jason and Dan talked periodically, and during one of those conversations several months ago, Jason learned that Dan would be stationed in Uruguay. Jason told Dan about the potential mining opportunities there and that many in his field believed the mineral potential in Uruguay was being ignored. Uruguay, a little smaller than the state of Washington, with a geological setting similar to Western Australia, Canada, and South Africa, was probably sitting on major gold deposits, but no one seemed to care. At present, mining accounted for less than one-half percent of the country's gross domestic product, while cattle remained the primary industry.

Dan had phoned Jason last night to tell him that the State Department was interested in assisting the government of Uruguay to expand the San Miguel gold mining project in the North, and they needed a specialist to help them in the initial stages. He told Jason that if he accepted the job, he would be there a month, certainly not more than two. The money sounded good, and given the fair climate, there could be far worse places to be making a living.

What he didn't know was that this project, (even though it was sponsored by the State Department), had the interest of some in the CIA. The Uruguayan government gave the operation its blessing only because its president would make a significant profit on any gold extracted.

Rosie knew instinctively when 5:30 a.m. was near. She rose from her bed and headed for the door. An anxious bark shook McClintock. "You're sure ready to get going today, what's up?" said McClintock. A

light yelp and wag of the tail was the response he usually received. When he was home, he and Rosie were inseparable. Outside, snow whisked past them in the light breeze.

They strolled across the gravel to the Jeep. “Okay, girl, hop in,” he said as Rosie moved to her spot and Jason started the Jeep. They headed to the mine.

Mike, Jason’s brother, thought the sheer beauty of the majestic Rocky Mountains was more awe-inspiring than anything they’d seen in years. They were about forty-five minutes east of Denver, making their way from Chicago to California. The drive so far had been uneventful; the Suburban was packed with everything needed to tide them over until the movers arrived in Santa Ynez five days from now. Santa Ynez is a rural town thirty-five miles north of Santa Barbara, California.

The McClintocks were ready for a new adventure. Mike, a little shorter than his brother, was built like a brick with dark hair and blue eyes. His build was so solid that at the beginning of every football season, his neighbors would tell him that he ought to be playing for the Bears. God knows they could use his help, they’d say. He had been an FBI special agent in charge of the most recent child abduction case in the area—it almost put him over the edge. Even though the child was found alive and the perp killed, the emotional toll it took on him and his family was more than he was willing to pay. He was burnt out mentally and physically. After twenty years with the FBI in Chicago, he’d decided to call it quits. With his experience, he felt he could find something to do if the small winery they’d purchased didn’t keep him busy and out of trouble—or out of his wife Julie’s hair. Mike still wasn’t sure the winery had been the right move. Sure, he’d read two books on wine-making and knew the basics of the basics. But his real expertise was drinking the finished product. The property had twenty-five acres of vineyard and five additional acres for the home and

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outbuildings where the wine processing, bottling and storage occurred. Julie was all for it. Her favorite phrase was “just give it a shot.”

A petite blonde with a cute figure to match her attitude, Julie looked at the lighter, brighter side of life—the glass was always half full, nothing less. When she wasn't carting the kids off to soccer practice or some school function she wrote children's books. Three had been published and a fourth was in the works. Her success gave them the flexibility to make the move. In the backseat sat Zach and Sam (short for Samantha). Zach was nine (going on forty) and looking more like Mike every day. Sam was six and had a button nose and curly golden locks that Mike was certain would drive the boys crazy in the next decade. The kids had been great so far, enduring eight-to ten-hour days on the road. The thought of playing in the hotel pool when they finally stopped kept them going; the threat of losing that privilege kept them in line.

Making the decision to leave Chicago had been very easy. Originally from Central California, Mike and Julie knew that any change included California's sunny climate. Both were forty-three and had many good years ahead of them. On that gorgeous summer day, finally leaving the wheat fields and corn behind, life was looking very good.

The drive through Denver was about as exciting as a drive through any major metropolitan area; they kept focusing on the mountain. It wasn't long before they were heading up in elevation and passing the turnoffs to prime ski resorts like Steamboat Springs, Keystone and Vail. “Wouldn't it be great to have a winter vacation up here this year?” Mike said as they passed Vail.

“Wouldn't it be great to have an income to afford a winter vacation up here?” said Julie.

Always the logical one, at least she kept things humorous while in perspective.

“Dad, when are we going to be there?”

“Are we almost to the pool?”

Taking his cue from the kids and their questions Mike checked the clock and figured he had maybe forty-five minutes to reach a stopping place before things got out of hand. “Julie, check your phone and see where nearest Holiday Inn might be,” said Mike.

“Looks like we’re in luck again,” she said. “Grand Junction is only thirty miles away and they have a Holiday Inn with an indoor pool.” Cheers erupted from the backseat as another long day was coming to an end.

“Do they have room service and movies like last night?” asked Sam.

“I’m sure they do, Sam,” said Mike, “but before we do any of that we get to swim, right?” Once again, a loud “right!” erupted from the backseat.

Mike took the off-ramp directed by GPS and drove right to the lobby. “Let’s check in before we grab our bags,” said Mike. While he filled out the paperwork, Julie and the kids checked the pool. It was bigger than they expected and it was all she could do to keep the kids from jumping in with their clothes on.

With their bags in hand, they made their way to the poolside room. “Julie, why don’t you take the kids out? I have to call Jason.” Mike had promised his brother that he would check in at least every other night. Jason had been more of a father than a brother, taking over for their parents who were killed in a plane accident during Mike’s freshman year in high school. Jason trusted Mike and Julie, but he didn’t trust strangers and freeways.

“You guys be careful,” Mike shouted as Julie followed the running kids to the pool.

He grabbed a cold beer from the cooler and dialed Montana.

“Hey Chief, how ya doing?” asked Mike. Jason had just showered and was enjoying a glass of Glenfiddich on the rocks, his favorite single malt scotch.

“Doing fine. How far did you get today, where did you stop?” Jason was glad to hear from his brother. He knew he was overprotective. For

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crying out loud, his kid brother was a retired FBI agent, and a good one at that!

“Just shy of six hundred miles; we’re at the Holiday Inn in Grand Junction. Julie took the kids to the pool to burn off some energy. Jason, I can’t tell you how nice it was to see those Rocky Mountains today. I didn’t realize how much I’d missed them.”

“I know what you mean. Why do you think I live where I live? Must be something in the McClintock genes.” Jason popped a frozen pizza into the oven.

“Did you hit the mother lode today?” Mike asked, knowing that the most Jason had ever pulled out of his mine at one time was an eight-ounce nugget. Jason enjoyed their playful jabs, whether it be the mine, wine-making, football, or the weather.

“Not today, but soon, I can feel the gold in my bones. Where’s your target stop for tomorrow?”

“I’m shooting for Mesquite, but we may have to stay in St George, Utah—depends on how antsy the kids get.” Mike finished his beer and reached for a second. He knew Julie would want a rum and coke so mixed that while he talked. Jason hadn’t mentioned Brenda, his girlfriend the last several times they spoke so as the conversation was winding down Mike asked about her.

“Haven’t seen her in the last three days. She’s finishing a painting she promised a guy up in Oregon. I was going to call her just as you called. Say, I talked to Dan Nelson last night.”

“How’s he doing? Still climbing to the top of the State Department?”

“He’s still moving up. Seems that they have an interest in mining gold in Uruguay. He asked me if I’d consider acting as a consultant, at least in the initial stages. I’ve pretty much decided to take the job. The mine, called San Miguel, is located in Northern Uruguay. It’s been some time since I’ve been down south, and I’m ready for some good ocean fishing. The trout up here are just too easy to catch.”

“Yeah, right. You still get just as excited now as you did when we

were kids going for those huge lake trout in Georgetown, or the browns in the Big Hole River.”

Jason grinned and said, “Sounds as though they want me down there soon. I’ll be staying, at least initially, at the Hotel Lafayette in town center Montevideo. Got that, Sport?”

“Have a good trip. I’ll give you a buzz in a couple of days,” said Mike. “Talk to you later.”

“Adios, partner.”

Jose Carrillo was in his office at the Uruguay Ministry of Industry, Energy and Mining when the phone rang. “Mr. Carrillo, President Duarte is on line one,” said Estella, his assistant.

“Thank you, Estella,” said Carrillo as he pressed the correct line. “Hello, Mr. President.”

“Jose, how are you, how’s the family?” asked Duarte.

“All doing well; thank you for asking, sir. How are you doing?”

“The reason for my call is to give you a head’s up about the San Miguel project.

The U.S. State Department is sending a specialist down to assist you. You may know him—Jason McClintock.”

“Sir, anyone involved in mining knows him. He borders on legendary when it comes to his uncanny ability to find deposits of whatever mineral he may be looking for.”

“Give him whatever he needs. I want to be pulling gold out of that mine within the month. Also, I know that you are accepting bids to handle the extraction. I want you to use, International Mineral Development and Exploration, also known as IMDEC.”

“Sir, I excluded them from the bidding process because I couldn’t find substantial background on the company.” A bead of sweat trickled down the side of Carrillo’s forehead.

“Carrillo, you heard what I said. I can vouch for the company, I

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know the chairman personally. Her name is Maria de La Cruz. Inform her of IMDEC's selection as soon as possible."

"I'll begin the paperwork and call her as soon as it's ready, Mr. President."

"One more thing, Jose. This conversation never took place. Understood?"

"Yes sir. Anything else?" All Carrillo heard was a click as the phone went dead. *What in the world was that all about? Of course, I know the President, but rarely do I speak with him. This doesn't feel right*, thought Carrillo, as he began organizing the contract for IMDEC.

Maria de La Cruz sat in her plush thirty-first floor IMDEC office in Rio de Janeiro. Her job was relatively easy compared to most others in "the Agency." She considered herself more of an administrator than a field operative. Had she known just how dull this job could be, she might not have joined the CIA right out of school. She sacrificed a normal life with two kids, a dog, and a home with a white picket fence and the same guy bugging her for sex night after boring night. *Maybe I don't have it so bad after all*, she thought. The phone rang and she heard her secretary pick it up.

"Mr. Nelson is on line one," Olivia said over the speaker.

"Dan, we're all set! I just received a call from the Uruguay Ministry of Mining. I know you had to grease Duarte's palms to get the deal done, but who knows, if your friend McClintock is as good as his reputation, maybe we'll be able to pad our retirements" said de La Cruz.

"There's always that possibility. Everything seems to be falling into place, Maria. What I don't understand is why Richmond is so adamant about you being down here to monitor the mine when I can do it just as easily," said Dan. "By the way, Jason will be arriving in Montevideo

day after tomorrow. I need to be in Washington, so plan on meeting with him after he gets in.”

For the last three months, Dan had been complaining to headquarters about his post in Uruguay. He was becoming a thorn to everyone and he knew it. They’d soon retire him or ship him off to a post further down the ladder than he already was, to force him out. At this point he didn’t give a damn. With any luck, he and de La Cruz would be able to siphon a small part of the proceeds from the gold pulled out of San Miguel, then he’d retire on his own terms. At least that was the plan. Every operative had an emergency stash somewhere, because you never knew when you’d be in a situation where you couldn’t access funds in the conventional manner. This project had the potential to allow him to top off what he already had and live in relative comfort.

“I’m already booked at the Hotel Lafayette,” Maria said.

“Jason can’t believe that this operation is anything but State sponsored.”

“Dan, you worry too much. You know how I operate. Everything will run smoothly. Not to worry.”

“I hope so, Maria, because if word leaked out that the Agency had a hand in this operation, you and I would take the hit and the prospects for a long, healthy life would be slim to none. I don’t know about you, but I’ve worked too hard for that to happen. I keep thinking of the Sandinistas the Agency got involved with and how many of those guys fried, just to raise hush money for covert ops. Life is way too short for that,” said Nelson as he reasoned through the logic of the scenario that he’d been forced to orchestrate.

“As I said, Dan, it’s under control. End of conversation. I’ll call you after I meet with McClintock.” Maria clicked off the phone, thinking that Dan was too much of a straight shooter. He was a good guy, but could be a real pain in the ass if provoked—a sentiment she knew was shared by others.

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She picked up the phone once again and dialed the private number in D.C., which was answered almost immediately. "Yes?" was the only thing he, Andrew Richmond, CIA Deputy Director of Operations for the Western Hemisphere said. He had lived in a large home with a huge mortgage that his soon to be second ex now occupied; he now lived in a condo while still paying the mortgage on the house. In addition to paying alimony to two women he'd once loved, he had two children in college, and a third starting next year. These issues combined with mounting credit card debt were pushing him to the brink financially, mentally and physically. He was desperate and so were the steps he'd recently taken to ease the pressure. Action that even he, in his wildest dreams, wouldn't have guessed he was capable of taking. The San Miguel mine operation was not sanctioned by the Agency. Any of the proceeds skimmed from the project were going right to Richmond.

"We're in with the mine," said Maria. "I can't wait to see you again," her sultry voice was inviting as she thought of her last trip to headquarters and their night together in her hotel room. Maria was impressed with power and money. She wasn't losing any sleep keeping Nelson in the dark regarding the true nature of San Miguel.

"There'll be plenty of time for that. Keep me informed of the mine's progress and let me know if Nelson becomes a problem. By the way, I've downloaded another file for you to deliver to Duarte. You should have it today. Deliver it as we discussed, and we'll be paid handsomely," and the line went dead.

Maria sighed, then pressed the speaker phone button. "Olivia, did you make the plane reservations for Montevideo?"

"You get in at 12:30, fifteen minutes before McClintock," she said.

"You're a gem, Olivia. What would I do without you?"

"Since you've finally realized my importance after all these years, how about putting in a good word about my raise?" asked Olivia.

Maria walked out of her office and stood at Olivia's desk. "I give

you an opening and you drive a truck right through it. I've done everything I can, you know that; it's up to Langley."

"This arrived for you while you were on the line," and she handed Maria the envelope.

"Thanks, see you tomorrow." Maria was gone for the day.

Nelson was reading an internal memo when the call came through. "Nelson."

"Just as you suspected, she's talking to someone about the project—and they're concerned about you!" said the voice at the other end. "Not only that, but whoever she was talking to delivered her a package that she was instructed to deliver to Duarte. You've got to hear this, the guy said they would be paid well for it. Oh, and one more thing....she's screwing this guy."

"Did you get a name?" asked Nelson.

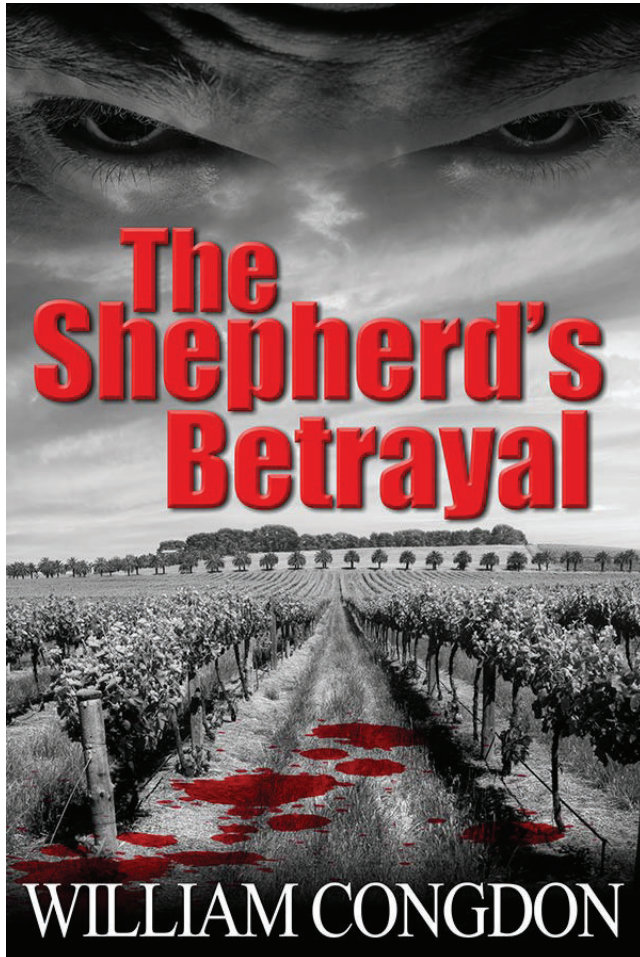
"The conversation was too short, but we did get the general area she phoned." "Which is?" asked Nelson waiting for the name.

"Suburbs of D.C. Can you believe it?"

"Send me a copy of the tape and let me know if she has any further communication," Nelson told the technician sitting in the embassy communications room. Nelson had had his suspicions about Maria's recent activities, but never thought she'd turn on the Agency. Thank God, he'd had her office and home bugged. But now he had to figure out how to handle her, and find out who she was in bed with, so to speak.

Nelson had been de La Cruz's control since his arrival in Uruguay, and he was still trying to figure her out.

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