

CHAPTER 18

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The backyard graduation party got crashed by the same news reporter that had covered the commencement ceremony. The newbie reporter had the video of Ben telling off the School board—but if he had only flashed them his bare ass she'd be on her way to a Pulitzer. Her long black hair, low cut blouse and side slit black skirt looked professional. The white **Press Pass** around her thin neck contrasted against dark brown skin. The red Ruby Bindi in the center of her forehead always worked to gain unabated entrance to most events. No one was going to stop a female Hindu from entering anyplace; especially a backyard party where cow was being barbequed.

Pastor Tom was right behind the high heeled news goddess ready to give her his bio and credentials. When Diya Bhan eye balled Ben she motioned for her camera man to follow.

"Ben, could we get a shot of what or better yet, what you don't have on under that graduation gown?" Journalism school had taught her well. The first question has to hit right between the eyes.

Ben was surrounded but when he turned and locked eyes with the Indian reporter he couldn't resist. He pulled up the back of the red graduation gown and flashed his bare white butt. The camera man zoomed in and then pulled back and panned the laughing guests.

There were a few questions and a model release that had to be signed. Just as she turned to leave Ben let out, "If you really want a story we should meet up tonight. I have something you'll like! Just you, no cameraman."

Coreen leaned in toward Zach. "Looks like your son is working on a graduation he'll always remember."

"I hope not. His mother was wild like that," Zach responded in a resolute tone. "I want him to have a good time, but not that good of time. Do you know what I mean?"

33 "Yeah, I know what you mean. You don't want your son to have a
34 boring graduation night like us two nerds had."

35 "True, but I just don't want Ben to do anything foolish."

36 "They both look like responsible young adults."

37 "I hope so." Zach watched the budding reporter write on the palm
38 of Ben's hand. Diya exited as fast as she had crashed the backyard
39 party."

40 "Don't rule out love at first sight," Coreen broke Zach's concern.

41 Zach turned and replied, "You actually believe in that sort of
42 nonsense?"

43 "Sure I do." A growing smile contrasted Coreen's white teeth. "Karl
44 and I got married a few weeks after he landed in Nigeria."

45 Zach reeled his head back. "You're kidding?"

46 "Nope!" Coreen's smile turned serious. "We got married before his
47 team went up north."

48 "Northern Nigeria! Isn't that where the Islamic extremists are?"

49 "Yes, the Boko Haram kidnap, rape and sometimes kill young girls
50 for getting an education or converting to Christianity. That's all I will
51 say." Coreen's smile faded. "What about you and Sally, how long did
52 you two know each other?"

53 Zack took a long drink off his beer. "Sally and I were best friends
54 up through middle school. We were somewhat good friends in high
55 school. She was pregnant when we graduated. We got married that
56 summer."

57 "Okay." Coreen took a drink of wine and then said. "Sorry Zach, I
58 didn't mean to pry into your private life. I've always felt something
59 was off with your marriage."

60 "I've never talked about it." Zach watched Ben disappear around
61 the side of the house.

62 "I understand..." The doctor's bedside manner to not hold back
63 anything led to the next question. "Zach, have you told Mr. Gomez to
64 set up an appointment with an oncologist? His CT scan was not good.
65 It could be life threatening."

66 The blunt words bounced Zach back from his graduation night
67 some eighteen years ago. "A... Yeah, I told him. I'll remind him again

68 when I meet with him Monday morning.”

69 “Good, the quicker Mr. Gomez starts treatment the better his odds.
70 Lung cancer is something you need to get on top of immediately!”

71 This night was no different than the first time when Coreen and
72 Zach met at the Kurtz’s house warming party. They were like two
73 nerds at a science fair. Coreen trailed off about how the new texting
74 app would reduce brain cancer; since teenagers were holding cell
75 phones in their hands and not up to their head. She stated that divine
76 intervention was going to save millions from RF radiation of the brain.

77 Zach pitched his rebuttal; that he didn’t feel that God was all that
78 involved in science or tangible matters. Ironically he was about to
79 change the name Son Source to Sun Source, a more secular business
80 name, that would have a broader and worldwide appeal to all faiths.

81 Ben wasn’t thinking about divine intervention or his Christian
82 upbringing. He was thinking about a tangible graduation night like
83 movies were made about. It was almost midnight before he got the
84 nerve to call the number written across the palm of his hand. Diya was
85 interested to hear his big news story. He suggested that they meet
86 that night before the story got leaked out.

87 There were three police cars lined up and backed into parking spots
88 in front of the pink, orange and brown all night donut shop. Through
89 the all glass front Ben didn’t see Diya. There were four police officers
90 sitting at the counter, the graveyard shift baker was loading hot
91 dripping donuts on to metal trays. A seasoned woman wiped down the
92 long counter. When she got to the end she grabbed a coffee pot and
93 refilled the line of coffee cups. Ben felt foolish, his graduation dream
94 rendezvous faded. Over the phone he could tell that he had wakened
95 the newbie Indian reporter. He’d give it ten more minutes.

96 A lone minivan with a broken headlight stopped at the intersection,
97 its left blinker came on. Ben strained and looked hard for shoulder
98 length black hair but tinted windows and midnight darkness disallowed
99 the peering. The kayak and bike rack on top were empty. When the
100 van bumped up into the parking lot ramp a press/parking pass in the
101 lower corner of the windshield froze every introverted muscle in Ben’s
102 body.

103 Baggy tan board shorts were the first thing to swing out the
104 driver's door, followed by an oversized college sweatshirt. A long black
105 pony tail concealed the light blue AFBBS letters arched across the
106 back. The **Soar to Achieve** embossed words and flying eagle was
107 obviously an air force emblem.

108 Ben drew a deep breath and reached for the door handle. At the
109 same time one of the city of Dallas police officers bolted out the glass
110 door and pointed at the broken out headlight. Ben lowered the
111 passenger window of the Prius and listened...

112 Diya explained about how an Antifa militant broke out her
113 headlight at a May Day demonstration she had just covered. The
114 bulked-up rookie told her he'd give her a break and not to drive until
115 daylight to avoid a ticket. He wrote his phone number across the top
116 of the yellow warning/ticket and handed it to her. The rookie strutted
117 back into the donut shop with his chest all pumped up. His partner
118 winked over the top of a hot steaming cup of coffee.

119 "I can give you a ride home," Ben inconspicuously said from behind
120 the steering wheel.

121 Diya bent over and looked through the passenger window. "Oh
122 good, you are here."

123 "Yeah, I was just about to go meet up with some friends."

124 "Sorry, I'm late. I didn't want to take the Interstate with the
125 broken out light."

126 "That cop is right. You need to get that headlight fixed ASAP."

127 "I will after I get moved into my new apartment." Diya opened the
128 door of her van grabbed her phone and a note pad. Without even an
129 invite she plopped down into the passenger side of white Prius. "Okay,
130 tell me about the big story you have for me!"

131 Ben told her about Pastor Tom and about how he thought that he
132 was lying about being a Green Beret. Ben explained how his recruiter
133 told him that to become a Green Beret it required learning a second
134 language. Exposing men that faked military service was old repetitive
135 news but adding in a pastor that had a Sunday morning show might be
136 news worthy.

137 The sound of squealing tires interrupted Ben's story. A red Porsche

138 did a four way slide through a yellow light and then accelerated down
139 the empty street. Two officers inside the donut shop rushed out and
140 tore off in chase with lights flashing. "They'll never catch her. She
141 power side slid through that corner at over thirty miles an hour. It
142 sounded like she was doing a hundred by time she hit fourth gear."

143 "Wow that was cool!" Ben replied. "My mom had a BMW Z4 and it
144 never sounded like that."

145 Their eyes met when they both turned back from looking out the
146 rear window. The immediate mutual feeling was like finding a BFF the
147 first day of school. "Hey, you like to skateboard. There's an all night
148 skate park about a mile from here."

149 "That sounds cool. I probably shouldn't move my van until
150 daylight. That cop has been watching us through the window like a
151 hawk. He'd probably write me a ticket if I took off in the dark."

152 Ben turned on the headlights, slowly backed the Prius out of the
153 parking spot and made sure to switch on the signal when he pulled
154 onto the street. He was oblivious that under Diya's seat was where
155 Zach had hidden the Colt 357 Peacekeeper. From inside the donut
156 shop the rookie moved to the glass window and watched carefully for a
157 driving violation.

158 The sun had been up thirty minutes when Ben put the Prius into all
159 electric mode and crept into the driveway. He was careful not to slam
160 the door shut and did not hit the **LOCK** button on the key fob. The
161 plan was no *beep* warning when the doors locked so not to wake
162 anyone. It didn't help! The double wide garage door started to rise.
163 Two deerskin slippers appeared first, followed by skinny white hairy
164 legs and then a red plaid robe. "Ben we need to talk," Zack said in a
165 serious tone.

166 "Can it wait? I've been up all night boarding." Ben handed the key
167 fob to Zach and slithered by. No one else was up inside the house.
168 Ben flopped face first onto his bed—exhausted from an all night
169 graduation for the books.

170 Still outside Zach took a deep breath of relief when his hand felt
171 the Colt 357 box under the passenger seat. *This was another stupid*
172 *gun handling move on my part. If Ben would have got pulled over his*

173 *graduation night could have turned into a catastrophe that followed*
174 *him for life.*

175 "Hey neighbor," a familiar voice rang from the sidewalk.

176 Zach pulled his head out from inside the car. "Hey Doc, looks like
177 you're going for an early morning run."

178 "I need to clear my head this morning." Coreen approached. "Are
179 you going shooting today?"

180 "No, I'm going to give this gun to Ben. That way he'll have
181 something to always remember me by when he's at Army Ranger
182 school."

183 "You can't have your own weapon in the service."

184 "Are you sure? I think all military bases have an Arms Room where
185 personal weapons can be locked up."

186 Coreen grabbed the box the 357 Magnum was in. "I don't know
187 about that? But, for now I'll have Karl lock this weapon up in his gun
188 safe. You need talk to Karl about concealed carry and the Second
189 Amendment."

190 "I will and I'll do some fact checking about personal weapons in the
191 military."

192 "I think a new enlistee showing up with his own weapon to boot
193 camp would send up a mental health flag."

194 "You're probably right. I just want Ben to always have something
195 to remember me by."

196 "You're his dad. Ben's never going to forget that." Coreen turned
197 one hundred and eighty degrees to go back home.

198 Zach watched Coreen jog across the cul-de-sac and disappear
199 through the front door with the boxed up gun in hand. Zach plopped
200 behind the steering wheel of the Prius. There was plenty of time to go
201 pick up legal documents at Son Source and be back in time to cook
202 waffles.

203 Seeing the camper van parked in the far corner of the Son Source
204 parking lot was a surprise. Carlos wasn't expected back until late
205 Sunday or early Monday morning, not on Saturday morning. Zach
206 stopped short of the driveway and then backed up so that the building
207 would block the sight of the Prius. A red Porsche 911 GT3 half parked

208 by a fire hydrant didn't let him back up far enough to be out of view.

209 Still in his robe and slippers Zach unlocked the front customer
210 entrance door darted down the hallway and grabbed the **Change of**
211 **Commerce name** papers off his desk. While relocking the customer
212 entrance door something out of the corner of his eye got his attention.
213 In the alley between Son Source and an electrical supply warehouse
214 he saw a man and woman coming from around back. *Oh crap, that's*
215 *probably Carlos and Maria. I need to get out of here before they see*
216 *me.*

217 Zack's speculating was unwarranted. It wasn't Carlos or Maria. The
218 two people were Envy and Agent Fletcher—their mission was almost
219 finished. They didn't even have to break into the camper van. Carlos
220 had forgotten to lock the side door after he parked and then hurried
221 off to the old church where he gave a confession a few days back. He
222 wanted the Priest to know of his plans to return to Mexico so to rectify
223 past dishonesty and marriage fraud. He'd also planned to confess that
224 he was giving up drinking alcohol—it was the root reason that he
225 sometimes abused Maria.

226 One sin he was still rationalizing was over the two gold pieces he
227 stole from an ornate box in the conference room. Mr. Rubin still owed
228 him his last month's wages—gold might be easier to trade with the
229 cartel, if it came to that. Plus, he didn't have an address to return the
230 jet and battleship pieces too. War Room/Top floor of the Chicago
231 Tower wouldn't be enough to get the gold delivered to.

232 Zach pulled away unseen just before the evil pair got to the street
233 end of the alley. Their mission had gone off without a hitch. While
234 agent Fletcher stood lookout Envy used an animal syringe to inject
235 Newt 4 through the ½ pint wax cardboard chocolate container. The
236 large gauge needle could have easily penetrated the wine cork on the
237 bottle of wine in the mini refrigerator but their target was a child not
238 an adult. *'The weak must die so that the strong can thrive'* was the
239 mission of the NWO. Envy couldn't wait to be praised by Mr. Rubin.
240 Her six other comrades would be so jealous.

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242 Chelsea and Kendra met Zach at the kitchen door ready to help

243 make a special breakfast for Ben. Slowly the vanilla aroma from the
244 waffles mixed with the coffee and pulled Sally from her make-up
245 mirror. At the bottom of the stairs the girls passed in front of her with
246 big smiles. Chelsea had a plate of waffles loaded with strawberries and
247 whipping cream and Kendra had a container of orange juice on a
248 serving tray with some flowers they had picked from the backyard.

249 Sally poured a cup of coffee. "The party turned out good. I'm glad
250 Pastor Tom made it."

251 "Yeah, it turned out fine." Zach kissed Sally on the top of the head
252 and continued, "I was proud of Ben's speech."

253 "It was embarrassing for our church members when Ben used the
254 word *Fricken*."

255 "Yeah, that did catch me off guard." Zach poured himself a cup of
256 coffee. "I've got some legal papers you need to sign."

257 "Oh," Sally reeled back. "What are they?"

258 "We need to change our business name, Son Source to Sun
259 Source. It will help get us more orders with the Arab's."

260 "Zach we have discussed this before and I don't like it. I'll discuss
261 this with my spiritual mentor and see what he thinks."

262 "Spiritual mentor! What's all that about?"

263 "It's a new program Pastor Tom is implementing."

264 "And who is your Spiritual Mentor?" Zach demanded.

265 Sally was interrupted by the girls' running back down the hallway
266 skipping and singing the lyrics, "Ben and Diya sitting in a tree, K-I-S-
267 S-I-N-G."

268 In a distraught motion Sally put down the coffee cup and headed
269 toward Ben's room. She never liked anything the Indian reporter
270 produced or wrote; especially the stuff with a Hinduism slant. Ben had
271 to be at least five years younger than the foreigner. He needn't be
272 hustled by a non Christian reporter that would probably do anything
273 for a story.

274 Zach retreated to the backyard to clean up from the party. First he
275 hosed off the patio. He'd need to wait until noon to start the lawn
276 mower or leaf blower per HOA rules. Being alone outside in the warm
277 morning sun was more about avoidance of Sally and even Carlos down

278 at Sun Source, he had something more important eating at his gut.
279 Finally, Sally left for ballet class with the girls. She said she also
280 planned to meet with her new spiritual mentor, Pastor Tom's good
281 friend Jim Baker.

282 It was almost noon when Ben stood at the sliding glass door only in
283 jockey shorts. He scanned the backyard and then slid open the door
284 and yelled, "Dad, I can pull those weeds later this week."

285 Zack used the five gallon plastic bucket to help him get off his
286 knees. He pulled off his gloves while he headed toward the patio.
287 "Ben, I need to talk to you about your graduation last night. It is
288 something that you can never let your mother know that we talked
289 about."

290 "Okay. I won't say anything to Mom." Ben stepped out on to the
291 patio. He'd grown a lot his senior year and was now taller than Zach.

292 "Let's sit down." Zack pulled out one of the nylon cushioned patio
293 chairs.

294 Ben ducked under the shade umbrella and sat down directly across
295 from Zach. "I got a gut feeling that this has to do with that guy in the
296 Dallas Cowboy team cap last night. The guy that demanded the PA
297 system got turned back on, so I could finish my commencement
298 speech."

299 Zack felt a slight reprieve. "It does..." Zach drew a deep breath. "If
300 it were not for the fact that you enlisted in the service we wouldn't be
301 having this conversation."

302 "So, you're going to tell me that guy at graduation last night was
303 my biological father?" Ben blurted out.

304 Zack closed his eyes and moved his head up and down. "Yes, he is.
305 I arranged for Frank to be there."

306 "Wow!" Ben sat silent for awhile than continued. "A few times over
307 the years I've overheard Mom say you were not my real father. She'd
308 inadvertently state that I didn't get my natural athleticism from you. I
309 always buried that stuff deep down but always suspected it."

310 "Frank was a star athlete in high school. Even with a broken arm
311 he still played in the state playoff game."

312 "I don't want to hear about this Frank guy! He's never been around

313 and I don't care to know anything about him!"

314 "I get it Ben, but hear me out." Zach put his hand on Ben's bare
315 muscular shoulder. "The day we got married I promised your mother
316 I'd never tell anyone that you were not mine." Zack squeezed Ben
317 shoulder hard. "Ben, please promise me that you won't tell anybody
318 what I just told you."

319 "I'm not going to promise anything!" Ben slammed his fist down so
320 hard that the glass top patio table shattered into hundreds of small
321 square pieces. When he stood up his head rammed the shade umbrella
322 and cut his forehead. Next Ben yanked open the sliding screen with so
323 much force that it came off its track. Full force yelling and ranting
324 continued inside the empty house until Ben's bedroom door slammed
325 shut.

326 Zach was bent over pushing small glass pieces into a dustpan when
327 he heard the patio door slide.

328 "I want you to take me to see this guy Frank."

329 Zach straightened up. A few of the safety glass pieces dropped out
330 of the dustpan and scattered on the concrete. "Okay, but you need to
331 promise that your mom doesn't find out."

332 "I won't promise anything because I don't want to be locked into a
333 lie like you have been for eighteen years. But, I'll keep my mouth shut
334 until after I meet this Frank guy."

335 "Why don't we head up to Forth Worth while your Mom and Pastor
336 Tom are doing the Sunday evangelical show."

337 "Okay. But for right now I need to get out of here and clear my
338 head." Ben glanced at the smeared and now unreadable phone
339 number across his hand. Solitude was what Ben needed. It wasn't the
340 time to start a meaningless relationship, like Sally had some eighteen
341 past years ago.

342 Twenty some hours later the Sunday morning drive to Forth Worth
343 wasn't meant to give the cold shoulder to Zach. It was a mixture of
344 hurt, questions and unknown answers that kept their conversation
345 quiet.

346 Ben scanned the food line and locked onto the worn face under the
347 tattered blue and silver Dallas Cowboy cap. Frank felt the stare! When

348 their eyes met he lowered his head and then the brim of the team cap
349 stepped out of line and headed for the rear cafeteria door.

350 Zach rushed between the tables and grabbed Frank by the arm.
351 There was an intense face to face before Frank removed the worn ball
352 cap and pulled a Rosary from around his neck and over his balding
353 head. He balled the worn beads up in his tattered hand and slipped the
354 relic into his front pocket. From way across the cafeteria Ben felt the
355 embarrassment and shame on what looked to be less than half a man.
356 Frank snapped the sports cap back on and pulled the bill down in
357 hopes to hide. Zach waved Ben to come over.

358 As Ben walked between the tables of homeless, addicts, mentally
359 challenged and humans just down on their luck something washed
360 over him. In that moment he felt all of the broken hearts, lost dreams
361 and empty souls, it was like he was walking through a valley of
362 anguish with so little hope. Mysteriously, when he got to the other
363 side his brewing anger and unbearable hurt subdued.

364 Zach did a short introduction and then faded away to quietly help
365 in the kitchen. Silence and space can be golden, especially when the
366 wrong words could destroy eighteen plus years of devotion.

367 It wasn't until they were about halfway back to Dallas before Zach
368 spoke. "Do you want to talk about the lipstick the girls and I spotted
369 on you?"

370 "Not really. But, Diya did show me a whole new peek at a part of
371 the world I know nothing about. Hanging out with her made for a
372 graduation night that I'll never forget."

373 "I hope it was a safe peek." Zach was happy that Ben responded.
374 "You know if you ever need to talk adult stuff, I'm here for you."

375 "It wasn't a night like that. We just clicked on a lot of issues. I
376 showed Diya how to do an Ollie and how to back slide a board. She's a
377 fast learner."

378 "The only thing I learned about skateboarding was crash and
379 burn."

380 "Ben laughed before he remarked, "Yeah you're not all that
381 coordinated."

382 "I've was never good at sports," Zach spoke softly followed by

383 silence and then he turned on the radio.

384 Ben reached over and turned the radio down. "It was cool to watch
385 the sun come up with someone from a different country with a
386 different perspective. It made for a memorable graduation weekend."

387 "Ben, I'm sorry if what I did ruined your graduation."

388 There was another moment of silence. "No worries. I'm glad that
389 you made the arrangement for Frank to see me graduate and for
390 bringing me up here today. It's been an enlightening couple of days.
391 Thanks... I love you Dad."