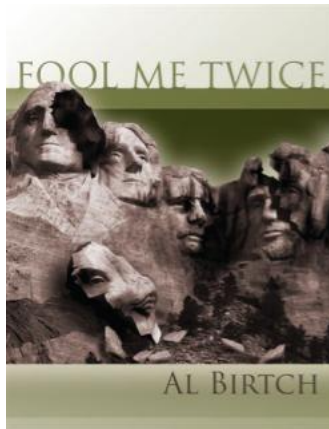




Genre: Action Thriller Fiction

The reason had been shrouded in mystery other than Katherine had been invited to The Savoy, London's premier private club, to have supper with Malcolm Wainwright, Britain's Ambassador to the United States. Katherine wasn't unaware of her reputation as England's premier sculptor. But why would the Ambassador want to meet with her? She is ushered into one of the several small dining rooms reserved for private meetings. Jeffrey Bower, who had extended the invitation to her, and Ambassador Wainwright are already in the room. Bower rises to greet her and is effusive about his delight to finally meet her in-person. Katherine cannot help but notice that Wainwright is far more subdued. Bower apologizes if it seems like he's intruding into a personal matter, but he says he has seen the newspaper article about her missing brother. Asks if he has been found yet...learns he hasn't. With the cordialities and small talk out of the way, Bower explains that the Ambassador had engaged him to help with a special project he had conceived. That there needed to be something tangible to symbolize the bond between England and America...akin to what France had done with the Statue of Liberty. Bower directs Katherine to a scale model on the side-table. It is circular like a merry-go-round. At its center were six uniformed figures standing in a circle, their right arms raised, joined together in the middle, their hands clasping a single staff and holding it high in the air. Bower explains that the staff will have the American flag inserted into it. A seventh figure is kneeling beside a coffin. The kneeling figure is holding an opened bible in one hand and the other hand is resting on the top of the coffin. The standing figures represent New York City firemen and police officers. The kneeling figure is also a fireman. Father Mychal Judge, the Chaplain who lost his life that fateful day. The names of the 2,996 people who died will be engraved around the base. The entire sculpture will be on a motorized base that will take exactly 1 minute to complete a full revolution...symbolizing the traditional 1-minute of silence. The final bronze sculpture will be 16 feet across and 18 feet at the tip of the flag and weight close to 9 tons. The 'ask of America' will be that it is installed at the very site of the former World Trade Center. Bower explains that the Ambassador has a meeting with the Prime Minister about the proposal. They want Katherine to join them and announce that she will bring the sculpture to life. Adding her name to the project will assure the Prime Minister's support. Katherine compliments the design, that it touches the heart...but there isn't any way she can undertake such a large project, multi-month project. She already has a commission underway with a committed delivery dates. She politely declines. Bower pushes harder. Katherine comments that Bower seems far more enthusiastic

about the project than the Ambassador does. Things go south rapidly. Bower walks over behind the Ambassador and with lightning quick speed grabs him by the back of the neck forcing his face down to the table top. With his finger to his lip and says *"if you ever want to see your brother again; if you want your husband Simon or your daughters Natalie and Amelia to stay alive ... you will sit back down and just listen!"* Bower releases his grip on the Ambassador who hasn't made a sound during the entire incident. Soon Katherine knows the type of man she is dealing with. Bower explains that his employers had already lured the Ambassador into an illicit affair. What the Ambassador didn't know was that she wasn't 19 as she claimed, but a 15-year old runaway that Bowers employers had dolled up and coached. Or that the apartment he had set her up in had hidden cameras. And now she was dead from a drug overdose. Bower had made it clear to Wainwright, that if he didn't comply, that the police and Wainwrights wife would get an anonymous tip along with the suggestion that the young lady had begun blackmailing him...which led to her suspicious death. He reminds Katherine before she leaves that his employers had no qualms about killing a 15-year old to achieve their goals.

On a parallel track, the CIA has assigned agent Jason Barrett to a multi-country task force comprised of 1 agent from each of Britain's MI5, Israel's MOSSAD and Russia's SVC agencies. After 9/11 America's entire security infrastructure had been revamped. Entire new organizations, new protocols, new intelligence gathering systems. But these systems had been run ragged chasing down leads about rumored attacks against major sporting events and other venues that draw thousands of spectators. But each investigation had one element in common...they had been planted intentionally to waste manpower and money. To tire these resources. But this lead the CIA Director could not ignore. The CIA had assets in every major terrorist organization in the Middle East... Hamas, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, PLF, Kahane Chai, and Kongra-Gel. Intelligence from these groups spoke of a new leader, only known as Malik. He had been in negotiations with the other leaders. He wanted nothing from them...for now. *Keep your weapons, your fighters, your money...but give me this solemn promise. If I successfully attack on America, if I inflict casualties a hundred times greater than 9/11, then you all swear by Allah that you will join your forces with mine, under my leadership.* Most thought that successfully executing something that grandiose was unlikely, so swearing such an oath was low risk. The hunt is on. Is Malik real or simply more disinformation? And there was an added complication that made this tasks forces mission even more critical. 5 months earlier Russia was decommissioning one of its older ballistic missile submarines to replace it with their newest Borei-class carrying 16 nuclear-tipped Bulava missiles. The launch engines of the missiles being removed from the decommissioned submarine were not compatible with the system on the new Torkev. But the payload, the nuclear war-head was transferable. It was during this transfer that Russia had made a shocking discovery. The war-head in one of the old launchers was a fake. No nuclear material was in it. Someone had replaced it with a dummy war-head. They had no idea who or how long ago it had been done. But they knew it had to be an inside job. It was a well-known fact that more than one Russian commander had made a fortune selling black market weapons; hiding their wealth in banks outside the country. But this was the first time anything nuclear had been stolen. The SVR didn't have definitive proof, but they believed the war-head was still inside the country, but what few leads they had developed indicated that it had been sold and was on the move. They believe the device is headed out of the country

and the most likely target was either Israel, America or England...and so the joint task force was formed.

Our story alternates between following Katherine Waldgrave's 8-month long ordeal as she creates the sculpture while Barrett and his team search for the warhead. On one occasion they are just one-day late but now know it's been smuggled into England. But what is the target? England is set to host the FIFA Worlds Cup in 3 months' time. Wembley National Stadium seats 90,000 people. Could that be the target...or Buckingham Palace? Not all of Barrett's team will survive the chase.

Bower's employers have provided Katherine with very exacting engineering drawings as well as some unusual materials to be placed within the sculpture itself. This immediately catches Katherine's attention. First there is the miniature receiver Bower provides her. It is to be placed inside the staff at the base. Then a small channel, the width of a wire, is to be left leading from the receiver to a two-foot square cavity inside the coffin. And all of that area was to be lined with lead. Katherine isn't a fool. She knows there can only be one reason for a lead-lining...a dirty bomb. And she knows this plan has a very high probability of success. The sculpture will be flown to NYC in the underbelly of the Prime Ministers plane. It will undoubtedly go through security, but will pass as the radiation is shielded. Katherine knows all too well that to save the life of her brother and her family...she has to be complicit in the deaths of tens of thousands. She makes one attempt to smuggle out a warning when an aide from the Prime Minister's office comes out to check on her progress. But Bower, who has moved into her workshop, observes her slip the note into his hand. The aid has an unfortunate accident on the return trip. He makes sure Katherine knows that his death is on her shoulders. Bower is so delighted with the progress, and wanting to endear himself to Malik for future employment opportunities, has Katherine make a duplicate copy of the coffin. It will make a perfect gift to Malik; a symbol of his glorious victory. The day has finally come. The sculpture is in place and over ten thousand spectators are at the dedication ceremony. TV coverage is being live-streamed around the world. Malek is watching the ceremony from his compound, his feet up on his recent gift. The President, followed by a member of the Guard of Honor carrying the flag, walks up the steps. The President inserts the flag into the staff, steps back and salutes. Malik is all smiles knowing the President just activated the receiver. He sends Safa outside with the satellite phone so his followers and the leaders of the other factions can watch as she punches in the numbers. The President takes the microphone and thanks the Prime Minister for such an enduring reminder of an unbreakable friendship. He then thanks Katherine Waldgrave not only for her beautiful workmanship...he pauses, then adds, and especially for her courage. Malek sits up...those last words catch his attention. The President looks directly into the camera and says *"for those who would threaten America, I have a message for you. The death and destruction you plan for us will be directed back at you."* Malek's eyes widen in horror and he glances at the coffin. He races outside looking for Safa. She's 40 feet away in the middle of a throng of shouting men, guns firing skyward. He waves frantically with both arms, his screams drowned by the cacophony. Safa smiles, waves back and pushes send button. The blinding light is instant. Bower is at his hotel in London watching the dedication when an insistent knock begins at his door. He is met by a man pointing a silenced gun at his head. A second later Bower's treachery has been repaid. Katherine and her family are nervously waiting at their front door, over a dozen suitcases lined up along the wall. 2 stretch limos pull up. The ceremony now over the President

and Prime Minister are in the President's limousine. The aid dials a number, then hands the phone to the Prime Minister. *"Katherine...I just wanted to tell you how incredibly proud I am of you. The President would like a word with you.* Hands over phone. *Mrs. Waldgrave, the American people owe you a debt we can never repay. When you came forward, you knew full well that you would have to be put into witness protection. That your career as a sculptor was over. You knew the cost to your family, you knew that your brother would probably be lost...but despite all of that you did the right thing away. We look forward to hosting you in America and will do everything in our power to ensure you remain safe and have a good life.* **The End**