

# CHAPTER 12

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**Before** the normal starting time on Tuesday morning Zach put a layoff notice on the Son Source employee door. Hopefully, Birch had gotten to most everyone with the bad news Monday afternoon. Zach didn't want to confront customers or workers so he locked the customer and employee doors; he also left the lights off. He had a mammoth amount of decisions to make before Thursday. Hiding out in his office and with pencil to paper he started a to-do list.

- Dip into Ben's college fund.
- Notify Texas Unemployment department.
- Sell Sally's BMW.
- Meet with Pastor Tom for spiritual guidance.
- Refinance or sell the house.
- Use the CIA surveillance photos.
- Pursue different venture capitalists.
- Call Carlos on his home phone.
- Make a deal with Mr. Rubin.
- ~~Father Son talk with Ben.~~
- Man to Man talk with Ben.
- Purchase a gun.
- Take a wilderness hike.

It was almost noon when a loud motor roar came from the customer parking area. That sound was followed by the pounding and then shaking of the customer entrance door. The thundering motor roared out again and trailed around to the back employee parking lot. The employee door was now being pounded on and shook hard. When it finally stopped, Zack slipped through the darkened warehouse and peered out a small crack in one of the rollup shipping doors. He saw a husky, muscle bound biker trying to break into his Prius!

33           Afraid and in the dark Zach moved to the employee door. He  
34 unlocked the steel door, opened it and yelled. "You better take off  
35 now! The police are on the way."

36           The biker pushed something through the partially cracked  
37 passenger window. He turned and billowed back in a deep intimidating  
38 voice. "Hey dude, are you the guy that's been doing whisker man to  
39 my daughter? I need to talk to you!" The heavy leather boots made  
40 the stocky biker look taller than he was. Massive tattooed shoulders  
41 bulged out from the sleeveless black leather vest; the bulky brute  
42 lumbered across the black asphalt.

43           Inadvertently the steel door slammed shut and automatically  
44 locked behind Zach. He froze his knees felt weak. *I should have called*  
45 *the police*, rushed through his brain.

46           "Hey dude! Aren't you Kendra's Dad?"

47           "Kendra is my daughter." Zach voice crackled as he dug in his  
48 pocket for the backdoor key.

49           "That's what I thought. I'm Rick Buck, Chelsea's Dad. I just got out  
50 last week. I need to talk to you about my daughter and her staying  
51 over at your house. What you did changed our family's life."

52           Zach pulled the keys from his pocket. He knew better than to turn  
53 his back to unlock the door on a biker thug type—just out of prison.  
54 "We have surveillance cameras back here."

55           "Yeah, I know." Rick pointed at the golf ball sized camera above  
56 the door. "I saw it when I read the layoff notice taped on the door. I  
57 guess I won't bother to ask you for work. Looks like you got your own  
58 problems."

59           "It's not a good time to be in the solar business. After all the so  
60 called green energy companies bilked the government out of billions of  
61 dollars."

62           "No shit. Those high tech executives should be the ones in prison.  
63 Not us little guys just trying to pound out a living."

64           "I agree with that." Zach finally took a deep breath. "What did you  
65 do for a living before being? A... Locked up."

66           "I was a licensed electrician. When the downturn in the building  
67 trade hit I floated some bad checks. Then I borrowed money from the

68 wrong people to make ends meet. The rest is history." Rick walked up  
69 the three concrete steps and was eye to eye with Zach. "I'm not here  
70 to talk about me. I'm here to talk about my daughter and what you did  
71 to her."

72 Zach held his breath again! "A... Okay."

73 "You should be careful with the whisker man thing."

74 "All I did was rub Chelsea's belly and tickle her."

75 "Yeah I know. I had you checked out." Rick put his hand on Zach's  
76 shoulder and squeezed hard. "Do you know what happens to  
77 pedophiles in prison?"

78 "I can't imagine. But, I'm not a child molester."

79 "I know. Like I said, I had you checked out." Rick pulled on Zach's  
80 shoulder so that they were face to face. "That story you told Chelsea  
81 about the robber and how Jesus told him he'd be in heaven was a cool  
82 story. Now Chelsea and I say prayer every night. And then we read  
83 about Jesus in some books your wife gave Linda." A tear formed in  
84 Rick's eye.

85 "The crucifixion and what Jesus told the robber is not a story. Its  
86 gospel and verified at least three or four times by different men."

87 "Yeah okay, I believe you. But the way you explained it to Chelsea  
88 made her see me in a whole different way." Rick pulled Zach into his  
89 muscle bound chest and bear hugged him. "Hey Bro, thank you. I owe  
90 you big time."

91 The embrace felt awkward and intimidating, yet genuine. "No  
92 problem," Zach replied and squirmed at the same time. "You could  
93 come to my bible study group if you want."

94 Rick relaxed the bear hug and stepped back. "That religious stuff  
95 isn't for me!"

96 "It's an all men's group. We meet on Thursday morning. I could  
97 pick you up."

98 Rick didn't like feeling pressured. "I'll think about it." He needed to  
99 change the subject. "What happened over there? Someone get shot?"  
100 He pointed at the faded outline of where Eric's body was found.

101 "That's where one of my employee's fell off the roof." Zach pointed  
102 up.

103                    "How'd that happen with a railing?" Rick pointed up.

104                    "That railing was recently installed, after the accident." Zach  
105 answered in a somber tone.

106                    "Oh?" Rick looked over at the body outline on the concrete and  
107 then back up at the edge of the roof a few times. "I don't think a body  
108 would fall that far away from the wall. Maybe your employee dove off  
109 or was thrown off. To land that far away from the wall wasn't from  
110 falling."

111                    "What?" Zach had never noticed how far Eric's body was from the  
112 side of the building."

113                    "You might want to pull the footage from that surveillance  
114 camera." Rick pointed to the dome shaped camera above the door.

115                    "The detectives already checked the footage."

116                    "I wouldn't trust the cops. A lot of them just find what they want to  
117 so they can close a case or lock someone up."

118                    "I don't think that happened. The detectives were thorough. It was  
119 an accident."

120                    "If you say so." Rick looked back at the body outline. "If you want I  
121 can check the case and see if it is still open."

122                    "You could do that?" Zach was surprised with the offer.

123                    "Sure, I studied the law and made some good contacts while I was  
124 inside."

125                    "No thanks, I trust the police. If they had found something  
126 different than an accident they would have notified me."

127                    "Whatever. At least they didn't try to pin this so called accident on  
128 you." Rich went down the three concrete stairs. He stopped at the  
129 bottom and turned. "Hey Bro, if you ever need someone to have your  
130 back give me a call."

131                    Zach watched Rick lumber across the parking lot and then throw  
132 his thick leg over the Harley. The thunder sound roared out again and  
133 Rick gave Zach the inverted peace sign; two fingers pointed at the  
134 ground when he blasted by. The meaning of the inverted gesture to  
135 keep both wheels on the ground meant nothing to Zach. The only  
136 thing he'd ever thrown his leg over was a ten speed bicycle.

137                    Back at his desk Zack looked over the list on the note pad and

138 added: **Call detective about distance of Eric's fall.**

139 He then picked up the old B&W surveillance photos. *I bet I could*  
140 *barter my own deal with the Prince. I just need to be careful... Since*  
141 *the CIA could be listening in. Maybe Carlos would be a mediator*  
142 *through his contact at Amerco Oil? But, I doubt that he would go*  
143 *behind Mr. Rubin's back. Refinancing the house will take time and*  
144 *won't help to make payroll on Friday. A quick sell on the BMW will*  
145 *probably get me twenty grand or so...*

146 Zach spent the next two hours at the bank trying to get an  
147 extended credit line so he could make payroll at Son Source. Without a  
148 commitment he stopped by three different used car lots. The most he  
149 could get for a BMW Z4 roadster with less than ten thousand miles on  
150 it was sixteen thousand dollars; one third of what he paid for it just a  
151 few years back.

152 Sally confronted Zach at the door between the kitchen and garage.  
153 "Why did some salesman just call and say he could give us twenty  
154 thousand for my car if it was silver?"

155 "A... A, we might need to do something to raise some quick cash. I  
156 need to payroll this next week."

157 "I knew it! Those small solar panel and your save the world pride-  
158 filled quest is ruining the family."

159 "I know. We might even need to sell the house."

160 "There is no way that is going to happen. I'll start working full time  
161 if need be!"

162 "You might have to." But right now we..."

163 Ben came busting through the door. "Hey, I'm glad you two are  
164 here. Pastor Tom wants to have a family meeting with us. He thinks  
165 it's cool that I want to be an Army Ranger. He told me about how he  
166 ate snakes when he was a Green Beret."

167 "What?" Zack was puzzled.

168 "I've heard Pastor Tom say he ate snake while in the Green Beret's  
169 and that he's still doing it as a pastor," Sally reluctantly chimed in.

170 "Yeah, he told me about how when he was behind enemy lines in  
171 the Vietnam jungle he had to eat snakes to survive. It's was all part of  
172 his Green Beret training. He even showed me the snake patch and his

173 Silver Star.”

174 “What?” Zach exclaimed for the second time.

175 “I’m going to go have a talk with Tom right now. I’ll also tell him I  
176 need more hours working in the studio!” Sally grabbed her purse and  
177 darted into the garage. The BMW roared and then the tires squealed  
178 on the concrete.

179 “Wow! What’s up with mom?”

180 “Ben... Like when we talked the other night, the military is  
181 dangerous and has a high risk. Your mother is scared for you.”

182 “She shouldn’t be! I’m good at defending myself. Look at when I’m  
183 on the soccer field. I’d be just as good on the battle field. Plus, the  
184 military will teach me to be a better team player. Isn’t that what the  
185 coach keeps telling you and mom; that I need to be a better team  
186 player?”

187 “Ben, we need to talk more about this. I’m scared for you too.”

188 “Look what happened at Son Source. Eric fell off the roof and died.  
189 There’s risk every day! It doesn’t matter where you are or what you  
190 do. Last winter Bill died in a tree well snowboarding. I’m not worried  
191 about it.”

192 It took a moment for Zach to gather his thoughts. “Ben let me  
193 make some coffee. We need to have a man to man talk.”

194 “Not tonight. I got to work on my commencement speech and prep  
195 for a math final.”

196 “How about this weekend? We need to talk. Why don’t we go on an  
197 overnight hike someplace?”

198 “That sounds cool. Just the two of us right? Mom and Kendra aren’t  
199 invited... Right?”

200 “Yeah right, it’ll be just you and me,” Zach paused and then hinted.  
201 “Saving the planet would be a good theme for a commencement  
202 speech.”

203 “I know, you keep reminding me.”

204 “I can supply you with solar versus oil facts if you want.”

205 “No thanks. Like my speech is going to upset enough people  
206 already. I don’t need to throw in the green deal or climate warming  
207 topics on top of what I’m going to say.”

208            "What?" Ben was a button pusher and probably would have been  
209 kicked out of school if it were not that he was the best player on the  
210 soccer team. He had lettered all four years and never once wore his  
211 letterman jacket to school. A lot of the teachers resented him, the  
212 coaches put up with him.

213            "Don't worry. I'll include something about saving the planet. Maybe  
214 I'll even give a little plug for Son Source." Ben disappeared out of the  
215 kitchen and headed for his bedroom.

216            "You better have one of your teachers check over your speech."  
217 Zach yelled out into dead air.

218            Ben barricaded his door and cleared off his desk. With rap music  
219 blaring he put pen to paper and wrote. **What would this planet  
220 look like if it were not for the United States Armed Forces?**

221            Zach made a sandwich and then casually back tracked toward Son  
222 Source. First, he needed to stop by **Bob's Gun Shop**, before they  
223 closed. Standing at the display case Zach didn't have a clue about  
224 purchasing a revolver or an automatic. He didn't know about the three  
225 day wait and background check either. But, he did pick up a folding  
226 survival ax/pick, fuel and some freeze dried meals.

227            Entering through the lobby he scooped up two days of envelopes  
228 on the floor under the mail slot. At his desk he quickly opened the  
229 ones that didn't look like junk mail. A sigh of relief was felt; three  
230 different checks that would more than cover payroll for the rest of the  
231 month were there. He pushed the rest of the mail to the side and then  
232 drew a line through ~~purchase a gun~~ on his to do list. The  
233 waiting/background period made sense. But four hundred dollars for a  
234 hand gun was money he didn't have. **Call Carlos at home** was maybe  
235 something else he could cross off his list.

236            "Hello," a barely audible voice came through the phone.

237            "Could I talk with Carlos please?" Zack asked.

238            "I'm Cecelia," the soft voice was a little louder.

239            "Cecelia, could I talk to your dad?" Zack asked again. Then he  
240 heard Spanish yelled out by a stronger female voice.

241            "Carlos hablando aquí."

242            "Carlos this is Zach. Sorry to call you at home, but I think it is

243 safer that I don't call you at work."

244 "No hay problema," Carlos took his phone off speaker mode. "Sorry  
245 about the Spanish Mr. Slenski. I'm expecting a call from Mexico."

246 "No problem Carlos. I'm calling to see if you could help me put a  
247 deal together with Prince Amer Nasser."

248 I think I can help. But I'm having some medical issues at the  
249 moment. How about I talk with Mr. Rubin in the morning and then I  
250 call you back."

251 "Carlos, I want to do a deal without Mr. Rubin."

252 "Un problema muy grande," Carlos replied in a warning tone.

253 Zach understood the 'very big problem' reply in Spanish yet went  
254 on to explain why he didn't want to do a deal that included Mr. Rubin.  
255 Carlos listened carefully. With his recent medical diagnoses maybe he  
256 could get brain cancer treatment in the United States and not have to  
257 move back to Mexico. He had a valid work visa but it had restrictions  
258 from getting medical insurance for adult aliens.

259 Zach listened to Carlos carefully and wondered if the radio  
260 frequency radiation from the top of the Sears Towers could be a  
261 contributing factor with the brain tumor. Cecelia could get medical  
262 treatment but neither Carlos nor his wife could, it was one of the  
263 conundrums for legal immigrants that followed the rules and obeyed  
264 the laws.

265 The phone call ended when Carlos needed to help irrigate his  
266 daughter's nasal passage before bed. Zach knew that Down Syndrome  
267 children were predisposed to chronic nasal congestion, nasal drainage  
268 and more frequent sinus infections and their ongoing sinus issues' due  
269 to a smaller nose. He also had a gut feeling that Carlos had been  
270 exposed to too much RF energy and its cumulative effects could not be  
271 reversed. *My family problems are minor* Zach thought. He crossed  
272 **call Carlos** off his to do list.

273 Everyone was in bed when Zach finally got home. Two sets of car  
274 keys were on top of the title to Sally's BMW on the kitchen table. Ben's  
275 school pack was on a chair and a spiral binder was sticking out the  
276 top. Against his better judgment he pulled out the binder and turned  
277 to the last pages. **What would this world look like if it were not**

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**for the United States Armed Forces?**

Zach felt uneasy and didn't read anymore than the title. If this was the title for a commencement speech somehow he'd have to intervene. He knew the reaction Ben would get from a secular academia event like a graduation, where love of country was not to be spoken. If this was the title for Ben's commencement speech the only thing worse would be a speech about the love of God.