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See no evil

CHAPTER 18

Tom rolled over and looked at the alarm clock. *Wow that dream felt real...* He tossed back the bed sheet, crept across the cool concrete floor and cracked opened the door. Victor’s music stepvan was down the side alley, even further from where the motorhome had been parked. *That’s right they went up to Yelwa Zangam Village. I hope Ken Chen’s people can help with some sort of scholarship program. Glory and Praise school will be pulling out when the church gets sold.*

Out on Frontage Road a brand new work week had began, the honking and hustle was ramping up. Tom itched to go back home, to the quiet peaceful mornings of his gated community and private golf course. He started a pot of coffee and then scooped dog food into stainless steel bowls. Cain and Abel gulped down the dry food; they sensed that they wouldn’t be quarantined this week. At the green table Tom checked his phone: **I passed your message onto Hank. No there has not been an offer on the house. Why would I not be able to reach you?** Tom started to text back but stopped, he remembered Dan’s warning about the FBI eavesdropping.

The FBI wasn’t the only agency spying. The tiny WIFI camera angle was low, yet Ayoola could see Tom had on boxer shorts and a sleeveless undershirt. The dogs were scurrying around blocking his field of view on and off. Ayoola could still see the long bag under the bed. He hoped to have a search warrant before noon.

Something felt wrong, it was past nine and there hadn’t been the usual chess game with Jacob. Again Tom stuck his head out the door and looked down the side alley. The music stepvan partly blocked the opening in the back fence where everybody ducked thru. Tom shrugged off Jacob’s no show to a mother’s concern of not wanting her child around guard dogs.

34 It was much more than that. Two hours earlier when Jacob started
35 across the field he spotted the big **V V** lettering on the side of the
36 truck. A flash back of three men taking stuff out of the church caused
37 Jacob to halt. The next flash back of a tall man with a Rungu baton
38 caused Jacob to wet himself. That is when Jacob ran back home —
39 remembering Victor’s threat of more than a broken arm!

40 About an hour later there was a loud pounding on the door. It was
41 way too forceful to be Jacob. “Open up we have a search warrant!”

42 Tom looked out the peephole and saw three men with light blue
43 shirts that contrasted with their navy blue berets and arm bands.
44 Constable Ayoola held up a search warrant.

45 “Give me a minute!” Tom was still in his boxer shorts.

46 A minute didn’t happen. The bulky Lagos Police Officer rammed his
47 shoulder into the door, the metal latch split the casing apart. Tom had
48 to jump out of the way of a piece of flying wood.

49 “Over there under the bed!” Ayoola pointed.

50 The smaller officer dropped to his knees and pulled out the long
51 duffle bag from under the bed. It was limp and empty. “Check the
52 bathroom!” Ayoola ordered.

53 The bigger officer went in pulled back the shower curtain and came
54 out. “No guns in there!”

55 “Let’s go check the church.”

56 Tom’s heart was pounding! He knew the gun law in Nigeria was a
57 heavy fine and up to ten years in prison. “Your search warrant includes
58 a place of worship?” Tom tried to pull the warrant from Ayoola’s grip.

59 A few onlookers had gathered behind the police cars in the front
60 parking lot.

61 “Unlock the church doors or I will arrest you for obstruction!”

62 Ayoola pushed Tom toward the church steps not realizing that Tom
63 couldn’t have a key on him.

64 A black man in a police uniform pushing a white man in his
65 underwear wasn’t a normal occurrence in this neighborhood. Some of
66 the locales took their phones out and started to record.

67 Cain and Abel ran out of the apartment ferociously backing with
68 their hackles up. They were ready for the **Angreifen** command. One

69 of the officers rushed back to his police car and got an AK47 from the
70 trunk. Shooting dangerous animals was an acceptable occurrence in
71 Africa. Dogs were put down all the time, even in large cities.

72 The crowd was growing exponentially. Tom did a quick assessment
73 and commanded the word, "Down!" He then rushed back thru the
74 busted door; he pulled on his camo hunting pants and then grabbed
75 the church key. Tom got pushed to the side after he opened the doors.

76 It didn't take long before one of the officers found the false wall in
77 the store room. "I found something in here!" he yelled and then went
78 back to tapping the wall with his baton.

79 "What's behind that wall?" Ayoola demanded an answer.

80 Tom glared at Ayoola then walled to the back closet wall and
81 pushed at the edge. A **click** sound echoed in the small room and the
82 wall panel opened. There were some audio/video cords hanging on
83 hooks. A video projector, a couple microphones, an electric keyboard
84 all neatly organized in the small space.

85 "After the church was robbed my handyman built this hidden
86 section in here. Out of sight out of mind was my thinking." Tom held
87 back a sigh of relief while wondering. *Where's my hog gun?*

88 "Let's go!" Constable Ayoola, ordered the two police officers to end
89 the search. Out front the crowd jeered and was already fabricating a
90 false narrative about the white preacher from Texas. Someone in the
91 crowd sent a photo of Tom in his boxer shorts and wife-beater tee
92 shirt to Lagos News channel 21.

93 Tom called Idogbe and told him that he needed the apartment
94 front door repaired. Next the coffee and akara vendor showed up and
95 asked to be paid in full. The vendor filled Tom in that the word on the
96 street was that a crypto currency bust was coming. Tom really didn't
97 care about neighborhood scuttlebutt. After he counted out ten-
98 thousand Naira the vendor pointed out the red bucket in the middle of
99 the back field.

100 Earlier that day after Jacob had walked with Ekon to school he was
101 anxious to play with the dogs, even more so than playing chess or
102 cleaning the church. While crossing and swinging the red bucket he
103 couldn't hear the crowd commotion coming from the front parking lot.

104 The flashing lights on the two police cars were out of his view. After he
105 ducked thru the fence and came around the rear church corner the
106 double **V V** on the side of the step van stopped him in his tracks.

107 All alone from the side of the church Jacob witnessed Tom being
108 shoved by a big bulky uniformed man across the parking lot. When the
109 smaller officer pointed his rifle at Cain and steadied so to end the
110 barking. Jacob turned and ran — it would be a scene that no child
111 should see. Halfway across the field a muffled *pop* vibrated his
112 eardrums! Jacob dropped his red bucket, wet himself and then ran for
113 home.

114 The crowd had faded away by the time Idogbe showed up. There
115 was one last news reporter trying to peer into the **V V** music van
116 parked at the far end of the alley. Tom ordered him to leave and then
117 walked back toward the apartment; he was done with all the media
118 antics.

119 “What happened? Was there another break in?” Idogbe asked as
120 he looked over the split door casing and watched the reporter leave.

121 “No! Constable Ayoola and his goon squad kicked the door in.”

122 “What!” Idogbe immediately thought about the video camera
123 hidden in the dog door casing frame. “Did Constable Ayoola see you do
124 something with Jacob?”

125 “What the f**k are you accusing me of?” Tom clenched his fists.

126 “I’ve heard rumors about you grooming Jacob by paying him to do
127 church stuff and playing adult games inside the apartment with him.”

128 “I’m no Catholic priest,” Tom responded his gut knotted. He was
129 caught off guard by the false pedophile insinuation toward him. “Glory
130 and Praise affiliation doesn’t recruit young boys to be altar servers like
131 your church hierarchy does.”

132 Idogbe had never been abused as an alter server nor as a deacon.
133 He felt compelled to defend his faith. “So showering with a family
134 member is okay? I do believe that Ms. Tina is your niece.”

135 Tom’s fist just missed Idogbe’s jaw. “You nose little bastard! I
136 didn’t shower with Tina. Who told you that?”

137 “I’m sorry! That came out the wrong way.” Idogbe bolted to his
138 truck, he jumped in and cranked over the dilapidated old Datsun.

139 “Listen to me! Please hear me out! Tina ruined my marriage. Let’s
140 not let her ruin our friendship too.” Tom rested both his hand on the
141 rusty, dented up yellow roof top.

142 Idogbe thought for a moment and then turned the ignition to off.
143 He thought back to the night Victor Vee and Tina parked in the field
144 and did drugs. How they flopped her onto the bed. He could have been
145 accused of a sex crime that night when he got soaked in a downpour
146 and slept in the apartment with her. “Okay, I’ll fix the door.”

147 “Thank you. I’ll take the dogs for a walk so not to bother you.”
148 Tom leashed Cain and Abel while Idogbe unloaded his tools. They went
149 down the side alley, slipped by the stepvan and ducked thru the hole
150 in the fence. Tom picked up the red bucket; instantly the dogs picked
151 up the urine scent. They partially pulled Tom to the Onukwulu’s
152 neighborhood and then to a pair of shorts and boy’s underwear
153 hanging on a clothesline.

154 Fifi opened the screen door. “Good afternoon Pastor Tom.”

155 Tom walked toward Fifi. “Jacob didn’t come by to play chess this
156 morning. I found his bucket behind the church and got worried.”

157 “He had an accident.” Fifi pointed at the shorts on the clothesline.”

158 Jacob appeared in the doorway, an unbridled joy came over him
159 when he saw Cain and Abel. He rushed to Tom and hugged his leg.

160 “Jacob thought something bad had happened to your dogs. I think
161 that is why he had an accident.”

162 Tom thought for a minute, *Jacob must have seen what happened*
163 *this morning.*

164 Jacob signed and then Fifi said, “Jacob thought something bad
165 happened to you too.”

166 “Constable Ayoola came by this morning and things got tense.
167 Jacob must have seen the commotion out front. But everything
168 worked out.”

169 Fifi squatted down and signed, “Okay.” She stood back up and
170 said, “I’m praying that you change your mind and stay here in Lagos.
171 You have been so good for Jacob.”

172 “A...” Tom hesitated. He had not thought about how much he was
173 going to miss the Onukwulu boys — especially Jacob.

174 "Mrs. Seton told me running the Ile-Ife Heritage Marathon is on her
175 bucket list. Whatever a bucket list is?"

176 "It is a list of things you would like to do before you get too old."

177 "Oh... I got a lot of things on my list then." Fifi replied with a frown.

178 *I only got one thing on my list. Get back to the United States.* Tom
179 thought to himself.

180 "I told Liz that I would train with her. There are some other church
181 members that want to form a running group. We could represent Glory
182 and Praise church. You should stay at least until after the race!" Fifi
183 pleaded.

184 "A..." Tom eyes moved anxiously, he hadn't shared to the
185 congregation about his probable divorce. With a divorce rate in Nigeria
186 of less than 7%, and since 'Thou shalt not divorce' wasn't a
187 commandment there was no reason to be forth coming.

188 "When is your wife coming back? She was the first white person to
189 sign with Jacob."

190 "A... Beth!" Tom was dismayed at why people were using the name
191 Liz. They both detested that name. "Is it okay if Jacob finishes walking
192 the dogs with me?"

193 Fifi turned Jacob in then lifted his chin. She then closed her hands
194 into fists and then X crossed her forearms over her chest — the
195 universal sign for love. Jacob did the same thing and then pointed
196 back at Tom and then to Cain and Abel.

197 Tom handed Abel's leash to Jacob. As they walked down the block
198 Fifi held back a load of emotions. Outside of family, Tom was the only
199 mentor and adult to play games with Jacob. Fifi had already seen
200 changes with Jacob. Today felt like a setback — she thought they were
201 done with the wetting.

202 "Damn it." Tom ranted as they approached the field. Constable
203 Ayoola was watching one of the police officers swing a metal detector
204 back and forth a few inches above the grass. "Halt," Tom yelped, Cain
205 and Abel stopped in place.

206 Ayoola rushed toward them. The officer with a shovel was in lock-
207 step as they crossed the field. "I know that you have a gun someplace!
208 I'm going to find it."

209 Cain growled and showed his teeth. Jacob held his open palm in
210 front of Cain's nose and used his other hand to lift his snout. Cain sat
211 without a command being spoken.

212 "I could use a trained dog like that," Ayoola said in amazement.

213 *I should command Angreifen to attack,* Tom thought.

214 "I found something!" an officer yelled. This newly turned dirt
215 looked like something was buried at the base of this Ube tree. The
216 officer scanned over the loose dirt while the metal detector's chirping
217 turned to a solid squeal.

218 A second officer pushed on a shovel with his foot. It stopped when
219 he hit something hard. He moved dirt to the side which exposed a
220 metal corner. The officer bent over and pulled, he unearthed a square
221 piece of bronze! When it flipped it over the embossed words **Glory**
222 **and Praise** were easy to make out, even thru the dried up mud.

223 "Wow, how'd that get there?" Tom exclaimed.

224 "You probably staged that robbery that first month you were here."

225 "Why the hell would I do that?" Tom resented the accusation.

226 "Insurance money! Typical of white Christian preacher's."

227 "You're a prejudiced prick! I'll be gone in a month. You will need to
228 find a new white guy to single out."

229 "You all come over to convert Africans. How many Muslims travel
230 to the United States to evangelize white folk?"

231 "I didn't choose to come over here. I got caught..." Tom stopped.

232 He didn't need to share about the stolen valor embellishing that got
233 him exiled from his church in Texas.

234 "You got caught doing what?" Constable Ayoola pulled his notepad
235 ready to take down information.

236 Watching the plaque being unearthed, in addition to the arguing
237 that he could only feel Jacob was locked in silence. Plus, there were
238 Ekon's instructions never to inform anybody what they saw the night
239 the church got robbed. Overwhelmed and frightened — Jacob lost
240 control again.

241 Constable Ayoola pointed at Jacob's pants. "Look you scared the
242 kid so bad he's peeing himself."

243 "Oh no!" Tom squatted down. "His mother is going to be mad. This
244 is the second time today." Tom whisked Jacob across the field, thru
245 the fence between the stepvan and church and then into the
246 apartment.

247 Jacob trusted Tom more than any other adult. He took off his
248 shorts and underpants and handed them to Tom. Tom was careful to
249 make sure the shower wasn't too hot and motioned for Jacob to rinse
250 off. There was loud knocking on the door! Tom handed Jacob a towel
251 and left the bathroom.

252 "I suspect you have another ticket for me?" Tom snapped.

253 "No!" Ayoola stuck his head inside the door. "Is the boy okay?"

254 "Yeah, I'm going to wash out and then dry his shorts and
255 underpants. This is the second time today that he had an accident."

256 "Do you think our arguing is why he lost control?"

257 "Jacob couldn't hear us."

258 "That's right he's deaf and stupid."

259 Tom glared at Ayoola. "How about deaf and brilliant. You're the
260 stupid one. I'll bet you twenty-thousand Naira that Jacob can beat you
261 in Chess."

262 "I'll take that bet." It didn't take more than twenty minutes for
263 Ayoola to lose and then state, "It's illegal for children to gamble in
264 Lagos."

265 "Are you kidding?" Tom was standing over Jacob. "I'll pay the kid
266 then."

267 "That will work." Ayoola stood up from the green table and handed
268 Tom twenty-thousand Naira. "A rumor of me paying off a child could
269 be a career-ender."

270 "I hear you about that... I'll give the money to Fifi. You know I
271 think he knows who broke into the church and stole that plague. Per
272 Fifi he started wetting around the time his brother broke his arm."

273 "Maybe I should take him down to the station and interrogate
274 him."

275 "Why would you want to frighten that child again?"

276 "Don't you want to get your stuff back?"

277 "No! Insurance paid for everything that got stolen."

278 *I knew it was an insurance job, Ayoola thought.*
279 "Let's just let sleeping dogs lay," Tom mumbled
280 "There are some muddy handprints on that church dedication
281 plaque. I'm going to take it down to the station and have our lab
282 technician try to lift a fingerprint or two."
283 "Do what you want. I don't need the plaque back. Glory and Praise
284 headquarters is going to sell the church and property. Their return on
285 investment has never been good at this location."
286 "What?" Ayoola was shocked. A music hall serving alcohol or some
287 sort of seedy venue was something Ayoola did not want in his
288 borough. The church was a good community asset that gave more
289 than it took.
290 Tom shut the door. It felt good that Africa would soon be no more
291 than a bad memory. Jacob was at the table sketching on a mini-tablet
292 he carried in his back pocket. He drew a box truck with a big **W** on the
293 side and then flipped the page over. He drew a tall man with jewelry
294 around his neck and a club in his left hand. On the third page Jacob
295 started to draw Ekon when he felt vibrations from the front door.
296 Tom looked out the peep hole. Idogbe was ramming the door with
297 his shoulder. Tom yanked open the door at the right moment and
298 Idogbe practically fell into the apartment. "What the hell are you
299 doing?"
300 "I'm testing the door to make sure that I reinforced it enough."
301 "It's fine!" Tom answered, perplexed why Idogbe came back.
302 "I should reinforce the dog door too. You could get robbed again."
303 Idogbe was making up an excuse so that he could remove the hidden
304 camera — but then he noticed Jacob with a towel around his waist.
305