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Guns not allowed

CHAPTER 17

Traffic back to Lagos had been heavy. Tom was almost two hours behind from what he had told Ekon and Jacob. They were kicking a ball in the field behind the church — waiting. He had barely parked when the brothers ducked thru the fence and came running up the side alley. Tom hopped out and then over enunciated short clear sentences. “We’ve talked about this. These are big dogs! Cain and Able are trained guard dogs. We need to go slow! Both of you need to stand back.”

Ekon signed Tom’s instructions to Jacob and they quickly backed up. Tom opened the rear door of the Sprinter and yelled. “Stay!” The dogs crammed side by side in the doorway. Four big brown eyes locked onto the boys and readied for the next command. Jacob stepped behind Ekon to a safer zone, also to avoid the two penetrating stares.

Tom muzzled the dogs and then clipped a leash on to Able. He jerked on the leashed and yelled “Heel.” Able stayed tight to Tom’s side as they circled the boys several times. Tom said, “Sit.” Able sat directly in front of Jacob. They were almost head to head in height. Tom dropped the leash. Jacob made his hands into fists and then X crossed his forearms across his chest — the universal sign for love. Able nuzzled Jacob’s stomach just below his crossed arms.

Tom followed the same process with Cain. Within the hour the boys were running the dogs in the field and around the church grounds. Several times yet one at a time the four took turns crawling thru the new dog door. Then they would huddle inside the oversized dog house that Idogbe had built. It was their new fort; it was a place for only boys to hang out. Back and forth they signed the fort bylaws — their second bylaw was that guns would be allowed.

33 The fun was about to end when Mrs. Onukwulu hurried across the
34 field, ducked thru the fence opening and cupped her hands around her
35 mouth. "Where are you boys? Ekon, you'd better be with your baby
36 brother! Ekon where are you?" Fifi could compete with any worried
37 mother calling kids home before dark.

38 Tom was at the green table working on his Sunday sermon when
39 he heard frantic hollering. Just as he opened the apartment door Ekon
40 and Jacob crawled out from the dog house. Fifi halted on the outside of
41 the woven wire fence, she was alarmed by how large Cain and Able
42 were yet relieved that they had muzzles on. "You two were supposed
43 to be home an hour ago! How would you two like no dinner tonight?"

44 Tom approached from around the corner. "It's my fault. I was late
45 getting back from Abuja."

46 "No, the boys know what time they are to be home!" Fifi put her
47 hands on her hips and glared at both of them thru the fence.

48 Jacob unlatched the kennel gate and then hand motioned. Cain
49 came out and nuzzled against her thigh. "Your dogs are really big."

50 "They both are around seventy pounds," Tom answered.

51 "They must eat a lot and make big messes." Fifi was trying hard to
52 ignore Able who was now rubbing up against her.

53 "They do make big dog piles and if its okay I'd like to hire your
54 boy's to help me feed and clean up after Cain and Able."

55 "Of course they'll help you." Fifi finally broke her rigid straight up
56 posture and started petting Cain. "Pastor Tom would you like to join us
57 for dinner?"

58 "I would, but I need to prepare for the service tomorrow." They all
59 walked down the alley and around back to the opening in the fence.

60 Petting and some head rubs were followed with Fifi saying, "See
61 you tomorrow, I always look forward to your preaching."

62 Jacob handed the leash to Tom and then signed, "Love."

63 Tom watched a mother arm and arm with her son's cross the field.
64 He thought about Beth and all the barren womb scriptures in the Old
65 Testament — Life is not fair.

66 Without his laptop that held all his old musing and sermons Tom
67 was at a loss for what commandment to preach about. He'd yet to

68 sermonize on 'Thou shalt not kill', four straight forward words. Tom
69 respected the Catholic version more, 'Thou shalt not murder' was a
70 better interpretation. It seemed to justify a non-intentional death.

71 An hour later, pen to paper hadn't happened so Tom took the dogs
72 for an evening walk; hoping to shake something out. Constable Ayoola
73 Ashiru watched the trio thru binoculars. Just one dog pile not being
74 cleaned up would be a fine of ten thousand naira. Ayoola ran a tight
75 ship; litter was one thing but wet garbage or dog crap was not
76 tolerated in his jurisdiction.

77 It happened! Ayoola rushed down two blocks with his ticket book
78 out. "You know the rules."
79 "My dogs just got here. Can't you give me a break?"
80 "If I give you a break than everyone expects a break. Then what
81 would the neighborhood look like?"

82 Tom looked up and down the street gutter. Constable Ayoola was
83 right. He held reign over one on the cleanest neighborhood in south
84 Lagos. Able starting turning in circles and then squatted. "You might
85 as well give me two tickets."

86 "Ayoola reached into one of his deep pants pocket and pulled out
87 poop bags. "Clean up both dog piles and you'll get off with just one
88 ticket."

89 Tom took the bags. "Thanks."
90 "Don't forget about the barking regulations." Do you want one of
91 my neighborhood rules and regulations pamphlets?"

92 "No, I still got the one you gave me when I was hanging church
93 posters." Tom replied sarcastically.

94 "What would the neighborhood look like if I let just one law slide? I
95 don't want this neighborhood to become like all the trendy nine
96 commandment churches I see these days." Constable Ayoola returned
97 the sarcasm.

98 "I'm sure all mosques display and adhere to every one of the
99 seventy five good manner commandments in the Quran," Tom replied
100 and snatched the ticket from Ayoola fingers. "It seems that you forgot
101 your 'Don't spy' commandment."

102 Ayoola was intimidated by Pastor Tom's knowledge of Islam. "Just
103 follow the neighborhood rules and there won't be any problems."

104 "I'm glad that I will be done with your goon like rules soon," Tom
105 shoved the ticket into his pocket.

106 "It's not spying if you are a doing it for the government," Ayoola
107 turned and walked off.

108 Back in the apartment without his laptop Tom was at a loss at what
109 to preach on. He had yet to let the budding congregation know of his
110 plan to take a position in academia back in the United States. Letting
111 out information like that would only get a rumor mill spinning. Maybe
112 he'd post a notice that the church was for sale. Shifting the blame
113 toward a home office business decision would be a good strategy. Tom
114 went to bed not prepared for Sunday service.

115

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118 Cain and Able were leashed and muzzled. Ekon and Jacob had
119 them outside the kennel and sitting at their sides. Tom's instructions
120 were to keep everyone at arm's length; they learned that guard dogs
121 are not pets and should not be petted by strangers. Cain and Able
122 only had seven commands to obey. Out of: Sit, Down, Stay, Come,
123 Heel, Off, and Angreifen the boys only learned the first three
124 commands. Angreifen was the German word for Attack — the
125 command that German shepherd's were bred for.

126 Tom entered thru the vestibule door. Over his shoulder the blank
127 spot where the church dedication plaque once hung wasn't important
128 any longer — especially if the church sold to a different denomination
129 or was converted to a mosque. All that Tom knew for sure, is that he
130 wanted out of Africa. He looked out over the packed church, cleared
131 his throat and started. "Brothers and Sisters last evening while walking
132 my dogs I was stopped and informed about another neighborhood rule
133 by Constable Ayoola." Tom held up the yellow ticket.

134 "Ayoola is a thief. He gave me a ticket for my over flowing
135 garbage can," came a rant from the congregation.

136 “The constable makes up his own fines and then keeps the
137 money,” a second outburst from a different person.
138 “He’s a Muslim and hates Christians. Ayoola works and collects
139 money on the Sabbath,” burst out a voice from one of the church
140 elders.
141 “I’m aware that Ayoola is Muslim. I don’t know how involved he is
142 in his Islamic faith. Muslims don’t observe the fourth commandment.”
143 Pastor Tom turned and pointed at the Decalogue plaques.
144 “You mean the third commandment!” The elder congregant walked
145 forward and pointed at the left side plaque that had the first five
146 commandments.
147 “Those are not the right commandments. They are the Catholic
148 version,” Tom instructed the church elder and congregation.
149 “Well then we should put them in the trash where they belong!”
150 The congregation went silent.
151 “Maybe the new owners will hang the correct ones.” Tom let slip
152 out the probable sale of the church.
153 “What’s going on with our church?” asked the congregant standing
154 up front.
155 First year of theology training Tom learned never to ad lib from the
156 pulpit and to always be prepared. Things quickly turned to more like a
157 school board meeting of angry parents demanding answers. A new,
158 corrected set of Ten Commandment plaques wasn’t the issues — the
159 sale of the community church was.
160 Tom explained how the slaying of the three girls at the outreach
161 school was the main reason headquarters’ wasn’t going to reopen it.
162 He made clear that only a dozen or so girls would not get an education
163 beyond sixth grade — risk outweighed benefit. Also, the local
164 government officials didn’t want to start a war between the Hausa and
165 Yoruba ethnic groups. The equal balance between Christians and
166 Muslims was an additional concern that Tom explicated on in detail.
167 Cain and Able were the most recent issue. That very morning one
168 of the church busy-bodies already complained and said she was going
169 to contact the head office on Monday to report that vicious guard dogs
170 were being kept on the church grounds — around children.

171 Factually, Cain or Able could take down a full size man. No one
172 except Tom, Beth and the trainer’s knew that Angreifen was the secret
173 command word for **Attack**.

174 Nobody listened to Tom finish preaching about keeping the
175 Sabbath holy. Tom was shunned during coffee and donuts. Constable
176 Ayoola Ashiru was hidden in a patch of Ube trees across the field.
177 Finally the church was locked, everybody, including the Onukwulu boys
178 headed for home. Tom did a walk around for litter and dog poop and
179 then locked himself with the dogs inside the apartment. He did a face
180 first flop on the bed — resting on the Sabbath wasn’t going to be a
181 problem.

182 Barely an hour passed before Cain and Able alerted on some noise
183 in the front parking lot. There was a light knock. Tom buried his head
184 in the pillow. A loud pounding followed. Tom got out of bed and looked
185 out the peep pole. He groggily opened the door. “Tina, what do you
186 want?”

187 “Uncle Tom, you said you’d loan us your motorhome. Kenney
188 Chan’s container ship will be in Tin Can Harbor this week. You
189 promised we could use it.”

190 Victor Vee stepped in front of Tina. “Hey old preacher man, you
191 need to deliver on your promise.” Victor puffed his chest out and
192 stepped to a few inches closer to Tom.

193 Cain and Able moved to Tom’s side, alerted and showed their
194 teeth. Victor drew his Rungu baton from his sleeved pants pocket.
195 “Back those dogs up or I will spinal jack them!”

196 “Sit.” Tom ordered with a commanding voice

197 Tina squeezed thru the door and went directly to the dogs. “Like
198 wow Victor! Cain or Able wouldn’t hurt a fly.” Tina was wrong! The
199 German word ‘Begreifen’ would put the dogs into full takedown and
200 apprehend mode. Only Tom, Beth and a few others knew the German
201 word **Begreifen** repeated twice was the also the command for attack.

202 Tom rubbed at his swollen eyes. “I need the motorhome for a trip
203 back up to Abuja next Friday and Saturday. Can you have it back by
204 Thursday?”

205 “What do you think Victor?” Tina looked back over her bare tanned
206 shoulder.

207 “I think you should go ask the Chinaman! He’s the one running the
208 operation. All I know is that Mr. Chan has a CCP outline to follow.”

209 Tina darted out the back door to Victor’s step-van. Ken Chan was
210 laid out on a half filled air mattress. His health had been on a decline
211 ever since the trip over to Africa. Being cooped up in a damp cargo
212 container for twenty days brought on a respiratory infection that he
213 couldn’t shake. His part of the CCP mission was four black virgins’ to
214 rendezvous with a pickup boat south of Little Saint James Island.
215 Between coughing spills Kenny Chan said, “Okay, we pick up Tuesday
216 be back Thursday.”

217 Tom had mixed feelings as he showed Victor the waypoint of the
218 school on the in dash GPS. Ken Chan couldn’t quit coughing and was
219 out of breath from just getting from the step van onto the elevated
220 queen bed. The missing vent let in plenty of fresh air. Tom grabbed his
221 hunting camo gear and long gun duffle bag out of the closet. Tina
222 waved from the passenger seat as they turned on to Frontage Road.

223 Tom watched the Sprinter fade into traffic and then noticed
224 Constable Ayoola a few blocks away coming down the sidewalk. Tom
225 darted for the apartment; he tossed his camo gear on the bed and
226 then slid the long gun bag under the bed. Now from behind the closed
227 door Tom looked thru the fisheye lens; Ayoola was headed toward the
228 apartment.

229 Tom yanked open the door! “Ekon and Jacob did liter patrol up and
230 down Frontage Road this morning after church.”

231 “I watched them!” From the doorway Ayoola took note of the long
232 black bag under the bed. “I heard that you talked about me this
233 morning during the church service.”

234 Tom paused to reflect. “We did. Some of the parishioners think you
235 make up new rules so to collect more fine money.

236 “That is sinful.” Ayoola mentally calculated that the black bag was
237 long enough to hold a rifle. “Did you tell them that bearing false
238 witness is against the eighth commandment?”

239 Now Tom paused. "No, I haven't preached on the ninth
240 commandment yet.

241 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor is the
242 eighth commandment." Ayoola replied with authority and again
243 making eye contact with Tom.

244 "That depends on what Christian faith you follow," Tom rebutted.

245 "Exactly, after my brother converted to Catholicism he told me the
246 only way to heaven is thru Jesus and by obeying the laws given to
247 Moses."

248 "You should tell your brother that he is saved by grace thru the
249 blood already shed by Jesus Christ."

250 Ayoola focused back on the bag under the bed. "We haven't talked
251 in twenty some years. After my brother couldn't get his marriage
252 annulled, he moved to the UK and joined the Anglican Church."

253 Tom noticed Ayoola was distracted. "I'm not up for having a
254 discussion about doctrine of any of the major religions. I'm sure that's
255 not why you are here."

256 Ayoola looked back at Tom. "I was watching your dogs around the
257 children today. I'm thinking that all dogs need to be muzzled all the
258 time. What do you think?"

259 "Is that going to be another one of your local rules that comes with
260 a fine?"

261 "Your dogs are bigger than most children. Every neighbor has to be
262 held accountable for their actions. So yes, there will be a fine! You're
263 the one preaching that everyone will be held accountable to your
264 manmade Nine Commandments. "

265 Tom sensed the insult... "Do what you want! I'll have my dogs back
266 in the United States in less than a month!"

267 Tom got the door half closed before Ayoola stopped it with his
268 boot. "I'll be back with a search warrant." Ayoola threatened.

269 "Do what you need to do! I have to contact my wife back in Texas.
270 The sooner I get out of Africa the better!"

271 Ayoola pulled a card from his shirt pocket. "Give this number to
272 your wife; it's the number for the station." Ayoola then pulled his boot
273 from the doorway."

274 "What are you going to do, arrest me?"

275 "Maybe?" Ayoola glanced back at the long bag under the bed.

276 "What kind of church would you have if your followers can pick and
277 choose what laws to follow?"

278 "Since we are all sinners, I'd call it the Nine Commandment
279 Church!" Tom wasn't up for anymore civic or religious discourse and
280 slammed the door.

281 Tom sat at the green table and sent a text: **Getting things**
282 **wrapped up over here. One last trip up to the outreach school**
283 **next Friday. Call this number if you can't reach me: 0 802 664**
284 **224 ask for Ayoola.**

285 It was after midnight when a vivid dream stirred Tom. In a slumber
286 he rolled out of bed onto his hands and knees. Inside the bag he
287 latched onto hardened steel and found a cold heavy mass for each
288 hand. Outside the thick dewfall had rolled in from the ocean. In the
289 dark and damp air Tom walked down the side alley to the Victor Vee
290 music van. He opened the side door and put the hunting rifle and Colt
291 45 onto a half inflated air mattress. The weight caused both guns to
292 fold down into the air mattress. The guns were tucked in out of sight.