

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

Chapter ~ One

As the plane banked to the left, Paul's stomach tightened. He pushed his head back into the seat and reached up to turn the air nozzle. The cool air felt good as it blew into his golden blond hair. He closed his dark blue eyes and tried to pray, but could not. His worst fear was yet to come and his mind started filling with distressing thoughts. *If this plane crashed, all my problems would be solved. I wouldn't have to confront my lifelong friend. David would never find out how I used and destroyed his name. But then all these innocent people would die, and. . . .*

Ding click. The pilot's voice came on over the speaker. "Please fasten your seat belts. We will be landing in Denver in fifteen minutes. It is an unseasonably cold forty two degrees this fall day. Winds are out of the northwest at seventeen miles per hour, and don't forget we gained one hour since leaving San Francisco. The time is now eleven-forty- one. Thank you for flying with us." *Click.* The pilot signed off and the **Fasten Seat Belt** light came on.

The stewardess leaned in toward Paul and spoke softly. "Please buckle up your seat belt, Father Miller. We will be landing in about twelve minutes." She knew his full name because she had read the seating assignments when Paul boarded. She did notice his white collar but was mostly aware of how handsome he was. When he walked by her, she could smell his aftershave and the smile he offered her pierced her heart. However, all fantasies vanished when she saw the **Fr.** abbreviation preceding his name on the seating assignment list.

As Paul opened his eyes and smiled at the stewardess, the thought of death ebbed from his mind. He turned to look out the cabin window. The mountains poked up through the clouds and just the highest tips were blanketed with a fresh dusting of snow. The whole area looked remote and isolated. Paul now understood why his best friend, David, lived here.

David McIntosh, a rough outdoors type, was not one to live in the city or suburbia. It had been more than twelve years since Paul had last seen him face to face; the thought of what he had to tell him caused his hands to shake. He struggled to get the seat belt together. Finally, he clicked it shut and pulled it snug across his trim waist. He brought the seat back to the upright position, closed his eyes and prayed for David's understanding and forgiveness.

The bumping of the plane tires as it touched down caused Paul's stomach to tighten up even more. *How will I tell David? Should I wait for a day or should I tell him right in the airport? He could have me arrested. Will he believe I am sincere on becoming a priest?*

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All these thoughts kept running through Paul's mind as the plane taxied to the terminal.

The plane came to a stop, the door opened and the passengers got off. Paul sat there, unable to stand. He wished he was dead. Alone in the void of the cabin, the dread of confrontation petrified him. He could not do it...

"Father, you will have exit the plane. Denver is our final stop," the stewardess said as she checked the overhead compartments and moved forward up the aisle.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Paul replied.

As he sat numb, his mind became foggy and drifted back to a similar feeling some twenty plus years ago. It was his first tour of duty in Vietnam. He was sitting in a Huey helicopter, hovering over a rice field. All the soldiers had jumped out; he just sat there frozen, his stomach in knots, his body unable to move.

Suddenly, somebody threw him out the door and he went face first into a deep water pool. The weight of his heavy pack carried him to the bottom. Thrashing around in the muddy water, he kept pushing his hands to stand up, but they just slipped and slipped in the mud. It seemed like an eternity. His lungs were ready to explode, his throat throbbled and both the straps and the weight of his pack pinned him to the bottom. With all his strength gone, he quit fighting, went limp, and lay on the bottom of the pond—in the silence.

And then for a moment, a great feeling of tranquility came over him and the darkness turned brilliant. He was floating through a tunnel of light toward a silhouette, and wanted for nothing. Abruptly, the moment faded and his mind got a jolt, some type of message like, "Not yet. You're not ready; it's not your time." Only then did he fear death. He started to struggle again. Suddenly, he felt the straps on his pack pulling him up. In the next moment, his head cleared the water. Choking and gasping for air, a huge hand grabbed under his armpit and lifted him to his feet.

Paul was never able to shake that near-death experience from his mind. He often searched his conscience for answers to the same old questions and now they were surfacing once again. *Why could I have not passed through that day? Why was I sent back, not only to ruin my life but my family's and now my lifelong friend? The last years of my life are to be lived in torment over which I have no control. It just does not seem fair that my journey has been so difficult. I pray every day but my prayers seem to go unanswered. Oh, how I want to feel that tranquility and peace I experienced on the bottom of that pond. I put all my trust in you, Lord, but please . . .*

"Father, are you okay?" the stewardess asked.

Paul snapped back to reality and replied in a broken voice. "Just feeling a little uneasy,

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but I'll be fine." He stood up into the stillness of the plane and could feel his heart beating. The anxiety kept building as he exited the plane. As he walked up the ramp he could see somebody at the gate. *Is that David? He looks bigger and older.* The figure waved.

Paul waved back. Every step forward was like drudging through knee-deep snow. Holding his head low, Paul avoided eye contact. Oh, how he wished he had not used David's name on that medical form. He was now at the top of the ramp and stood face to face with his alias.

"It's been a long time!" David said as he extended his hand to Paul, giving it a firm handshake. "Do I call you Father, or what?"

"Just, Paul will be fine. No sense in changing things at this point," Paul said as he looked David over, noticing that some of his hair was gray and he had put on more than a few pounds.

"I'm glad you got in touch with me, Paul. I was meaning to write but you know how that goes," David said. Paul being in collar made David a little uncomfortable and he was uneasy over the urgency in which Paul had to come to see him.

"You look good, David." The two men let loose of their handshake and tried to break the ice. Paul's stomach still had butterflies. All he could think of was the news he had to spring on David. He wanted to grab David and hold him. He started to blurt out the bad news but nothing came out. *I'll wait.*

They went on to the baggage claim, not saying much to each other. The tension in the air was as uncomfortable as a muggy summer night. Gathering up one suitcase and a satchel, they exited the terminal and David suggested lunch.

David pointed out a pickup truck in the lot and they walked toward it in silence. Unlocking the passenger door first, Paul stored his luggage behind the seat and then hopped in. They stopped at a small cafe about fifteen miles southwest of Denver in a small town called Englewood. Entering through two swinging wooden doors, the mingling aromas of bacon and coffee rolled out into the fresh air. "Truckers always know where the best grub is," David said as he looked around to find a table. They took a window booth that looked out over the asphalt parking lot filled with semi-trucks. The waitress strutted to the table, her Wranglers hugging her hefty hips. Her hair was bleached blond and her makeup a little heavy. She took their order and called it back to the kitchen just by yelling through the smoke filled air.

A beep came from David's pager as they started to eat. "Excuse me, I have to call in." David got up and walked to the back of the truck stop to make his call. Three minutes later he returned and started to gulp down his food. Between mouthfuls he said, "I've

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got a job to take care of immediately. The translator is out up on Mount Antero and I have to check on it before we go back to my house. You'll love the awesome view from the transmission site." They hurriedly finished lunch and headed south down Highway 285.

David, an electronic technician, was under contract to keep the translators operating. The translator repeated the Denver TV stations to Canon, Pueblo and other small towns south of Denver.

Turning off the main highway onto a gravel road, a small weather-beaten sign read **MT. ANTERO 3 MILES**. The road narrowed as they started to climb at a fairly steep incline. The dangerous drive, compounded with the silence in the cab, made David nervous. He tapped his hand on the steering wheel while looking out the side window making sure not to get too close to the edge. As the incline approached forty degrees, the rear tires of the truck started to spin, causing it to hop and fishtail. David grabbed a lever in the center of the floor and shifted the pickup into four-wheel drive. The truck bogged down and gripped the road like a tank. "You're not getting nervous are you?" David asked, trying to break the ice.

"It is a little frightening, but what a view," Paul replied, now overcome with the awesome surrounding and the massiveness of the mountain. For a brief moment the beauty filled his head, allowing him a respite from his anxiety. It had been twelve years since he had seen David and scarcely an occasional card. The altitude, along with his anxiety, forced him to lay his head back into the seat. Sweat was beading on his brow and soaking his shirt under his arms.

David slowly and methodically guided the pickup toward a rusty metal gate. The road leveled out onto a landing that had been carved out of the side of the mountain. He stopped the pickup inches from the gate, shut off the motor and applied the brake. "Well, we're here. What do you think?"

Paul looked out through the gate and noticed how a section about the size of a tennis court had been cut out of the side of the mountain. The site was littered with wooden pallets, cable spools and other debris giving the place a junk yard atmosphere. To the right, in a straight line, were three different antenna towers all secured with guy cables attached to huge anchor bolts coming up out of the rock and dirt. To the left stood a cubed shaped gray concrete building about fifteen by fifteen feet with a black fuel tank attached to it. Straight ahead, between the building and antennas, was a beautiful view that extended across the Rockies. The sun's rays poked out from the clouds and touched gently into the lower valleys. Out beyond the edge of the landing there were no signs of men scratching their existence into the face of the earth; this was virgin wilderness. It took a few moments for Paul to reply. "It's awesome out there! But," Paul's eyes moved from the center then to left then to right, "this site here kind of detracts from the beauty."

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"I agree with you about that, but people need their TV programs. The environmentalists don't even fight us over this site." David said laughingly. "You can't take away people's soaps and talk shows. I'd better go find the problem. Probably got some mad people by now, they've been without TV for almost two hours." David unsnapped his seat belt and reached for the door handle. The door popped open and he got one foot on the ground.

"Wait!" blared out Paul. "I have something to tell you." He took a deep breath, swallowed hard and mumbled. "I've tested HIV positive."

"What?"

"I have the AIDS virus." Paul looked away out the passenger window.

Mesmerized with one foot on the ground and one still in the truck, David forgot about repairing the translator. *AIDS! I bet he got it from helping at a hospital or a clinic someplace. That makes sense. After all, he's a priest.* After a few minutes David said, "I am sorry. I don't know what to say."

"You don't have to say anything. Please just forgive me." Paul said, still turned looking out the side window.

"Why should I forgive you? I mean, it's not your fault."

Paul felt relieved at David's calmness. "I just found out about four months ago and you are the second person I have told, besides my dad. He won't even talk or write now. That really hurts."

Why won't Dean talk to him? David wondered. Something's not right. Paul can't be gay. We were best friends throughout school. And why tell me now, after not seeing each other for twelve years? Trying to be diplomatic and hoping for the answer he wanted to hear, he asked, "Your dad knows you got the virus helping people, doesn't he?"

"That's not true."

"What?"

Paul started to tense up and could feel things were going to be bad. If David wanted to believe he contracted the virus some other way, then why tell him the truth? But he couldn't lie. "I got *it* from a friend."

"What do you mean? You were helping someone with AIDS and you accidentally caught it."

Paul swallowed hard. "No, David."

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The air in the cab could have been cut with a knife. Paul finally looked over toward David who had his head locked straight forward, gripping the steering wheel so tight that his knuckles turned white. David couldn't stand it any longer. He looked Paul straight in the eyes and said, "So, what you are trying to tell me? That you're a fag?"

The word stung. "Yes, I'm gay."

In a rage, David jumped from the cab and slammed the door shut with so much force that the half opened side window shattered. Glass flew all over! Paul just sat there with his head slumped forward, not able to even look toward David or the broken window. He had prayed for a different kind of reaction, but he kind of expected this. His father had reacted about the same way. The two men that he looked up to the most now hated him. *Why can't people understand? I tried to live up to my father's expectations and he disowned me. Now David hates me. Please God, help me get through this. I only ask for their forgiveness—before I die.*

When the glass imploded, it flew all over inside the cab. Paul started wiping the glass away that had landed in his lap. When he finally lifted his head, he could see David walking toward the concrete building, leaning hard into the wind. There was a sign on the door, in big red letters: **DANGER HIGH VOLTAGE.**

Paul still had more to tell. Taking a deep breath, he reached for the door handle of the pickup. When he tried to open the door, he could feel how hard the wind was blowing and had to use his foot to help push it open. Then lowering his head and leaning into the wind, Paul started jogging toward the building. All of a sudden his head snapped back! Something had hit him in the forehead, knocking him to his knees. He had run into one of the frayed guy cables that held one of the antennas. Putting his hand right above his right eye he felt something warm start to run down his face.

David had just pulled a bunch of keys from a ring that hung on his belt to unlock the door when he heard the twang of the cable. Looking back over his shoulder he saw Paul just getting back to his feet with blood flowing from his forehead. The cable had put a deep cut in Paul's forehead. Blood was rushing from the gash, down his right cheek, dripping from his chin. In a panic David ran back to the truck for some bandages. He searched frantically and the only thing he could find was a red shop rag. He ran back to Paul with the rag. Pointing to an old wooden cable spool, David said, "Sit over here."

David started to apply the rag to his wound. "Hey, don't do that!" Paul reared back his head. "Stay away from my blood!" Paul grabbed the shop rag and applied pressure to his own forehead.

It just crossed David's mind, as he stood there watching Paul administer his own first aid, he could have been jeopardizing his own life. "What can I do?"

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"Just be careful. Can you see if I'll need stitches?" Paul pulled the rag from his head while David bent over to look. It was hard for David not to reach out and use his hands to spread the cut to see how serious it was. Without using his hands David could see that it was about two inches long and ran above Paul's right eyebrow.

"It looks like you won't need stitches. You'd better go back to the truck and wait." Suddenly angry, David asked, "Why were you wandering around out here anyway?"

Paul looked up and swallowed hard to clear the lump in his throat. "I have one more thing to tell you."

"What, that your lover is a fellow priest! Or that Jesus never condemned homosexuality, so it's okay? How about that God has forgiven you because you are holier than thou? I've heard it all. I'm so sick of you fags being on TV and in everybody's face, pushing your lifestyle. I hope all of you die. The sooner the better!"

Paul stood, shook his head side to side and then returned to the truck without saying anything. David's words were like a knife shoved into his gut. It took about a half an hour before Paul could focus his hurt toward forgiveness. *God, please help me. I can understand how your Son must have felt before his death. Alone, neglected and spurned. Yet his last words were, "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do." Jesus forgave and so must I, no matter what David says or does. But it's so frustrating not to be able to explain how I feel, that I didn't plan this and that it just happened. Oh, how I had hoped that David's reaction would have been different than my father's. I've now let down the two people that I respect and love. And I still have to tell David what I did to his name . . .*

Tick tick tat. Paul opened his eyes. It had just started to rain and with the force of the wind the raindrops on the windshield were loud. He had his head leaned back and was still holding the rag to his cut. He sat up, checked in the rear view mirror to see if the bleeding had quit, then looked at his watch. It was almost 6:30 and a bank of thick gray clouds had darkened the sky and caused the temperature to drop. *I wonder where David is?*

Paul's eyes scanned the site and after a few minutes David emerged from the concrete building. He walked to one of the antenna towers and started to climb it. The tower looked about thirty feet tall and had a ladder surrounded with a wire mesh tunnel for safety attached to the side. Halfway up the tower he stopped climbing, inspected a heavy black cord, then climbed back down and went back into the concrete bunker. The clouds were rapidly moving closer together, blocking out the last of the daylight and bringing more rain.

The wind blowing in through the broken window was bone chilling. Paul was kneeling on the seat trying to get his jacket from his suitcase when he heard a *click*, then a *squeak*.

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He flinched and bumped the back of his head on the roof of the cab. It was David opening the door. "You startled me!"

David jumped into the cab and started to rub his hands together. His clothes and hair were wet and beads of water covered his face. "The transmission cable about halfway up the tower has a bad fitting. I'm going to have to splice it."

"Now? It's raining and it's almost too dark to see."

"Can't let people go a night without TV." David reached for the key in the ignition and started the truck. "I need the headlights to see. I'll turn the heat on for you too."

"Thanks."

David jumped back out and Paul watched him in the beam of the headlights as he climbed back up the tower. Paul strained, barely able to see through the raindrops beating on the windshield. As he looked around the dash for the wiper control, Paul noticed a phone that was hooked into a box connected to some wires to the dash. He almost laughed to himself; this phone contraption reminded him of the things that David used to make when they were kids. He could still remember the time David wired a microphone into the girl's bathroom in high school.

Up on the antenna tower David was working at repairing the cable. The job normally would have taken about twenty minutes but the rain and cold was slowing him down. Besides what Paul had told him made it impossible to concentrate. As he sliced through the cable, he also sliced into his hand. "Damn it!" The knife flew from his grip and ricocheted off the tower before it hit the ground. Blood gushed from David's hand and as he climbed down, each grip on a rung pumped blood from the cut. When he got to the ground, he used his thumb to stop the bleeding and headed back for the truck.

Jumping back into cab David yelled, "I cut my damn hand." He turned on the dome light, spotted a shop rag on the dash, grabbed it and used it to apply pressure to his bleeding left hand. The heat in the cab felt good and David had not noticed how cold it had gotten. He lifted the red rag to see how badly he had cut himself.

"What happened?"

"I sliced my hand trying to cut through the cable," David said, avoiding eye contact with Paul. "It's not that bad, but I've got to finish the job. I'll just get warmed up first."

Neither said a word. The only sound was that of the heater in the truck blasting away. David kept turning on the dome light to check his cut.

Finally Paul spoke. "While you're here I have one more thing to tell you."

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"Paul, can't it wait? I need to concentrate on getting that cable repaired and the television translator back on, not on you."

"Sure David, it can wait."

The truck was now overly warm. David shut off the engine before he opened the door and slipped off the seat into the last bit of dusk and cold driving rain. The beam from the headlights now became beacons to aid him in the twilight. Back up on the tower he fumbled in the rain and cold darkness for about twenty minutes to complete the repair. He climbed down and sloshed back to the concrete bunker to switch the translator power back on. There was a low hum as everything came back on. David only waited half the time required by the FCC to do a Frequency-Drift-Check but added half an hour to the time and wrote it down on the log chart on the side of the translator. Then he used his flashlight to gather up his tools. From the doorway an instant panic came over him.

"Oh, no!" David dropped his toolbox and ran full speed toward the two dim headlights and yanked the door open. Paul's head was cocked back, his eyes closed. He had been resting and was startled by the opening of the door. David jumped in and switched the headlights off.

Paul sensed the urgency and asked, "What's the problem?"

"I forgot! I've been having problems with the battery," snapped David, reaching for the ignition and turning the key. *Eer eer ... eer click click click*. The starter quit turning; the engine did not start. "It was stupid to shut off the truck and leave the lights on." Only the sound of the rain as it beat against the cab and window was heard as both men sat there thinking about the serious predicament.

"Can't you use the phone there on the dash?" Paul asked.

"Not with a dead battery." David replied, rubbing his hands together to stay warm. "Let's see, I could take my phone and hook it to the phone company's equipment in the equipment shack. I'll call Bill at work and have him come up here and give us a jump. No, it's too late. He won't be there. I'll call Marcea and have her go to one of our neighbors for help. That'll work." David picked the flashlight off the seat and switched it on. "Here, hold this on those phone wires." He handed the light to Paul.

Paul shined the light, watching David's hands shake as he unclipped some wires up under the dash. "I never knew you were married."

"I'm not." David quietly mumbled as he took back the flashlight and grabbed the phone with his the other hand.

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Paul watched the flashlight beam bounce around the landing as David headed back to the bunker. The rain had eased off and the clouds were just starting to let the moon peek out as they broke open. Paul zipped up his jacket as he watched David's silhouette from the flashlight through the open door of the concrete building. It looked like David was smoking as his breath vaporized into steam and floated into the air inside the cold concrete building.

David shined the light around the terminal board on the telephone microwave equipment. He found the loop test terminal and clipped his phone up. He was an expert with this type of equipment and knew exactly what to do. In school he would often sneak into the telephone room and clip up a phone and make long distance phone calls. While in the military, his expertise grew as he worked on communication equipment. Even now, he would do occasional wiretapping or electronic surveillance for a private investigation company. He moved a switch on the handset to **Line-in**, a high-pitched squeal almost blasted his ear off. "Damn! It's a dedicated computer line!" He shined the light around the terminal board for another line but there was nothing.

Back at the truck he had to use the steering wheel to help pull himself in. The combination of the cold, along with the weight of his wet clinging clothes, made every move laborious. The broken window added one more problem, there was no way to warm up and the temperature was dropping rapidly. David shivered out broken words. "I ca... can't ca... call. It's a com... Computer relay station."

"You mean you can't call for help?" Paul asked in a panic.

David drew a deep breath so he could try to talk without shivering. "There all, com... computer da... data lines, no voice lines. Don't worry... Marcea will send help."

Paul figured that David must be living with this Marcea. After all, David had never married and always seemed to be in some type of relationship. One of the most difficult things Paul had learned at the seminary was not to pass judgment; at the moment this was the least of his concerns. A real sense of urgency came over Paul. "Will Marcea know where we are?"

"No." David quipped.

"Then how will she know where to send help?"

"When I don't show up, she'll call... Call Bill at home."

Paul could feel David's shivering through the bench seat and knew that they could not just sit there and wait. "How long do you think she'll wait before she gets worried? What time does she expect you home?"

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David started to shake even more. He was becoming delirious, the first sign of hypothermia. In the beginning it only causes irrational thinking. The next steps would be sleep—followed by death.

"I asked you, what time does Marcea expect you home?"

There was no response from David...

"What time does she expect you home?" Paul yelled as he reached across the cab and shook David's shoulder.

"Hey don't touch me you fa... fa... fag."

At the sound of that word Paul yanked his hand back, folded his arms across his chest and leaned up against the door. Another ten minutes passed without a word being said. The wind had quit and the sky was clearing, letting the moon shine on the mountain. When David's shivering slowly ceased, he finally broke the tension by letting out a strange sort of laugh and then said, "You know, I almost forgot. Marcea is staying with a friend tonight. I didn't want you to find out." A short laugh. "That I was living in sin." More silence followed.

"Will she call or anything?" Paul asked.

"Probably not," David quipped. "I told her my best buddy and I would spend some time together the first couple of nights, and that she could meet you Sunday. That way you wouldn't realize our living arrangement. We even have one of her kids in on the lie. I guess this is my punishment. We will just have to wait it out."

Now Paul started to shiver. He unzipped his jacket and put his hand inside under his armpits to keep them warm. He couldn't fathom David's just sitting there, soaking wet yet calm. "Aren't you cold? I noticed you quit shaking but I'm freezing. Shouldn't we try to put something in place of the window?"

"No, I'm fine. I've got more insulation than you." David patted his belly and laughed. "Bill might call my house to see how the job came out and figure out we are stuck up here. Then he will head up here to give us a jump start."

Paul noticed a jolly and reassuring mood had seemed to come over David. If he only had known that becoming incoherent was the second stage of hypothermia he would have not decided to spring the rest of the news on David. "There's one more thing I need to tell you."

"And what might that be?" David replied as his mind played tricks on him. Unaware of the danger he was in, his body temperature had dropped yet he thought he had warmed

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up. He was only picking up a few of Paul's words.

"Don't get upset. I'll pay whatever it cost to get the records straight," Paul said.

"What records?" David tried to focus on the conversation.

"Some computer records." Paul answered.

"Computer records?"

"Yes, some computer records."

"How did you know about my computer records?" David shouted at Paul. "So you're the S.O.B that altered my military records! I've been working the past fifteen years trying to straighten them out. You bet you can pay for it. I hope you got plenty of money. I just paid five thousand dollars for a Clipper Chip."

Paul was confused. "What in the world are you talking about? I never said military records. And what the heck is a Clipper Chip?"

"Here, I'll show you what you owe me five grand for." David turned in the darkness. Reaching behind the seat, he pulled something out and sat it between them. The sound of two latches as they snapped open echoed in the cab, and then there was the click sound of a switch. A blue rectangular display lit up and the outline of a laptop computer could be made out. It was too dark to make out the **Clipper Chip** on the back of the computer. David picked up the flashlight off the seat and shone it on the back of the computer at a black box about the size of a pack of cigarettes. One end had a cable running into the computer and the opposite end had a female phone jack molded into it.

Paul pointed and asked. "Is that thing what you're talking about?"

"Yes, that's a Clipper Chip. I bought it from a drug addict stationed at Lowry Air Force Base. I can break into any computer data system with it. It is the latest in cryptography hardware. The government has been working on it for over seven years. If I got caught with it, I would go to prison for twenty years." David said proudly, bragging of his great find with a rush of adrenaline.

"David, I don't know what you're talking about. All I need is a simple signature to straighten things out. I don't even have the slightest idea what you think I have to do with your military records." Paul said, staring at the little box, noticing the words, **PROPERTY OF US GOVERNMENT** engraved across the top.

It was typical of David to have all the newest high tech gadgets. He was always involved with tapping someone's phone or getting into a bank's main computer. Now he had this

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US Government Clipper Chip, the key that could break into any computer data line.

Still confused, Paul leaned over and examined the little black box. Something just popped into his mind. "Can you use that Clipper thing to tap into the computer data lines in the concrete bunker over there?" Paul pointed in the direction of the concrete communication shack.

David smacked his forehead with his hand. "Why didn't I think of that?" Then he didn't say a word and just sat still for awhile. *It's too risky. Someone might ask how I tapped in. Then they'll find out about the Clipper Chip. We'll just wait it out. I'm tired anyhow. I'll just close my eyes and take a nap till Bill, or . . .*

"David! Are you okay? Aren't you going to try to call someone with your computer?"

"Yeah, sure, it might work. It's at least worth a try," David rambled as he folded down the screen then opened the door.

"Is there anything I can do?" asked Paul as David slid out into the dark.

"No! You cut your head open last time you got out of the truck," responded David with sarcasm. "There's electric energy all over in the shack. I don't need you electrocuting yourself. Just stay here and don't start wandering around."

"Okay." Paul answered feeling helpless.

Walking to the building, David noticed his wet clothes were now stiff, actually starting to freeze on him. Inside, he used the flashlight to locate the loop test terminal. He had only tested the Clipper Chip once and that was to get into his own account at his bank. He hoped it worked now. The cable clicked into the modular test plug and ran down to the black box which connected to the computer. David had set the computer on a small shelf in front of the terminal board and had flipped up the screen. He could see the steam from his breath in the beam of the flashlight.

With the computer turned on, he loaded up the Clipper Chip communication software. A menu popped up and he chose the auto connect mode. The cursor on the screen started to blink then a message appeared:

WAIT: SEARCHING PARAMETERS.

"Come on, come on . . . connect," David said in a jittery voice. He was getting chilled again as his heart started pumping faster, circulating a higher volume of warming blood through him. While waiting at least ten minutes, his vision and mind blurred as the uncontrollable shaking took over his whole body for the second time. Hypothermia was winning the race as precious moments ticked by.

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Finally the word **CONNECTED** appeared on the blue liquid crystal display. David hit the **ENTER** key twice. His eyes locked on the computer screen, the link to his survival.

More Arial font words started appearing on the screen:

SENATOR BRIAN BUCK LEADS POLLS IN RACE FOR RE-ELECTION. POLLS SHOW 64% OF VOTERS FAVOR HIM. CHARGES ON CHILD ABUSE AND DRUG SALES TO MINORS FALSE. HIS RECORD IS CLEAN.

The Clipper Chip worked. David stared at the message, trying to figure it out. The name Brian Buck was familiar. He must have read it a thousand times in the newspaper. *I must have tapped into a wire service. Now all I need to do is send an emergency message and I'll get help. Reporters are reading the wire service day and night.*

Desperately, David typed:

MY NANE D DAVID MC LINTOCK PLESSE HELP I'M TRAPD ON MTANTREO. EMERGENCY.

David looked at his message. He realized he had not hit the right keys. His hands were shaking too hard. He wanted to correct the spelling but his thought processes now were under the full siege of hypothermia. The display changed:

HIT F2 KEY TO SEND MESSAGE.

Then a small beep came from the computer. David struggled to move his shaking finger to the F2 key. The last thing he remembered was the display having changed to:

SENDING MESSAGE.