

# Weak Point

By

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Titles with shared characters

Listed in the order in which they should be read

Day 183 - Published in 2015

Flight 885 - Published in 2015

A Trip to Mérida - Published in 2015

Weak Point - Published in 2016

Serenity - Published in 2015

Miss Match – Published in 2015

Dragonfly - Published in 2015

Grace: a trilogy; Day 183, Flight 885, and A Trip to Mérida

Other Titles

The Writer - Published in 2015

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## Dedication

This work is dedicated to both the uniformed and civilian intelligence officers within the armed services and the Department of Defense.

## PREFACE

This work is a continuation of the adventures of characters introduced in previous stories. In Day 183, (set in 1976) Pete Levindusky had resigned his commission as a Naval Officer to attend graduate school in Ft. Myers, Florida, and study fish behavior. There he met and married Dr. Sarah Roth (research chemist and daughter of Pete's thesis advisor, Dr. Harry Roth). Harry is a research botanist. Pete and Sarah were drawn into a smuggling case being investigated by FBI agents Brandy Bane and Bob Foreman.

The next two novels, Flight 885 and A Trip to Merida, follow the adventures of these characters as they investigate hijackings and drug smuggling cases. During these pursuits, they disrupted the operations of a powerful drug lord. The drug cartel became intent on killing Sarah, Pete, and Harry for revenge, forcing them into the witness protection program under the name Fitzpatrick. Weak Point begins five years later.

Day 183, Flight 885, and A Trip to Merida are also published as a trilogy under the title Grace.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Life in St. Francois

September 30th, 1982

Pete Fitzpatrick sat on the front porch of his small ranch house a few miles north of Poplar Bluff, rocking ever so slightly so that he wouldn't spill his morning coffee. The view was nothing spectacular by rural southeastern Missouri standards, but this morning the fog hung low in the depressions while at the same time it could be seen rising from the waters of the small stream that ran through the hills a few miles away. The scene was splashed with the reddish-golden glow of the morning sun as it peeked over the tops of the wooded knobs of the Ozarks to the East. There was only one thing that would make this moment better; and suddenly she was there. Sarah slid into the rocking chair next to Pete's, reached over and, taking his free hand in hers, said, "Good morning, sweetheart."

"Good morning, honey," Pete smiled. Glancing at Sarah, he was once again captivated by her beauty, snared again in the depth of her shimmering obsidian eyes. She looked every bit as good to Pete as she had the first day they met, five years and three children ago. He smiled again as he wondered when her jet-black hair would begin to develop thin lines of gray.

Just as the rhythm of everything else in their life had matched soon after they had met, it didn't take long before the rhythm of their rockers matched too. Sarah had first been attracted to Pete by his intelligence and his heart. It had taken a little time, but his strong, if plain, features had won her heart as well. He still wore his sandy hair short, as he had when he had been in the Navy.

"When do you think Bob and Brandy will get here?" he asked.

Sarah glanced at her wristwatch before answering. "It's 6:48 now, so I guess they should be here in about an hour and a half." Sarah looked at Pete and read his mind. It wasn't hard to do; she had been thinking the same thing. Dropping her hand to his thigh, she asked, "Do you want to go back upstairs for a while?"

Their thoughts of an early morning workout were driven away by the slapping of small, bare feet on the wooden floor of the living room. A moment later, the screen door opened and slammed shut again. At Pete's side, grasping the arm of his rocker, with his cherubic face

upturned at his father, stood a drooling, snot-faced Harold R. Fitzpatrick. He had been born only ten days after they had arrived at their new ranch: July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1977.

"I'm hungry," Harold muttered through the slobber that adorned most newly awakened five year olds.

"I'll get his breakfast ready," Sarah said, rising from her rocker. "Do you want anything?"

Before Pete could answer, the sound of their third son, Gordon, could be heard drifting down the staircase. It wasn't quite a cry. It was a special noise that Gordon made when he wanted attention, but wasn't upset. Someday Sarah hoped that it would become his first word: Mommy.

Pete rocked forward in his chair, stood, and made an alternate suggestion. "Tell you what; I'll get breakfast. You should go see to Gordon. I'll check on Louis, too."

Sarah nodded and Pete picked up Harold to carry him to the kitchen. He couldn't help stopping and admiring Sarah, however, as she walked to the stairs and began to climb to the second floor. Their youngest child, Gordon, was only three months old and she had somehow once again regained her figure. The way she walked still made his heart beat faster, but *maybe*, he thought *that was because of her suggestion only a few moments ago*.

*No*, he countered silently, *Sarah was as sexy as ever*.

When Sarah rounded the corner at the top of the stairs, Pete returned to his duties. Looking at Harold, he said, "Valerie's coming to play today!"

"Yippee!" Harold bubbled through his still sodden upper lip. Pete got Harold situated in his booster chair at the kitchen table, wiped his nose, and presented him with a bowl of dry Cheerios and a cup of milk. He and Sarah had long ago learned that serving cereal this way tended to make cleaning up quite a bit easier. Harold had gotten used to it and still liked his Cheerios dry. Once Harold became engrossed with playing with his breakfast, Pete ducked into the next room, picked up Louis, and brought him back to the kitchen.

"Legs out, big boy," he said as he put Louis into his high chair.

Clicking on the radio on the kitchen counter, Pete tuned it to the morning news. Saturday news broadcasts were never as well done as the ones during the week, but on this Saturday the station had called in their regulars to cover an important story.

*Police in Chicago have reported that a second person has died. The latest victim, a man in his thirties, has died from the same poison that took the life of twelve-year-old Kathleen yesterday. Police are attempting to locate the source of the poison and are concerned that other lives may be at risk.*

“What’s that all about?” Sarah asked as she came into the kitchen, Gordon cooing softly in her arms.

“Potassium Cyanide,” Pete replied. “They identified the poison that killed that girl in Chicago and now they’re reporting a second death. It looks like a mass murderer is on the loose. The big question is how they’re getting poisoned.”

“Well, at least he’s not here,” Sarah remarked, putting Louis into his baby seat. “How’s Harold? He looks flushed.”

“And drippy,” Pete added, putting his hand on Harold’s forehead. “He’s warm. He has a fever.”

Sarah reached into the kitchen cabinet and retrieved a bottle of Tylenol. She took one out, cut it in half, and gave it to Pete. “See if you can get him to take this. It’ll cut the fever down and we can take him to the doctor on Monday if he’s not better.”

Pete proceeded to stuff the pill into the hole of a Cheerio, smother it with jelly, and offer it to Harold.

The announcer on the radio continued: *The police announced only a few minutes ago that the only connection between these two victims is that they both took Tylenol shortly before they died. Investigators are collecting the Tylenol from their homes and having it tested to see if that’s the source of the poison. The results should be available in a few days.*

Pete and Sarah froze, he with the Cheerio in his hand and she with the bottle of Tylenol in hers. Their eyes locked onto each other, fear mixed with anger radiating from their faces.

“Holy shit,” Pete finally said, breaking the tension.

“Chicago,” Sarah muttered. “Do you think these are safe?”

“Probably,” Pete shuddered. “I took two the other day, but let’s be safe about it. You can take a sample to the lab if you want. You’d get your results before the Chicago police do.”

“I don’t want to go in on Saturday. Besides, we have company. I’d need to take Gordon with me for feeding, and I don’t have a lab coat in his size.”

“Let’s see what Bob has to say when he gets here.” Pete dropped the Cheerio into the trash, and went to give Sarah a comforting hug. The moment might have turned romantic if Louis hadn’t let out a scream at the same time that Harold accidentally tossed the rest of his breakfast onto the kitchen floor.

Sarah went to change Gordon’s diaper, leaving Pete to get a bowl of oatmeal for Louis and watch Harold play with fugitive Cheerios that were scattered on the kitchen table. Gordon would have mother’s milk.

Pete closed his eyes, and, for a moment he relived that pivotal day that brought them to St. Francois: that day of decision and destiny, back in Ft. Myers, Florida. FBI agent Bob Foreman and DEA agent Brandy Bane had just been married in a small ceremony at the Lutheran Church, followed by a private reception held on the deck of the research ship that Pete had once captained. His mind played it back for him like an old movie.

*Pete, seated next to Sarah in the all too familiar signature black sedan provided by the FBI, turned to look out the back window. There, moored at a dock on the other side of the parking lot of the Marine Institute in Ft. Myers was the RV Grace. It was there where he'd met the wonderful woman who now sat next to him as his wife. He was saddened by the thought that he'd never sail on the Grace again.*

*Sarah matched his gaze, then, while waving to the shrinking figures of Secret Service Agent Michele Bianchi and Cody Branson, Bob's friend at the FBI, she asked, "What do you think will happen with them?"*

*Michele and Cody were waving goodbye. Pete had already noticed that they held hands, but when Michele turned to Cody and kissed him, Pete reached the only logical conclusion he could.*

*"Good things," he said. "Listen, Sarah. Cody told me last week that he has never felt about anyone the way he feels about Michele. He's ready to quit his FBI job and go to D.C. just to be with her.*

*Sarah smiled. "That's good. Michele told me the same thing."*

*"Will we ever see them again?" Molly interrupted from the front seat.*

*"Probably not," Pete replied. "This witness protection deal only works if we disappear completely."*

*Harry steered the car onto the main road, turned to Molly, and smiled. "You never know the future. If you did, you'd either be bored to death or die of impatience."*

*Molly smiled back. She hoped that Harry was referring to the years that he had waited to meet her after his first wife had died. She knew that she was right when he took his hand from the wheel and squeezed her knee.*

*"I suppose we'll be reading of our death in the morning paper," he added.*

*"That should be fun," Sarah added drily. "I wonder how we'll die."*

Sarah snapped her fingers in front of Pete's face bringing him back to the present.

“What are you thinking? You’re off in dreamland.” Holding Gordon to her for his breakfast, she took a seat at the kitchen table. Pete glanced at Harold, who was still collecting loose Cheerios, and then spooned oatmeal into Louis’ mouth.

“I was thinking about our death.”

“Which one?”

“The last one!”

At the time, Pete had thought that their death would be traumatic, even if it was to be faked. He and Sarah, along with Sarah’s father, Dr. Harry Roth, and his new girlfriend, Molly Kingman, were to be dead and buried before the end of Bob and Brandy’s honeymoon.

Life had been good for Pete and Sarah since then. In fact, it had been a lot better than either of them had imagined. Not long after they left Ft. Myers, they stopped at a small motel and checked in as the Levinduskys and the Roths. The next day they had watched from their window as their look-alike couples exited the motel. The stand-ins got into the black sedan and pulled out onto the highway. An hour later, Harry had put their bags into a tan Chevy Suburban. The four of them checked out and headed north towards Tampa.

“I was just remembering that drive to Tampa when we learned how our lives would change.”

Sarah smiled as she shared the memory, “Molly was quite surprised when she found that package in the glove box: all wrapped in Christmas paper and tied with a neat little bow.”

“Yeah,” Pete added. “It was addressed to Mr. Peter and Dr. Sarah Fitzpatrick, and friends.”

“I remember. The first time I saw our new name in writing was a bit of a shock. I know that we picked it, and I still like the fact that we named ourselves after a Gaelic King, but that was the first time it was official.”

Pete smiled. “You couldn’t bring yourself to open it, so Molly had done the honors.”

“Uh-huh. Let’s see, there was a map to St. Francois, complete with directions to Dad’s new house in town and our little 150 acre ranch. I was happy that Michele was able to find a place located roughly halfway between Wappapello and Poplar Bluff.”

“I was surprised at the detail,” Pete added. “There were deeds to the ranch, the house, and Harry’s new hardware store; two checkbooks, four passports, four drivers’ licenses, and the registration to the Suburban.”

“I liked the balance in the checkbooks: \$100,000 each.”

“We saved the letters, right?” Pete asked as he began picking up Cheerios from the floor.

“We did. I was happy when I read of my appointment to the faculty at the Three Rivers Community College in Poplar Bluff, but when I learned I was fully tenured and would have my own laboratory, I was ecstatic.”

“Of course the notice that you received a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to study the effects of acid rain on the local forestry industry didn’t hurt either.”

Sarah laughed. “I’ve been awarded a grant before, but never without applying for it.” She shifted Gordon to her other breast. “You got a grant and a job, too, remember?”

“Of course I do. I’m still working on it. When I was studying fish schooling in Florida, I never thought I’d end up doing field research on the effects of pesticides on fish behavior and breeding success for the U.S. Department of the Interior.” Pete chuckled. “And I’d never even heard of the University of Missouri at Wappapello.” Pete stood, with his hands full of Cheerios, he kissed Sarah tenderly, and added, “But I love it here.”

“Me too. But you know the best part of that whole day of discovery was the last thing Molly dug out of that package. Do you remember?”

Pete recalled the stunned look on Molly’s face when she saw the document Sarah had mentioned. The sight of it had literally taken her breath away. She had shown it to Harry who smiled as if he had known it would be there. Pete could still see the glowing joy on her face as she showed it to him and to Sarah. It was a marriage certificate, listing Harry G. Fitzpatrick and Molly Fitzpatrick as husband and wife.

“I remember,” he replied as his memory raced through time. For the past five years, after having died in a horrible boating accident in Sarasota, Florida, Harry and Molly had lived in town, running the hardware store, while Pete and Sarah had pursued their research. Bob and Brandy had been transferred to the Sikeston, Missouri, offices of the FBI and DEA. And they had all been allowed to stay in touch due to their government jobs.

The drive from Sikeston to St. Francois was short, by rural standards, and the Foremans visited the Fitzpatricks every few weeks. For Pete, the very best part, other than being with Sarah, was his new neighbors. Charles and Patsy Pritchard, an elderly couple living on the next ranch to the west, were very pleasant people who bore a striking resemblance to Pete’s parents who had lived in Montana up until Pete and Sarah Levindusky had died. Life had indeed been good.

When Bob and Brandy arrived, with little Valerie scampering behind them, they were all smiles. Valerie scooted inside intent on finding her playmate. Brandy struggled up the porch steps, only days away from delivering her second child. Bob trailed behind. In his face, Pete saw not only the smile of a good friend on a Saturday visit, but a hint of unrest. Something was

troubling him. Pete only nodded, knowing that Bob would share what he wanted to share when he wanted to share it, and not a moment earlier. In many ways, Bob's demeanor reminded Pete of how he had acted years ago when they were in a tough spot trying not to be killed by smugglers.