

CHAPTER 17

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Per the airport arrival and departure monitors all early morning flights out of LAX were delayed by fog. Zach had a decision to make! If the brownish gray fog didn't clear out by noon he'd rent a car and drive back to Dallas. If he drove straight through hopefully he'd make it for Ben's graduation speech. He prayed and paced up and down the terminal. *Thank you God for helping me solve the solar farm problem. Something as simple as cleaning a dark oily smog film off the panels brought the solar farm back up to full power. I'm here again asking for your intervention. Please help me get back to Dallas in time so not to miss Ben's graduation. In Jesus name I pray.*

It was a different travel situation for Carlos. All Thursday morning flights out of Chicago were on time. He'd be back in Dallas before noon and could walk from DFW airport to Son Source. A half mile from Son Source was an old mission church he wanted to stop by and pray about moving his family to Oklahoma and for Cecelia's health.

On his knees with a Rosary bead between his fingers Carlos meditated. It had been more than eleven years since he spoke privately with a priest. That past confession was a week before his arranged marriage and about two months after Cecelia was conceived. If he'd only known that an extra copy of chromosome 21 caused Down syndrome he would have been more careful, used protection or better yet practiced abstinence. Maria's parents were actually in favor of the marriage—it was the only way out for their daughter and unborn grandchild.

The hunched over brown skinned priest entered through the side door of the old church. He took off a carpenter's apron and hung it on a coat hook in the side vestibule. Dust flew and sawdust fell as he brushed himself off. He bowed his head and made the sign of the cross with holy water from a font.

Carlos got up off his knees when the double doors clunked shut. He

33 approached through the stillness and reverently said, "Padre I'm here
34 to make a confession. It's been many years and it was in Mexico. I
35 forgot how and not sure if it's the same up here in the States."

36 "How many years my brother?"

37 "Over eleven years. My confession was the week I got married."
38 Carlos quietly replied and looked down in shame.

39 "Why so long? Are you still married?" The priest asked and
40 motioned for them to sit in the front pew.

41 Carlos told about the adultery that led to a forced marriage. Then
42 they discussed the falsified ages and wrong birthdates on a Harvard
43 college scholarship application. He continued about how he took bribes
44 and used his PhD to skew data on environmental studies. He spoke
45 about the ongoing deception with Mr. Rubin and rationalized how
46 temperature readings were not that important. He reinforced his
47 argument with jobs being lost if a solar company went out of business.

48 The old priest responded, "It is still 'False witness in God's eyes, no
49 matter how insignificant or however you want to rationalize it."

50 "What if my family is at risk or could be harmed?" Carlos rebutted.

51 "Then maybe you should get the police or authorities involved."

52 "Padre, this is bigger than the police or authorities." Carlos was
53 almost in a panic.

54 "Nothing is too big for God to handle. Put it into His hands."

55 Carlos often said these very words to Cecelia. Now an elder was
56 repeating them to him. The priest continued on about how associating
57 the age of a parent to Down syndrome was all about guilt destruction.

58 "While science might support some unfavorable facts, those
59 outcomes aren't some sort of punishment from God toward older
60 parents. That skewed secular humanism thinking that somehow God
61 gets even on earth is nothing more than Satan's guilt trap. Elizabeth
62 the mother of John the Baptist was way past sixty when she gave
63 birth."

64 Carlos felt a huge relief to hear that he needed to let go of certain
65 uncontrollable past events. Christianity wasn't about self judgment and
66 guilt. Not some karma punishment or reward belief system of cause
67 and effect from doing good or evil here on earth. The enlightenment

68 that reconciliation was an act and outward sign asking for God's
69 forgiveness, love and grace forever supported that there was nothing
70 greater than eternal salvation Not taking action mattered—as much as
71 avoiding sin.

72 The old priest went on and told Carlos to pray the rosary and to
73 focus on Jesus' earthly life looking through the eyes of His Holy Mother
74 To especially focus on the five Joyful Mysteries and to pray for peace
75 and justice. The priest helped Carlos pray an Act of Contrition and then
76 said, "There are some leaflets in the front vestibule to refresh your
77 memory about the different mysteries of the rosary."

78 Carlos rose up with a new zeal. "I'll go get one. I've not felt so
79 close to the Lady of Guadalupe since my confirmation forty plus years
80 ago."

81 "The Mother of God is also a good channel to pray for all sinners."
82 "There is no shortage of sinners in this world," Carlos replied.

83 "And there is no shortage of saints to ask for intercession through
84 prayer and meditation. The Holy Spirit can intercede with the
85 discernment that brought you to the altar on this very day."

86 "I hope so..." Carlos eyes looked away. "Is there a pamphlet back
87 there on giving a good confession?"

88 "Why? You just gave your confession," replied the elder and stood.
89 With the weathered hand of a woodworker he squeezed Carlos
90 shoulder and said, "I will pray for you."

91 Such a comfort came over Carlos as he walked between the pews.
92 He found the small **Pray the Rosary** booklet and then pushed open
93 the heavy spring loaded doors again. He had one last question but the
94 old priest was gone.

95 Carlos prayed and walked the two miles to Son Source. From the
96 side street he saw the back of the campervan still parked around the
97 corner of the building. He found Marie and Cecelia inside helping Birch.

98 The resentment Birch had toward Carlos intensified when Carlos
99 bypassed everyone and headed to do some inputting on the lab
100 computer. Granted he had a PhD but his actions as though he owned
101 the place was insulting. The repetitive work of applying a precut piece
102 of bronze tint to solar panels felt hollow. Birch felt like a migrant farm

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worker harvesting food or picking grapes.

Carlos pulled up the temperature data sheets that he had altered and made hard copies of each one. It was not the first time an evil entity used the metric system to trick or bribe. It happened to the United Auto Workers (UAW) more than once. To this day both metric and standard parts are used on cars assembled in the USA. If it were not the Cash-for-Clunker payoff there would not be a car manufacturer left in the United States. The solar industry was minuscule compared to the Auto industry but the Slenski family could end up living on the street with these actual true facts. Carlos folded up the three printouts and put them in Maria’s overnight bag in the corner of the cleanroom.

The way Cecelia would twist around with her hands over her head and do a curtsy after a panel was tinted, relabeled, repacked and placed on a pallet didn’t get old. The just happy to help one at a time attitude was a blessing. Each short dance she’d sing out the words, “Dios es bueno. Dios es grande. Dios está en control.”

In a soothing voice Marie would respond with, “Amén, amén, amén, te digo.” After the fiftieth panel or so, Birch was humming along to their singing.

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Zach’s airport pacing and praying paid off. The foggy smog had cleared off enough to allow for departures out of LAX. He was thankful that he didn’t have to rent a car for a marathon drive across four states. It was 3:21pm when the Boeing 737 touched down at Dallas/Fort Worth airport.

It was a few minutes past 4:00pm when Zach rushed through the employee door and hurried toward the work crew of three. He gave thumbs up when he saw the ten pallets of panel’s plastic wrapped, ready for shipping.

“Thanks to the help of these two, I’m ahead of schedule.”

“That’s good news.” Zach winked at Cecelia just before she took up a hiding spot behind Marie.

Carlos came out of the cleanroom. “Mr. Slenski I need to talk with you. There’s even a better offer from the high tower in Chicago.”

“Carlos we’ll have to talk later. My flight was delayed five hours. I

138 need to get home and get the backyard ready for a party.”

139 “Can we meet first thing in the morning before I take my family up  
140 to Oklahoma?”

141 “A, maybe?” Zach paused. “My Son is graduating tomorrow and my  
142 wife has a big party planed.”

143 Carlos hesitated and thought. *If I don't get a commitment by*  
144 *tomorrow noon Mr. Rubin will be mucho upset with me.*

145 “What are you going up to Oklahoma for?” Zach asked.

146 “I will be putting my PhD in Geology to good use. I'll be doing  
147 research work about fracking for clean natural gas.”

148 “I hope your research shows how excessive hydraulic fracking  
149 could be causing those recent earthquakes and ground water  
150 contamination up there.”

151 “There's been a lot of falso testimonio about deep shale fracking,”  
152 Carlos rebutted.

153 “Sure, if you say so. Just don't falsify or alter any data and the  
154 truth will prevail. Unlike solar, drilling miles into the earth is not a  
155 clean source of energy. Don't let those greedy power brokers play  
156 you!” Zack used his fingernail on one of the new **Sun Source** labels to  
157 make sure that they adhered well.

158 “Bueno, Señor Slenski.” Carlos stood silent. He'd been involved  
159 with deep well drilling in the Gulf of Mexico right out of college.

160 From behind Maria, Cecelia watched Zach picking at the new label  
161 with his finger. Birch also stood there silent; jealous that Carlos was  
162 an expert in so many fields. He was not even sure what fracking was.

163 Maria didn't understand much of the conversation. She did know  
164 that Oklahoma was north of Texas. Carlos never discussed any of their  
165 moves. He'd always been more like an older brother than a husband.  
166 Their first move was to get out of the small town she was born in;  
167 after the Los Zetas Cartel took over. She didn't even know that she  
168 was still considered illegal and that Cecelia had become a US citizen at  
169 birth by Anchor baby status.

170 Zach looked at the stack of peeled off Son Source labels. He felt  
171 guilty about not standing up for God's name. Zack looked over at Birch  
172 and asked, “Can you get these panels shipped out ASAP?”

173 "I've already contacted the oversea shippers. They'll be here before  
174 noon tomorrow."

175 "Great, you've really been a big help getting the first two  
176 shipments over to Dubai. After they pick up the panels take off early  
177 and have a good weekend. I know you always have work to do around  
178 your Mom's ranch.

179 "Thanks, a long weekend would be great. One of Sequoia's recue  
180 mares just had a foal. I need to secure up a private stall for that  
181 skittish filly. She won't let anyone near her and hasn't nursed yet."

182 Zach made a beeline for his office. He retrieved the 357 magnum  
183 out of the bottom drawer of his desk. On his way across the shop  
184 toward the employee door, he yelled, "See you all on Monday."

185 Carlos froze in terror. Monday wasn't good...

186 In a short time the last panel was stacked on to the final pallet.  
187 Cecelia circled the last pallet of bronze tinted Sun Source panels with  
188 the plastic wrapping roller and sang, "Dios es bueno. Dios es grande.  
189 Dios está en control."

190 Carlos had been on the phone in the lab. After the berating from  
191 Chicago he used the computer to find campgrounds in Oklahoma. He  
192 didn't say a word during the three trips he made moving the sleeping  
193 bags, camping mattress and overnight bags from the cleanroom to the  
194 camper van.

195 Birch locked the employee door and walked around the corner of  
196 the building. He extended his hand to Carlos. "Drive careful. Your wife  
197 and daughter were a big help the last few days."

198 "Gracious." Carlos returned a nervous handshake. "Maria told me  
199 how you shared food with them and let them sleep inside the  
200 building."

201 "It was no big deal. I think the cleanroom was better for Cecelia."

202 "Correcto señor. I'm worried to take her to Oklahoma. I  
203 understand they have mucho dust demonios."

204 "What are demonios?" Birch asked.

205 "Dust demons," Carlos replied.

206 "Oh. You mean dust devils. You might want to try an allergen  
207 particle mask. I wear one when I'm bucking hay."

208 "Oh, where would I get one of those?  
209 "Most any feed or farm store."  
210 "Are there any feed stores headed north toward Oklahoma?"  
211 "We got plenty of them. Why don't you just follow me to the rescue  
212 ranch? We're right off Interstate thirty five north. It's on your way."  
213 "No señor Birch, that would be too mucho of you."  
214 "No I insist. I know what it is like to have a weak immune system.  
215 I can't even get out in the sun without protection! I identify with  
216 Cecelia."  
217 Maria opened the mini camper side door not sure exactly where  
218 they were going or even if they would ever be back in Texas. Carlos  
219 wasn't even sure himself. Their destiny and fate was all in Mr. Rubin's  
220 hands.  
221 Birch didn't give Carlos a chance to say no. He hurried toward the  
222 white Dodge truck. Some weird kind of take charge dominance came  
223 over Birch as he wheeled the one ton Dodge truck around the parking  
224 lot and motioned for Carlos to fall in behind him.  
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226 The horse ranch/sanctuary was a few miles northwest of Plano  
227 Texas, about thirty five minute from Son Source. Due to Birch's  
228 albinism vision impairment, the Dodge truck was equipped with special  
229 side mirrors. He kept watching to make sure he didn't lose Carlos.  
230 What seemed off was that a high end red sports car seemed to be  
231 following a distance behind the camper van. When they took the off  
232 ramp for Plano Texas so did the red sports car.  
233 Sequoia was cleaning stalls when they meandered down  
234 alongside the patched up three rail fence. *I hope that's not another*  
235 *rescue*, she said to herself as she watched the old camper van  
236 tailgating the one ton flat bed Dodge.  
237 The dual tires skidded to a stop a cloud of dust came up from  
238 under the flatbed. The camper van slowed to a stop. Sequoia stabbed  
239 the pitchfork into a pile of manure and made a beeline across groomed  
240 arena.  
241 Birch jumped out and yelled. "They're only here for some of my  
242 allergen masks."

243                 Sequoia slowed her pace and pulled the red bandana off her nose  
244 and mouth. "So they don't have a rescue?"

245                 "No, it's Maria and Cecelia. You've met them at Son Source."

246                 Sequoia leaned into Birch and coyly asked, "Who's the old Mexican  
247 behind the wheel."

248                 "That's Carlos!" Birch hurried to the side door of the van and  
249 opened it, Maria stepped out. She had pulled on a green and red Huipil  
250 with white puffy half sleeves that exposed her smooth round  
251 shoulders. "You can come out too," Birch said through the narrow door  
252 opening.

253                 Cecelia cautiously took Birch's hand and stepped down. She  
254 immediately hid behind her Mom. Three horses and a mule trotted up  
255 to fence and leaned over, anticipating their evening feeding. Uneasy  
256 by all the commotion Cecelia grabbed a handful of the green Huipil. A  
257 Border collie barked and circled around the rear legs of the biggest  
258 horse. Out of nowhere an inquisitive mini goat approached and nudged  
259 at Birch's legs.

260                 Sequoia started a conversation in Spanish with Marie and took  
261 Cecelia by the hand then led them down the fence line. The mini goat  
262 and Border collie fell in line behind the trio. They went through a gate  
263 and headed toward a loafing shed.

264                 Carlos hung his rosary around the rear view mirror and got out of  
265 the van. "We can't stay long. I'd like to find an overnight place in  
266 Oklahoma before dark."

267                 "Sure, I'll go get a few of my allergen masks." Birch headed toward  
268 an old weathered barn.

269                 Carlos walked around back and sat on the bumper. He watched  
270 Sequoia order the dog to lie and then slid a piece of plywood to the  
271 side. About a minute later and in slow motion a brown and white  
272 shaky legged Philly appeared at the open end of the loafing shed. The  
273 mini goat distracted Maria. She didn't notice that Cecelia had walked  
274 too close to the baby foal. With her arms drooped straight at her side  
275 a startled yearling could rear up and hoof a child. Sequoia leaned the  
276 plywood against a post and gradually approached and pulled Cecelia  
277 back a safe distance.



278 In a soft reassuring voice Birch said, "My mother is real good with  
279 animals."

280 "I see that," replied Carlos. The comfort that he experienced earlier  
281 at the church was present again.

282 "Has your daughter been around horses before?"

283 "Nunca! In Mexico Maria grew up around farm animals but we've  
284 not been back."

285 "Oh? So Cecelia has never met her grandparents?"

286 "See, Maria's Padra got involved with the Los Zetas cartel. Her  
287 village is mucho dangerous for us to ever return."

288 Oh? Birch knew and so missed his grandparents. Up until he was a  
289 teenager Grandpa Nelson had been the only male figure in his life. If it  
290 were not for the inability to produce pigment melanin the entire family  
291 would have sailed the world. But then he and Sequoia would have  
292 been lost at sea too.

293 "That red autom6vil is in la distancia." Carlos pointed toward the  
294 frontage road.

295 Birch squinted. "I did notice a small red car behind us all the way  
296 from Dallas."

297 "Si se1or Porsche. The Los Zetas cartel has many luxury cars."

298 "You don't think the cartel is following you do you?"

299 "I don't think so. It has been over eleven years since we were in  
300 Mexico."

301 "I have binoculars in the barn." Birch made a dash for the barn.

302 Carlos prayed that his family was not somehow in harm's way. The  
303 red Porsche zoomed out of site.

304 Birch returned wearing an oversized sombrero and had binoculars  
305 that he often used to check on horses in the pasture. He scanned the  
306 far fence line. "I don't see a red car out there now."

307 "The autom6vil sped off." Carlos nervously replied.

308 "It was probably nothing," Birch said in a reassuring tone.

309 "Yeah, I pray so. I've associated with mucho worse people than the  
310 cartel."

311 Birch lowered the binoculars, Carlos words were alarming. "You  
312 know Maria and Cecelia are welcome to camp out here over the

313 weekend. We have a bunkhouse for guests.”

314 A protecting comfort enlivened Carlos. “Señor Birch that would be  
315 mucho apreciado!”

316 “No problem. I can bring them into Son Source on Monday.”

317 Everything just fell into place. It was hard to tell which of the  
318 women was most excited as they transported overnight bags and  
319 other stuff from the van to the bunk house. Only knowing a few words  
320 in Spanish Birch was left out of most of the conversation. Carlos got  
321 some medication from the camper van mini fridge and handed it to  
322 Birch and said, “God bless you, por mirar a mi familia.”

323 Friday Morning Birch was the only person at Son Source. He picked  
324 up the mail in the front lobby and put it on Zach’s desk. In the lab he  
325 checked history files on the computer and saw that Carlos had been  
326 looking over data sheets for Chinese solar panels. The Google maps  
327 history showed the places Carlos had marked for stops up in Oklahoma  
328 and a Catholic church marked near Son Source. The shipping company  
329 showed up early and loaded up the ten pallets of solar panels. Birch  
330 was headed back to the ranch before noon.

331 The Slenski house was in full swing event mode. Zach made  
332 strawberry waffles, eggs bacon and fresh orange juice for everyone,  
333 Ben had pencil to paper still working on the graduation speech. Sally  
334 was on the phone taking care of last minute details for the after  
335 graduation barbeque and had one last thing to do for Pastor Tom.  
336 Kendra and Chelsea were playing dress up and practicing ballet in and  
337 out of the house.

338 Zach was hosing off the patio when a tattooed arm reached over  
339 the top of gate and lifted the latch. Rick Buck came lumbering across  
340 the yard and looked around to make sure no one could hear him.  
341 “We’re on for tonight. Linda doesn’t have a clue. The pickup in Fort  
342 Worth is set for five.”

343 Zach turned off the hose. “Thanks for you and Linda helping with  
344 the party and watching Chelsea this afternoon.”

345 “No problem Bro.” Rick fist bumped Zach on the shoulder.

346 “Rick, I might have some contract work coming up in Dubai if  
347 you’re interested.”

348                   "Where's Dubai?" Rick asked. He was streetwise not worldly.

349                   "Dubai is a city in the United Arab Emirates. It's a luxury tourist

350 destination in the middle east."

351                   "Are you talking about near Afghanistan and Iraq?"

352                   "Yes, south of both those countries. Directly across the Persian Gulf

353 from Iran."

354                   "Oh?" Rick was still puzzled. "I could really use the work but I

355 doubt that my parole officer would let my leave Texas."

356                   "Oh?" Zach was caught off guard. "Well anyway, come by Son

357 Source next week and we'll talk. But not on Monday I already have a

358 meeting set that day.

359                   "Thanks, I'll make sure your friend Franko up in Fort Worth makes

360 it to the graduation. Don't worry about anyone finding out. I got your

361 back."

362                   "Thanks Rick, It's just best Sally or Ben not find out."

363                   "Got it." Rick disappeared around the side of the house.

364                   Friday morning and afternoon flew by and not everything got done.

365 Zach did make sure that the battery on the camcorder was fully

366 charged. He recorded the graduation class of 2003 as they marched

367 into the over packed high school gym. The school principle and

368 coaches had warned the anxious graduates that any misconduct or

369 outburst would lead them to being removed from the ceremony. A turn

370 and greet your neighbor was observed in place of any prayer or the

371 pledge to the flag.

372                   The salutorian gave a twenty minute speech about empowerment

373 and inclusiveness and how she overcame being bullied in middle

374 school. The high school debate team instructor is who she credited for

375 learning to stick up for herself and that in college she hoped to pen a

376 memoir. She got a standing ovation and tears were brought to many

377 eyes.

378                   Ben pulled a folded paper from under his graduation cap. He didn't

379 have any pockets to keep his speech in since he didn't have anything

380 on under the graduation gown. Ben approached the podium. "We

381 fricken did it!" blared out over the PA system.

382                   Most the students cheered and most their parents sat tight lipped

383 in the bleachers. Zach almost dropped his camcorder but kept filming,  
384 he'd always encouraged Ben to stand tall and speak his mind.

385 "I thought I'd get that out before they shut off the sound system."  
386 More cheers from the gym floor and a low whispers from the  
387 bleachers. "FYI, I'm completely naked under my gown so if the school  
388 board tries to have me removed everyone will get an eyeful.

389 The students went wild. One of the staff rushed toward the sound  
390 board and shut off the PA system. A hardened looking man with a  
391 Dallas Cowboy hat pulled low quickly moved toward the staff member.  
392 "Only a few people heard the redneck say, "Let my boy speak or I'll rip  
393 your face off." Now everyone heard the *click* of the PA system coming  
394 back on.

395 "Thank you sir." Ben spoke into the microphone. The stranger  
396 tipped his blue and silver Dallas Cowboy team cap and then nodded.  
397 Dark sunglasses concealed bloodshot eyes and tears of pride.

398 "I too have to give credit to one of my teachers and mentor that is  
399 not here tonight. She was fired by the school board because she dare  
400 teach about Christophobia and how it is raising its head once again.  
401 Ms. Cosgrove was teaching us history; that was her job. She was  
402 teaching us that the words under God were added to the Pledge of  
403 Allegiance when she was in school. These two words were the main  
404 reason she enlisted in the armed forces. She was not advocating that  
405 the Pledge of Allegiance with or without 'under God' be once again  
406 recited in schools. She was teaching us students about separation of  
407 church and state..."

408 "We love you Ms Cosgrove!" a student yelled out from her chair.

409 Ben continued, "But our politically correct school board that is  
410 made up of a bunch of outsiders, probably not even Texan's made  
411 sure to censure her. I wonder if the school board even knows that Ms  
412 Cosgrove was a decorated medical specialist during the Vietnam War.  
413 Ms Cosgrove was my mentor. Her example of service to country and  
414 this school is why I enlisted." Ben stepped away from the podium and  
415 faced the row of school board members. The plan was to turn and lift  
416 the back of the gown and flash a bare ass at them.

417 For some unknown reason he turned toward the flag and put his

418 hand over his heart. A few other students and parents stood up and  
419 did the same. In unison they recited, "I pledge allegiance to the Flag  
420 of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it  
421 stands, one Nation **under God**, indivisible, with liberty and justice for  
422 all."

423 Not one of the seven members of the school board stood nor joined  
424 in. They readied for a showdown. How dare anybody challenge secular  
425 numbing and their Marxist veiw. The most self righteous leader of the  
426 school board motioned for security to remove Ben.

427 Instead of removal there was support when in an impromptus  
428 action the band played God Bless America. A new spirit filled the high  
429 school gym as the school board stood and left. Freedom of speech,  
430 thought and soul resonated as evil was suppressed—for the time  
431 being.