

CHAPTER 5

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Sally found a babysitter at the last minute and they made it to the party within the socially accepted late grace period. The crowd gradually took on the normal structure with the men out back standing around talking sports and the women inside talking kids and new trends. Zach took up a position in a lawn chair at the far side of the pool. Three beers and a hard drink helped ease the fact of not being in the know of what NFL or NBA team had the best players. Zach's mind never was and never would be focused on sports or the latest social trends. *This drink is in order, Zach told himself. A private toast to the man that's going to solve the world's energy problems. I'll be more famous than any sports hero.*

Zach's self pride was interrupted when someone from behind asked, "So you must be Zachary Slenski?"

Zach turned and looked up; it took a moment for his eyes to catch up to his thoughts. "Yes, I'm Zachary Slenski. But, call me Zach. I'm guessing that you must be Mrs. Kurtz?" Zach stood up from the lawn chair, held out his hand and canted to the left and then straightened up.

"Yes, I am," she said and shook Zach's hand. "Most of the men here think I'm the hired maid."

"That's because you're black." Zach's words were slurred.

"Thanks for pointing that out to me. You're the first person tonight to notice."

"That's not true. I'm just the first one to say it. Believe me, all your new neighbors have noticed." Zach canted to the right this time, then stood straight up and drew in some fresh air.

"May I ask, Mr. Slenski, Do you have a problem with black people?"

"No!" Zach swayed again. "But your German last name must throw people off."

32 "I wanted to keep my maiden name but my husband gave me the
33 ultimatum. Saying we should just live together if his name was not
34 good enough for me."

35 "That's a typical German for you. They're so stubborn. Don't even
36 try to tell them what to do."

37 "So you have a problem with German people?"

38 "Nope!" Zach swigged at the brown scotch in his glass. "Earlier
39 today I had a conversation with my associate at the lab. If you want to
40 talk about one stubborn German, you should meet Eric Helzer. When I
41 left work I told him to go home. He's so bullheaded he'll probably be
42 there all night running tests."

43 "That sounds like my husband. When Karl gets focused on
44 something you can't tell him anything. By the way I'm Coreen." She
45 smiled and her perfect white teeth beamed out against her flawless
46 black skin. "I also work at a lab."

47 "You do?" Zach swayed slightly forward.

48 "You may want to sit down before you fall down," Coreen
49 suggested.

50 "I'd better." Zach sat down. "What lab do you work at?" From his
51 seated position Zach took note of how muscular Coreen was. She had
52 on a sleeveless light green dress that displayed her round strong
53 shoulders along with her trim waist and firm hips."

54 "I'm going to be working at the new oncology wing at the Dallas
55 Medical Center."

56 Zach jumped up and grabbed Coreen's hand. "You're Dr. Kurtz!
57 You wrote that article about cell phones linked to brain cancer. That
58 was a great piece." Zach let loose of Coreen's hand.

59 "Thank you," replied Coreen. "I'm flattered that someone actually
60 read my work."

61 Zach immediately pulled another lawn chair over and they spent
62 twenty minutes talking about all the unnecessary radiation humans are
63 subjected to without their knowledge. They were like the two nerds at
64 a high school party that had found each other. Coreen was impressed
65 with Zach's solar research and offered a few hypotheses of her own.

66 Karl kept glancing over at the two of them from his outpost at the
67 barbecue; he wondered who Coreen had corralled. From inside the
68 upscale home Sally had finished socializing and stepped out onto the
69 patio. She immediately spotted Zach and Coreen on the far side of the
70 pool. They were sitting knee to knee and laughing. Sally retreated
71 back inside and took up a position at the window over the kitchen sink.
72 For almost five minutes she spied on the two new found friends. The
73 second time she saw Coreen put her hand on Zach's knee she took a
74 deep breath and exited out on to the patio.

75 Calculatedly Sally worked herself around the pool and approached
76 Zach from behind. "Honey, I was wondering where you had drifted off
77 to."

78 Zach turned in the lawn chair and looked up. "I've been right here
79 the whole evening. You knew that."

80 "Oh," Sally forced a smile at Coreen. "I see you and Mrs. Kurtz
81 have met."

82 Zach stood. "It's Doctor Kurtz. She is the new oncologist that is
83 heading up the cancer wing at Dallas Memorial Center."

84 Coreen stood and extended her hand to Sally. "Please call me
85 Coreen, Doctor Kurtz is too formal."

86 Sally took her hand. "Please, call me Sally."

87 "I will." Coreen let loose of the uncomfortable handshake. "I think
88 I'd better go help my husband." Coreen pointed toward Karl who was
89 waving at her with a spatula. The barbecue was bellowing dark smoke.

90 Colleen hurried off. When she got past the diving board Sally
91 looked over at Zach. "Coreen seems nice."

92 "Yeah, she's cool and smart too. She invited me to tour her new
93 cancer wing at the hospital." Zach finished off the rest of the brown
94 scotch.

95 "Oh." Sally's stomach knotted. Never in eighteen years of marriage
96 had she ever felt jealous. There was no reason to, Zach was the
97 brainy, science, nerd type; plus he was going bald. Sally watched
98 Coreen slip on a white apron and tie it around her small waist. "She
99 kind of has big hips, for a doctor."

100 “What are you talking about?” Zach scowled over the empty scotch
101 glass.

102 “I mean, like most doctors don’t have time to keep in shape.”

103 Zach looked back across the pool. “Doctor Kurtz looks like she’s in
104 better shape than you. I think her legs are more muscular and look at
105 the V shape of her back. I bet she’s a swimmer or tennis player.”

106 “Well, anyway!” Sally put her hands on her hips. “I’m going back
107 in and talk to Mary. We are planning a fund raiser for the soccer
108 team.” Sally went around the shallow end of the pool and vanished
109 back into the house.

110 From her post behind the barbeque Coreen kept looking over at
111 Zach and smiled each time their eyes met. After fifteen minutes and
112 another scotch Zach gingerly strolled over to fix himself a plate of
113 food. Coreen formally introduced him to Karl. Their introduction was
114 cut short by the sound of a beer bottle breaking on the concrete. When
115 Karl hurried off to clean up the broken glass, Coreen suggested they
116 get together for lunch. Zach wandered off and ate by himself. He
117 switched to drinking coffee—the luncheon offer was intriguing.

118 Zach was scanning over the desert table when Sally emerged from
119 inside and made a beeline for him. “I’m ready to go!” she pulled Zach
120 by the arm.

121 No sooner had they exited the front door and started down the
122 walk Sally let loose. “That Mary is a bitch! She doesn’t want to help
123 with anymore fundraisers. Where does she get off saying Ben’s
124 attitude is hurting the soccer team? It’s not my fault that her kid is an
125 uncoordinated wimp.”

126 Zach didn’t say much as they walked past the homes with
127 oversized garages and manicured yards. Their showpiece was at the
128 far end of the cul-de-sac. Zach was evasive with all his replies to
129 Sally’s rant. The switch to drinking coffee had been a wise move; it
130 helped so not to say the wrong words at the wrong time.

131 Just as the babysitter unbolted the front door there was the sound
132 of little feet running down the hallway which was followed by the noise
133 of a bed being jumped on. Sally demanded to know why the girls were
134 not asleep and promptly ordered the babysitter to get her things. Zach

135 offered to drive the teenager home but Sally already was headed
136 toward the garage. Driving her red BMW was a self prescribed
137 relaxation therapy. Zach knew that Sally would aimlessly drive around
138 for at least thirty minutes. Sally's cooling off period would give him
139 some one-on-one time with Kendra and Chelsea.

140 He stuck his head around the door and saw both girls with their
141 eyes clinched tight as though to be sleeping. He slowly crept over to
142 the bed reached under the cover and touched Kendra's stomach. "Its
143 tickle man!" The covers got kicked off while the screams and laughter
144 echoed off the walls. The free for all ended with Zach tucking them in
145 and then reading a story about a bear family, where Papa Bear always
146 messed up.

147 After bedtime prayer just as Zach stood up Chelsea asked, "Do you
148 think Jesus loves my Daddy?"

149 "I'm sure he does." Zach replied. He was caught off guard with the
150 question. His expertise was science and solar energy, not theology.

151 Chelsea looked up directly toward Zach. He was the first man that
152 ever said a prayer at bedtime. "Does Jesus love robbers?" Chelsea
153 asked in a soft voice.

154 Zach reached down and brushed Chelsea's hair back off her
155 forehead. Religion was Sally's field, she would have an answer but she
156 was gone. "Chelsea, you shouldn't worry about things like that. Just
157 remember, Jesus loves everything good." Zach paused. He had picked
158 the wrong words. "Chelsea, Jesus loves everyone."

159 Chelsea didn't say anything. Zach left the room knowing he hadn't
160 satisfied a child's wonderment. Out in the hallway one of Pastor Tom's
161 sermons flashed in his head. He returned to the bedroom and knelt
162 down next to the bed. "Chelsea, I know one story about Jesus and a
163 robber if you would like to hear it."

164 Chelsea instantaneously worked herself out from the covers and
165 Kendra followed her lead. Both girls squirmed around until their backs
166 were against the headboard.

167 "I don't know the story exactly, but I know it to be true."

168 The word **true** burst into Chelsea mind. Her thoughts were wide
169 open.

170 "This story is about Jesus and the two robbers who were sentenced
171 to be ____." Zach paused. He needed a better word than **crucified**.

172 "I know this story from Sunday school," Kendra blurted out.

173 Zach continued, "Anyway, in the old days they would punish people
174 even if they didn't do anything wrong. That is what happened to Jesus.
175 He didn't do anything bad. But a bunch of jealous men wanted to
176 punish him anyway."

177 "I know Daddy, Jesus died on a cross. He was crucified," piped in
178 Kendra.

179 "Yes he did die," Zach paused again.

180 "Did the two robbers die too?" Chelsea asked barely audible and
181 with her eyes and ears wide open.

182 "These days a robber is put in time out for a little while. They are
183 not put up on a cross or anything like that."

184 "I know. They locked my Daddy up. He was bad." Chelsea said with
185 a shame a child should not have to bare.

186 "Well anyway," Zach paused and then started again. "One of the
187 robbers told Jesus he was sorry for what he had done."

188 "My Daddy is sorry for being bad," Chelsea replied gently.

189 "Well, Jesus looked over at that man. The man that had said he
190 was sorry. And do you know what Jesus told that man?"

191 "No," Chelsea did not blink, she was frozen.

192 "Jesus told the man that he would go to heaven."

193 "Heaven is where all the good people go?" Chelsea let out with joy.

194 "Yes it is. Jesus forgave that man and we need to be like Jesus. If
195 someone does something bad we need to forgive that person. Jesus
196 loved that man, even though he had done some bad things in his life."

197 An unseen feeling of calm came to Chelsea. Zach hoped his words
198 had made sense to an eight year old. He got both girls tucked back
199 under the covers. When he turned out the light and stepped into the
200 hall he overheard Chelsea say, "Jesus loves my Daddy."

201 In an assuring tone Kendra answered, "Yes, Jesus loves everyone."

202 Out in the kitchen Zach thought about everything that Chelsea's
203 father had missed out on and thanked God for Ben and Kendra. After
204 going through a stack of mail he listened to the answering machine

205 then started reading the newspaper. When the blue display on the
206 microwave flashed **11:00** Zach folded the newspaper in half and
207 headed upstairs. Twenty minutes later he heard the hum from the
208 garage door opener. Next the kitchen door opened and then closed,
209 followed by the clinking sound of the car keys on the counter. The
210 stairway lights came on and a few seconds later Sally entered the
211 bedroom and asked. "Did Ben call?"

212 "Yes, he left a message. Ben said he would be home tomorrow
213 about noon." Zach replied from bed.

214 "Zach, I want you to tell Ben that he needs to take those private
215 soccer lessons."

216 Zach looked over the top of a book and over the top of his glasses.
217 "Sally maybe you shouldn't push him so hard."

218 "Yeah right Zach. How's he going to be First Striker at state if we
219 let up on him?" Sally walked into the closet.

220 Zach went back to reading a new indie author. He thought about
221 taking a firmer stand but Sally was the stay at home parent; she knew
222 what was best for the children. Zach's eyes followed Sally as she
223 walked from the closet to the bathroom. She wasn't shy and often
224 mentioned that she could still fit into her rally uniform.

225 The water ran for several minutes and then the toilet flushed. Sally
226 finally emerged in an emerald green camisole. Zach closed the book
227 and put it on the nightstand. Aroused from the visual and Sally's scent
228 Zach flung back the sheets.

229 Sally hurried and slid into bed. She kissed Zach on the cheek and
230 said, "Good night."

231 "Good night!" Zach replied.

232 "Yes, good night." I have to be at the studio by six in the morning."

233 "I thought we could make love tonight." Zach swallowed hard. "I
234 was gone all last week and really missed you."

235 "Not tonight Zach. We'll have sex tomorrow night."

236 "I can hurry, if all you want is sex," Zach said and started to
237 massage Sally's back.

238 Sally twisted away. "Not tonight, Zach. Plus the girls might come
239 up to our bedroom again."

240 "They're sound asleep. I read them a story and tucked them in."
241 I've told you how people can tell the next morning. There is no
242 way I'm sitting up there under those hot studio lights next to Pastor
243 Tom with him knowing."
244 "That's a new excuse for the books." Zach pulled his hand back.
245 "It's not an excuse! What do you think Pastor Tom would think
246 knowing I had sex the night before his show?"
247 "Sally, I don't think Pastor Tom would even care. And if he did, I
248 hope that he would condone a husband and a wife becoming one."
249 Sally switched off the nightstand lamp and buried her head into the
250 pillow. "We'll have sex tomorrow Zach. I promise."
251 Frustrated, Zach propped up against the headboard and folded his
252 arms across his chest. He hated the feeling of begging or bartering for
253 intimacy. *Things will be different when Son Source is in the newspaper*
254 *as the most innovative business of the year. Sally will really want me*
255 *then! Who knows, I might be nominated for a Noble Peace Prize? Then*
256 *Sally will really want me. She'll see what I've been working day and*
257 *night for. I'll slowly give her the things she wants. I can play her*
258 *game. The world will be a better place because of my quad panels.*
259 It was dawn when the phone rang. Sally reached toward the
260 nightstand and pulled the phone to her ear. "Hello," she said and
261 forced her eyes open.
262 "This is Detective Murphy. Is Mr. Zachary Slenski there?"
263 "Yes he's here." The word **detective** snapped Sally from her
264 slumber. "Has there been an accident?" She asked, holding her breath.
265 "Yes, there has been an accident." Sally's mind jumped to full on
266 panic. "Oh, no! Something has happened to Ben." She shoved the
267 phone against Zach's head and pillow.
268 "Hello," Zach said into the handset. He listened to the details very
269 carefully. Sally was now on the edge of the bed taking shallow breaths.
270 After what felt like an eternity Zach hung up the phone. "Eric fell off
271 the roof last night. I have to go down to the shop right now!"
272 An ambulance was leaving when Zach whirled his Toyota Prius into
273 the parking lot. Sparks flew from underneath when the hybrid

274 bottomed out on the concrete driveway ramp. The tires skidded to a
275 stop and a detective approached. Zach jumped out!

276 The flinging car door almost slammed the detective. "You must
277 be?" The short, heavy set man looked at his yellow note pad and then
278 flipped back a page. "You must be Zachary James Slenski."

279 "Yes, that's me," Zach answered and then noticed two men that
280 were on the roof. One had a measuring tape extended out over the
281 roof edge and the other man had a camera taking pictures.

282 "Mr. Slenski I need to ask you a few routine questions." The
283 detective flipped to a blank page then took a pen from his pocket
284 protector. "Could you tell me why Mr. Helzer was on the roof of your
285 LLC in the middle of the night?"

286 "Eric was running some diode leakage test on the solar panels."
287 Zach pointed toward the roof. "You can only test diode reverse leakage
288 when the sun is down."

289 "Well, that explains that." The detective made a big X across the
290 entire page. "So, it was normal for Mr. Helzer to work the graveyard
291 shift and be up on the roof in the middle of the night?"

292 "Yes it was normal. And we don't have a graveyard shift. Eric was
293 working alone." Zach noticed a woman that had chalk in her hand by
294 the receiving dock looking down at the concrete. "Is that where?" Zach
295 couldn't finish his sentence; he pointed toward the woman.

296 "Yes, that's where Mr. Helzer landed. A jogger spotted the body
297 this morning. He broke his neck instantly. He probably didn't feel a
298 thing." The detective flipped forward in the yellow notepad. "So, to get
299 the facts straight, it was not unusual for Mr. Helzer to be working on
300 the roof, in the dark, by himself?"

301 "Yes, that's correct. It was not unusual for Eric to be running tests
302 on solar panels at night. He was up on the roof the night before also."

303 "Was there any reason for him to be crawling around up there?"

304 "Yes, he had to work on his back under the solar panel racks when
305 he soldered in new diodes or connected test equipment to the solar
306 array."

307 "Okay, that answers that." The detective made another X in his
308 notepad and then yelled up to the two men on the roof. "Come on

309 down! We can wrap this one up.” The short, husky detective used the
310 sleeve of his frumpy shirt to whip sweat off his forehead.

311 “Is that it?” Zach asked.

312 “Yep, that’s about it. If we have more questions we’ll call you.” The
313 detective walked toward the woman and the body outline on the
314 concrete. They talked a few minutes and then the woman pulled off
315 the latex gloves and put them along with the piece of chalk into a
316 paper bag.

317 The two crime scene investigators on the roof came down a fire
318 escape ladder bolted to the building. One of them walked to a police
319 van and the other approached Zach. “Looks like your employee tripped
320 over one of those wires up there. It’s dangerous even in the daylight. I
321 can’t imagine walking around up there in the dark.”

322 Zach didn’t respond, he watched the other investigator toss a hard
323 metal case onto the back of the van and then light up a cigarette. He
324 overheard a radio conversation to take Eric’s body directly to the
325 morgue, so not to waste resources on a full ME examination at the
326 downtown lab. Zach stood frozen. He wondered if Cindy had been
327 notified. She was pregnant with their third child.

328 The heavysset detective and female criminologist got into a white
329 unmarked car and drove off. A few minutes later the CSI van pulled
330 away. It felt like walking thru deep heavy snow as Zach plowed his
331 way toward the front entrance of Son Source. Overcome with guilt and
332 dazed he stared at the desk phone and thought about contacting
333 Cindy.

334 Two hours later Sally showed up after co-hosting Pastor Tom’s
335 cable/TV bible program. She found Zach wandering around in a far
336 corner of the warehouse. She told Zach that Pastor Tom had opened
337 up a prayer line for Eric and that the church had a good liability lawyer
338 that she was going to meet with. Zach showed zero emotion—prayers
339 were not going to feed Eric’s family.