

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

~14~

**The** private hanger at the Abuja airport had less security than the international public terminal. Tom stood behind a yellow barrier rope and watched the Gulfstream G550 taxi to a stop. The side door swung up and an extra wide ramp was pushed up against the fuselage. A slender middle age man with arm crutches appeared at the top of the ramp and gingerly worked himself down the aluminum incline. Two uniformed Nigerian TSA personnel were at the bottom of the ramp. An armed ex-military type Caucasian was positioned behind a carbon fiber wheelchair.

Beth appeared at the top of the ramp and waved. Tom's stomach knotted, he forced a smile but didn't wave back. She slowly followed Danny being pushed across the tarmac to a small screening tent. One TSA agent did a quick up, down and around with a scanning wand while two agents went thru their luggage. Danny's laptop was confiscated and so was a large bottle of Beth's shampoo.

Beth followed behind Danny who was now pushing himself with long arm strides. At the security rope Tom avoided eye contact but did catch a wisp of Beth's perfume. "Tom, I'd like you to meet Danny."

"Call me Dan. Your wife told me a lot about you and a dedication to the Lord." Danny extended his hand.

"I'm not sure if I call it a dedication." They shook hands.

"Well her stories reminded me a lot of my step-father. He wasn't that much of a man of the cloth, but he was dedicated to exposing false information over the AP wire service. These days we call it fake news. David was the reason I started my internet fraud and cyber security business."

"I know all about that email scam from a Nigerian Prince asking for an advance fee to release millions of dollars from a trust." Tom replied.

35                    "That fifteen year old scam still rakes in over eight hundred  
36 thousand dollars annually. The baby-boomers are a great mark with  
37 the hopes of growing their crypto-currency accounts." Dan frowned.

38                    Beth leaned over the rope barrier and hugged Tom. "I really have  
39 missed you. Remember don't talk Bitcoin stuff."

40                    Tom stiffened and then stood tall. He now focused on the dog  
41 carriers being unloaded from the rear cargo hatch. "I hope Cain and  
42 Abel are okay."

43                    "Hank gave them some animal tranquilizer. Something he uses  
44 when he ships breeding stock." Beth rubbed Tom's hand, she sensed  
45 something was wrong.

46                    "Nice meeting you Tom." The armed agent pushed Dan into a  
47 private room where his carbon fiber wheelchair would be x-rayed.

48                    Cain and Abel were taken in the opposite direction to a private  
49 quarantine building. It would be three more days before Tom could  
50 even touch them.

51                    "I'll take those," Tom grabbed hold of Beth's luggage. There was a  
52 chilling silence as they exited the private hanger at Nnamdi Azikiwe  
53 International Airport.

54                    "What's wrong Tom? Sally finally asked as she climbed up into the  
55 passenger side of the Sprinter.

56                    "A... A lot of things have happened over the past couple of weeks."  
57 Tom started the motorhome and backed out of the airport parking  
58 space. "We need to get on the road; it's almost eight hours back to  
59 Lagos."

60                    Tom kept looking for the right time to confess his adultery. But the  
61 slaying of the three school girls dominated their conversation. Tom  
62 said he was reluctant to get Glory and Praise headquarters involved.  
63 Beth insisted that he needed to reach out to local law enforcement.  
64 She asserted that not doing anything would be worse than the cover  
65 up of child abuse in the Catholic Church.

66                    Tom vehemently set Beth straight. With over two decades of the  
67 Catholic Church covering and moving pedophile clergy to different  
68 parishes the deaths of three African girls in a remote village in the  
69 middle of Nigeria wasn't a good analogy.

70 Beth fought back and rattled off some Prosperity Preachers that  
71 were sketchy. Recently an elder at Glory and Praise Ministries was  
72 photographed landing on a private Caribbean island known to traffic  
73 children. Deep in the back of his mind Tom knew that as long as  
74 collection baskets exceeded the ten percent tithing benchmark these  
75 pastors were left alone.

76 Next Beth went off about the FBI looking into a cyber currency  
77 hack at his old church. Sally had stopped by to inform her that a FICA  
78 warrant had been issued and not to talk, text or email anybody over  
79 the phone. Beth never cared for Sally when she was the secretary at  
80 Tom's old church. Sally was a straight shooter and never spread  
81 gossip. Sally was also part of the reason Tom got moved to Africa.  
82 There was a church rumor that they were involved.

83 The more Beth unloaded on Tom the more he discerned that the  
84 real root of Beth's problem was their interfaith marriage. The last two  
85 hundred miles back to Lagos was indoctrination about all the good  
86 Martin Luther brought to Christianity. Beth had never seen this side of  
87 Tom; she was no match for all his years of theology training.

88 It was dark and traffic was light when Tom stood in the beam of  
89 the headlights so he could unlock the church gate. He pulled the  
90 motorhome between the apartment and church. "What do you think?"

91 Beth looked at the small building on her left and then the church  
92 on the right thru the lowered passenger window. "This reminds me of  
93 your first church in Round Rock, Texas."

94 Tom reflected back to his first assignment when their marriage was  
95 new and full of adventure. "I guess it sort of does." Tom jumped out of  
96 the motorhome and walked to the apartment. There was a note on the  
97 front door, he snatched it and stuffed it into his front pocket. He  
98 unlocked the door.

99 Beth walked in and looked to the right at the small kitchen and  
100 then at one door to the bathroom. To her left she saw the double bed.  
101 "That is kind of cute, about the same size bed I shared at college."

102 "I don't think I saw that apartment." Tom replied as he set Beth's  
103 luggage next to the green table. There was an awkward silence. Tom  
104 never knew that Beth had a roommate in college.

105 Beth opened the bathroom door. "This shower is definitely not built  
106 for two."

107 "I'm going to sleep in the motorhome. That bed is too small for  
108 both of us." Tom quipped, he needed sleep.

109 "We can make it work," Beth walked over and took both of his  
110 hands.

111 Tom yanked his hands away. "I'm sleeping in the motorhome. I'm  
112 beat from the drive up and back to get you."

113 "To get me! What the hell Tom, I thought you missed me and  
114 would want to be with me?"

115 They were both exhausted, now was not the time to have a  
116 couple's relationship dispute. "We'll talk in the morning." As soon as  
117 Tom got into the motorhome he pulled the note out of his pocket.

118

119 **Uncle Tom we need to use your**  
120 **Mercedes van for our road trip. Call**  
121 **me or Victor at the hotel ASAP. Mr.**  
122 **Chen said to remind you of your**  
123 **contract with the CCP.**  
124 **Your fun niece, Tina**

125

126 The drive up to Abuja airport and then back to Lagos had been  
127 grueling. Tom didn't even make it five minutes before he was fast  
128 asleep. The motorhome was the least of his worries, let alone any  
129 threats by a rogue Chinese Communist Party member. Worst case  
130 scenario he'd let Mr. Chen have the motorhome and then turn it in as  
131 being stolen.

132 When Beth fluffed the pillows a strong fragrance trickled out; it  
133 wasn't the flowerily smell from scented laundry detergent. She buried  
134 her head into the second pillow — Chanel #5 was the perfume Tina  
135 always wore. Beth tossed and turned; she prayed that her woman's  
136 intuition was off.

137 As the heavy morning Lagos traffic started Beth finally dozed off. A  
138 persistent knocking on the door felt like three am on Beth's internal  
139 clock still set to Texas time. Groggy and disorientated Beth slowly

140 pulled open the door. She immediately recognized Jacob from the  
141 endless stream of jpg images Tom continually emailed to her. Beth  
142 signed, *"How are you?"*

143 Jacob was surprised to see a strange woman in the apartment. He  
144 was overjoyed that she knew sign language! Jacob signed back, *"Who*  
145 *are you?"*

146 Beth signed, *"Tom's wife,"* and then leaned out the door and  
147 pointed at the motorhome. Next she put her open hand near her  
148 forehead and lowered it below her chin while closing her eyes.

149 Jacob now understood that Tom was asleep in the motorhome. He  
150 looked downward, paused and then back at Beth and quickly signed,  
151 *"Can you play?"*

152 Beth moved her head up and down to affirm that she could. With  
153 glee Jacob set his bucket and supplies to the side of the door. He  
154 rubbed up against Beth as he burst into the apartment. He got the  
155 chess game from a cupboard and competently arranged the chess  
156 pieces. Beth looked over the chess board and signed, *"Who goes first?"*

157 Jacob pointed at Beth with a determined look. It had been years  
158 since she played a game of chess; she didn't expect to lose in nine  
159 moves. The second game Beth was more focused on the chessboard  
160 when Tom came thru the door. Jacob jumped off the green chair and  
161 ran over and hugged Tom's upper leg. "Jacob's becoming a good chess  
162 player."

163 "No kidding!" Beth stood then walked over to Tom and kissed him  
164 on the cheek. Jacob took her hand and pulled her back to the table.

165 Tom made coffee a cup of coco and put some yum yums on a  
166 plate. He stood behind Jacob and gently massaged Jacob's small  
167 shoulders as he observed. When Jacob sacrificed his queen Tom knew  
168 Beth would be checkmated within three moves. Beth signed, "Thank  
169 you."

170 Tom showed Beth the new dog kennel and the side alley where  
171 children played during Sunday service. Jacob stood patiently at the  
172 church double doors with his red bucket in hand ready to work. Beth  
173 now understood about Tom's bragging up how mature the Onukwulu  
174 boys were; she couldn't wait to meet Ekon.

175 As Tom was unlocking the church his cell phone vibrated, he pulled  
176 it from his pocket. Jacob grabbed Beth's hand and led her inside.

177 Tom noted the caller ID then stepped back and down the stairs  
178 where he couldn't be overheard. "What do you need?"

179 "Uncle Tom Mr. Chen wants your motorhome ASAP. The Chinese  
180 have a big plan and you said you would help them. They want to give  
181 out scholarships for their Red Nobility School.

182 "Tina, I told Mr. Chen before any scholarships are given out Glory  
183 and Praise headquarters has to give their approval."

184 "Uncle Tom I don't know anything about your agreement with Mr.  
185 Chen but he's got strict orders. If you can't help, Victor said he will."

186 "Tina I'll call you back in a couple days after Beth heads back to  
187 Texas."

188 "Oh like wow! Aunt Beth is here now. We should all go out to  
189 dinner. Victor knows the hot spots in Lagos."

190 "Tina, I have to go. I'll call you Friday on my way back from the  
191 Abuja airport." Tom shoved his phone into his pocket, walked up the  
192 stairs and pulled open one of the church doors. Jacob and Beth were  
193 gone — it was as though they had vanished!

194 Tom let loose of the door and walked to the right corner of the  
195 church, he looked down the side alley. No Beth or Jacob! He walked all  
196 the way down the alley and gazed over the vacant lot. Tom cupped his  
197 hands around his mouth and yelled, "Beth where are you?" Tom  
198 learned his first week in Lagos that yelling for Jacob would fall on deaf  
199 ears.

200 Tom ran to the other rear corner of the church and yelled toward  
201 the trees in the vacant lot, "Elizabeth are you two over there in the  
202 trees?" Tom then put his thumbs into his mouth and blew out an ear  
203 piercing whistle. The side door of the church sprang open. Tom hurried  
204 down the alley and demanded an answer, "Where were you two  
205 hiding?"

206 "Jacob was showing me the false wall panel that you have in the  
207 closet," Beth replied with a concerned tone. "Tom you need to get a  
208 gun safe?"

209                    "Nigeria doesn't have the right to bear arms in their constitution.  
210 Getting a gun safe would send up a red flag. I'm already on the locale  
211 constable's list. He spies on everyone in the neighborhood."

212                    "At least keep the ammunition someplace else. Guns and small  
213 boys are not a good mix!"

214                    "I didn't think that Jacob knew about the false wall. I'll move the  
215 stuff into the motorhome later." Tom was fully aware that the  
216 untraceable ghost gun that Hank gave to him could get him  
217 imprisoned for up to ten years.

218                    "Do you want me to help you do that now?" Beth asked anxiously.  
219 Recently one of the young altar servers at her church committed  
220 suicide by a gun his father kept in the glove box.

221                    "Beth, I'll move the stuff after dark. That nosy neighborhood  
222 constable could be spying on us right now. He's a devout Muslim. He  
223 hates white Christian preachers. Credence to Allah is all that he  
224 knows."

225                    "Okay." Beth squatted down and signed to Jacob. "*Thanks for*  
226 *showing me the secret hiding place.*"

227                    "Let's go get some fresh African Coffee. I need to pay the baker for  
228 Sunday. Tom said as they walked up the alley toward the apartment.  
229 Jacob hurried ahead and retrieved his red bucket and rags and then  
230 darted into the church. He never missed the opportunity to wipe down  
231 the chairs and mop the church floor.

232                    Over a boiling vat of palm oil, Tom introduced Beth to his baker  
233 partner and settled up the church bill. Back outside they found a small  
234 table under a blue tarp awning. "This African coffee is really good."

235                    "It's from Kenya." Tom cautiously sipped off the paper cup. "The  
236 Akara is a deep fried bean puree and Pap is a porridge made from  
237 corn."

238                    "Sounds healthier than sugary donuts." Beth broke the Akara and  
239 popped a chunk into her mouth.

240                    Tom's impromptu small talk about how he was mentoring the  
241 baker and helping him grow his business was an ongoing discourse  
242 that started at the airport twenty-four hours ago. After coffee Tom  
243 flagged down a Kekes and told the driver to take them to Tin Can

244 Island. Showing Beth the corrupt side of commerce in Nigeria was part  
245 of his plan. He wanted to discourage Beth about moving to Africa.

246 The next day the women of the parish had a tea social for Beth.  
247 Some of the more traditional church ladies wore colorful African dress  
248 and head scarfs. Beth felt welcomed — their love was genuine. Jacob's  
249 Mum explained that they didn't call it 'Tea and Crumpets' any longer.  
250 In the UK and in Lagos the word 'Crumpet' was now considered  
251 derogatory; it meant whore. Beth replied that she wouldn't mind being  
252 called a lady of the night by her husband; Mrs. Onukwulu laughed.

253 The next day Tom arranged a tour of Makoko, a slum built over  
254 water. Makoko is sometimes referred to as the 'Venice of Africa.' It  
255 wasn't a tourist destination. stone of the more unusual slums in all of  
256 Africa. It's built on water, which provides a way of life for a fishing  
257 community of over a quarter million residences. Beth instantly fell in  
258 love the people; especially the children that paddled up to their tour  
259 boat. The plan to discourage Beth backfired — she purchased every  
260 trinket, woven bracelet and three colorful scarf's until she ran out of  
261 money.

262 After dark Beth helped Tom move the guns and ammunition to the  
263 concealed under seat compartment in the Sprinter. They then headed  
264 for the Lagos International airport so Beth could get on a direct red-  
265 eye flight into Houston, Texas. Traffic was light and the drive only took  
266 forty-five minutes from the church to the departure terminal. Tom  
267 reiterated the horrific slaying of the three school girls. He doubled  
268 down that now wasn't the time for Beth to move to Africa. Beth  
269 rebutted Tom's concerns with the fact that there are more school  
270 shootings in the United States than any other country in the world.  
271 Beth cited the recent senseless shooting of nine African women in  
272 Charleston, South Carolina by a white supremacist. Ironically the  
273 murders happened while they held their Bible study class at the  
274 historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

275 Tom wasn't in the mood to debate gun violence, methodology of  
276 statistical school shootings or the Second Amendment. He was a  
277 witness to three innocent school children having their throats sliced



278 open just because they just wanted to be in school. Tom couldn't  
279 shake those haunting murders.

280 Beth's flight number finally rang out over the airport PA system.  
281 After Beth's ticket was scanned at the top of the jet bridge Tom pulled  
282 an envelope from his pocket and placed it in Beth's hand. "I'm sorry  
283 for breaking the **Seventh Commandment.**"