

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

~13~

**Call your wife** was written on a paper that was stuck on the window over the propane stove. Tom's mouth was dry and his head throbbed, he pushed the back door open and spit phlegm onto the dirt. The sky blue Harley-Davidson was gone! The morning dew fog took a cool bite to his bare arms and chest. Off in the distance animals yelped and birds called out announcing a new day.

The store owner was carrying a plywood **OPEN** sign down the road; he was silhouetted by the rising sun. Tom shielded his bloodshot eyes, pulled the rear door closed and then found his phone. There were seven voice messages: Two from Idogbe, one from Hank the hog hunter and four from Elizabeth.

First message: "Pastor Tom, I just locked up. I need to help my Mum on the farm for a few days. I'll be back to finish up the dog kennel later in the week."

The next message from the same phone number: "Don't worry about your niece Ms Williams. She got hooked up with Victor Vee. He is showing her around." Tom deleted both voice messages from Idogbe.

Third voice message: "Hey Preacher Man. I'm sending you some 223 hollow point ammo for that ghost gun I built for you. These new plastic tipped rounds are more accurate than full metal jacket ammo. Hope to get over there soon to shoot hyenas and knock down some African swine." Tom deleted Hank's message.

The next four messages were from Beth: First message: "Tom call me ASAP."

Second message from Beth: "Why haven't you called back? What is going on over there? Call me even if it's the middle of the night."

Beth's third message: "The FBI is looking into financial records at your old church. Something about a crypto-currency scam coming out of Africa."

34           The last message: "Tom are you okay? My checking account got  
35 hacked. I asked Danny to help me. Please call back!"

36           Tom tapped the call back icon on his phone. After four rings he got  
37 Beth's 'leave a message' prerecorded script. "Beth, the cell service is  
38 spotty up here in the Plateau State. I'll call you from Abuja in a couple  
39 of hours. I'm okay!" Tom shoved the phone into his pants pocket and  
40 then pulled on a shirt.

41           The store owner was walking back across the gravel parking lot  
42 and waved. Tom followed the store owner into the store. The smell of  
43 fresh brewing coffee was the morning fix he needed. Tom slapped  
44 three kobo coins on the counter. "I'll take a cup of hot java. What do I  
45 owe you for camping overnight?"

46           "Nothing, it was a good thing you didn't drive drunk last night."  
47 The merchant swept the coins to the edge of the counter into his hand.

48           "Do you know what time the guy on the big motorcycle pulled out  
49 this morning?"

50           "Fr. Paul left on his big okada before dawn." The Fulani merchant  
51 set a paper cup on the counter.

52           "Why are you calling him Father Paul?"

53           "He's a priest that brings the holy bread to the sick and dying in  
54 the Gongola River Valley."

55           The phone vibrated in his pocket. "Excuse me," Tom pulled the  
56 phone from his pocket and went outside.

57           "Tom you are in big trouble! I don't want to talk about what  
58 happened over the phone."

59           "I'm sorry Beth. I didn't expect anything to happen, but it just did."  
60 Tom felt relieved that Beth knew about Tina — he thought.

61           "I won't talk about this over the phone. I will be coming to Abuja  
62 on a private jet this week. I've made arrangements to fly with Cain  
63 and Able." Beth was picking her words carefully, as per Danny's  
64 instructions.

65           Face to face Dan had informed her that two months after the 9/11  
66 terrorist attack, President George W. Bush authorized the National  
67 Security Agency to spy on ordinary Americans. Bush expanded the  
68 NSA's authority to record private phone conversations and also

69 approved the hacking of email and messaging accounts. Espionage on  
70 US citizens became a political football and non collaborated  
71 information was often leaked to fake news media. Beth was now  
72 informed that calling overseas to someone that was already on the FBI  
73 watch list was sure to send up a red flag.

74 "Beth, I'm not sure that you should go thru all the trouble to get  
75 the dogs over here. I doubt if I will keep to my two year contract over  
76 here." Tom paused, his throat was dry. "I'll stop in Texas on my trip to  
77 headquarters to Los Angeles next month."

78 "Tom, I had to use crypto-currency to get the dogs vaccinated and  
79 pay for a pet visa. I'm bringing them to you."

80 "I never knew you had a crypto account?" Tom was confused; he  
81 had no clue that Beth was into crypto currency; especially after what  
82 had happened to the church treasurer in Dallas.

83 "Tom we need to talk. I'll text you the flight information. Don't  
84 bother to call me!" Beth kept the conversation short and didn't use any  
85 keywords— as per Danny's instructions.

86 Tom set a new waypoint on the Sprinter's GPS. The Abuja  
87 International airport was on the route back to Lagos. Finding a nice  
88 hotel for Beth that allowed dogs was the least he could do.

89 Abuja was the only planned city in Nigeria, it became the nation's  
90 capital in 1991. It looked like most any metropolitan city in the United  
91 States. There were several international hotel chains and restaurants  
92 around the airport. The Sheraton Hotel was five star and allowed pets.

93 Tom got fuel and headed for Lagos, hoping to be home by dark.  
94 The revelation that Beth had a crypto account had Tom thinking that  
95 their marriage wasn't all that solid.

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The parking lot gate, the church and the apartment were all locked  
up. Tom did a quick look over of the dog kennel. Inside the apartment  
the motion activated spy camera recorded him strip off his camo  
hunting pants and then crash face first onto the twin bed. The three

103 days up to and then getting back from Plateau State felt more like a  
104 week of being on the road.

105 Tom could have slept longer but the persistence tapping was more  
106 annoying than a repetitious snooze alarm. He stepped on a pile of  
107 damp towels and a mildew smell reeked onto his foot. He bent over  
108 and looked out the peephole. Across the alley Jacob was setting on the  
109 church steps dragging his finger across the screen of the outdated  
110 tablet. Tom opened the door and then sidestepped toward the coffee  
111 pot on the laminate counter top. There were ants crawling on dirty  
112 dishes and several half empty food cartons in the sink. *This is*  
113 *disgusting! Tina should've cleaned up after herself.*

114 Jacob darted into the apartment hugged Tom's upper leg and then  
115 took up a chair at the green table. Tom started a pot of coffee and  
116 then washed off the plates and cleaned out the sink. After he picked  
117 up mildewed towels he stood over Jacobs shoulder. Jacob was already  
118 playing at Chess level six on his old tablet computer. Tom was  
119 impressed when Jacob castled his king to queenside. He rubbed  
120 Jacob's full head of nappy black hair and then got some Akara and Pap  
121 out of the fridge.

122 Jacob couldn't hear the parking lot gate being pushed across  
123 cobble stones but could feel the beating of a blown out muffler on his  
124 chest. Tom heard both sounds and hastily pulled on his camo hunting  
125 pants. He rubbed Jacob's head again and then pulled opened the door  
126 for the second time.

127 Idogbe steered between the apartment and church while casting a  
128 long stare at Tom's baggy unzipped hunting pants and bare chest. He  
129 took a mental note of Jacobs red wash bucket and cleaning supplies  
130 over on the church porch.

131 "How about a cup of coffee?" Tom yelled as Idogbe stepped out of  
132 the truck.

133 "Sure," Idogbe replied and focused around the left side of Tom.  
134 Jacob was sitting at the green table with his head cast down.

135 "Come on in." Tom back tracked to the bed and pulled on a  
136 sweatshirt.

137                   Idogbe moved toward the table. Jacob looked up, smiled and then  
138 looked back down. He only had nine seconds left to make his next  
139 move.

140                   "Did you give Jacob this computer?"

141                   "I did. It was gathering dust in our basement back home. I'm glad  
142 that Jacob could use it."

143                   "Speaking about back home, did you call your wife?"

144                   "I did." Tom handed a cup of steaming coffee to Idogbe. "I'm sorry  
145 about leaving you hanging for three days."

146                   "That was not a problem." Idogbe blew across the surface of the  
147 Kenya coffee.

148                   "How did my parishioners do with no Sunday service?"

149                   "I took care of it. When you didn't show up, I filled in with a  
150 gather, proclaim, and send version of a service. Since I can't  
151 consecrate bread or wine I left that out. Your baker friend brought  
152 coffee and Texas style Ankara."

153                   "What? Are you telling me you conducted my Sunday service?"

154                   "What did you want me to do?" Idogbe rebutted.

155                   "I left you a message to hang a sign on the church doors that my  
156 Sunday service was canceled. I sent a similar same message to Tina."

157                   "Well, I didn't get the message. I did not hear anything about  
158 canceling your Sunday service from Ms. Williams." Idogbe paused and  
159 reflected on the last time he'd spoken to or saw Tina. That night it was  
160 cold and rained hard. He got soaked and was on the verge of a Malaria  
161 flare up.

162                   "I'm going to call Tina and see if she got the message!"

163                   "You don't believe me!" Idogbe set the coffee cup on the green  
164 table and abruptly left the apartment.

165                   Tom didn't akin to some abbreviated universal catholic service at  
166 his church. He especially hoped that Idogbe didn't honor any graven  
167 images like the Virgin Mary or prayed a Rosary. This type of idolatry  
168 would be a direct violation of the second commandment. Jacob  
169 couldn't hear what had been said, yet he sensed the tension.

170                   "A groggy, "Hello," came out of the cell phone.

171            "Tina, did you get my message?" Tom asked and then walked over  
172 behind Jacob.

173            "What, like where have you been Uncle Tom?"

174            "I traveled up to the Glory and Praise outreach school."

175            "Oh." Tina rolled over in the king size bed. Victor Vee was just  
176 getting out of the shower. "That's the all girl's school?"

177            "Yes, it's a school mainly for girls." Tom quipped, not wanting to  
178 re-digest anything of what he had witnessed. "Tina did you get my  
179 message about posting a sign on the church door about no service for  
180 last Sunday?"

181            "No." Tina motioned at Victor Vee that she was on the phone and  
182 to be quiet. "I got the note you left me on the apartment door but it  
183 didn't say anything about closing church. That was the only message I  
184 got from you."

185            "Okay, that's all I needed to know. We should talk before I travel  
186 up to Abuja next week."

187            "Abuja! Maybe I can go with you. I hear that it is the hot spot for  
188 the elite people."

189            "Tina, we'll talk later."

190            Tom went outside and walked to the back of the apartment. "My  
191 niece didn't get the message about canceling Sunday service either. It  
192 must be the fault of the poor cell service in the Gongola River Valley."

193            "Okay." Idogbe didn't look up from installing the gate latch. A  
194 sincere apology was what he expected, not an excuse.

195            "I'm glad that the kennel is almost finished. Cain and Abel should  
196 be here next week."

197            Idogbe glanced up and replied, "Why did you named your dogs  
198 after the first conflict between nomadic shepherds and settled  
199 farmers?"

200            "What?" Tom knew all about the first murder in the first book of  
201 the Bible. "That passage is not about a conflict between farmers and  
202 ranchers."

203            "Okay, if you say so." Idogbe turned back to finish installing the  
204 kennel latch.

205 "Don't you want to learn the true meaning behind the murder of  
206 Abel by Cain?" Tom asked.

207 "Not really." Idogbe kept working on the latch. "I'm way behind  
208 helping my Mum on her strawberry farm."

209 The realization that Idogbe stayed over the weekend for the good  
210 of his church sank in. "Take the rest of the week off to help your Mum  
211 get caught up on the family farm."

212 Inside the apartment Jacob had set out the chess board and was  
213 placing the chess pieces when Tom came back in. Tom held one finger  
214 up so to indicate that he could only play one game. The game ended in  
215 a stalemate. Jacob retrieved the red bucket and headed over to the  
216 church to mop and wipe down the pews. Tom called Tina and told her  
217 that they needed to talk.

218 As Tom walked across into the lobby of Oyins Holiday Inn he  
219 noticed a **CLOSED** sign on the door of the relaxion room. When he  
220 approached the reservation counter he asked. "Would you ring Ms.  
221 Williams' room and let her know that I'm here."

222 "She's in the lounge." Phillip pointed toward the relaxion room  
223 double doors.

224 Tom pulled open one of the doors. Tina, Victor Vee and Kenny  
225 Chen were bent over a map that was spread out across two tables.  
226 There was no one else in the room. "Where's Tanny? Tom asked as he  
227 approached the trio.

228 "She quit," Victor piped up.

229 "Quit! Doesn't she have three kids to feed?" Tom asked as he  
230 glanced down at Mr. Chen's notepad that had dates and actions items  
231 circled.

232 Victor gestured toward Tina. "Tanny was spreading lies about our  
233 most excellent guest. She won't be back."

234 "Tom we need your motorhome. Victor is going to show us a place  
235 where his great grandpa was a Trokosi Priest." Tina gestured toward  
236 Mr. Chen.

237 "You can't use it this week. Beth is flying into Abuja I'm using it to  
238 pick her and the dogs up"

239 Victor pointed at the map. "Is this the village where your church  
240 school is located?"

241 Tom bent over the map; it took him a few minutes to pinpoint the  
242 school. "Tina don't travel up here to the outskirts of Jos City." Tom  
243 held back what he had witnessed. Tom left Oyins Holiday Inn even  
244 though his gut was telling him that he should have been more  
245 forthcoming about the murders.

246 Mr. Chen reminded Tina that they had an obligation with the CCP.  
247 Tom wasn't even two blocks from the motel when Tina caught up with  
248 him. From behind she grabbed Tom's arm and out of breath said, "Mr.  
249 Chen won't take no for an answer! He wants to use your motorhome  
250 tomorrow."

251 Tom yanked his arm away. "I don't give a crap about what Mr.  
252 Chen wants. I told you after I pick up Beth and the dogs from the  
253 airport you can use the motorhome."

254 A deep malevolence warning spewed out Tina's mouth, "Aunt Beth  
255 would not like to hear about what happened between us." Tom turned  
256 and walked away! Blackmail was not one of the commandments —  
257 even when it was used to extorted love of others.

258 Jacob was rinsing out the red bucket and Idogbe was inspecting  
259 the dog door when Tom entered thru the gate. Jacob ran and hugged  
260 Tom and felt the tenseness in Tom's thigh. Idogbe showed Tom how to  
261 block off the dog door from inside the apartment; he also sensed that  
262 something was off with Tom. It was more than the rift about  
263 conducting last Sunday's service.

264 Jacob climbed up onto one of the green chairs. Hoping to play  
265 another person on person game of chess? Tom was the only adult  
266 mentor/teacher that Jacob had — he'd do anything to please Tom.