

Service over Family

CHAPTER 28

“What’s your hurry?” Hank asked as Dan slipped his laptop into an oversized Graphene case.

Dan looked at his watch. “If I hurry maybe I can beat the weekend traffic through of Fort Worth.”

“But you’re not done here.” Hank sternly scowled.

“Godfather just told the team to come marching home. Plus he shut down the wall of monitors.”

“I told him to shut off the monitors. It’s not mentally healthy for anyone to watch the blood and gore of battle. The news outlets do it to sway the flock. That’s one reason that those that serve are sometimes spat upon and mocked when they return from battle.”

Dan thought about two key men in his life. David, his stepfather and Paul his Godfather; both had served in Vietnam. “Okay, what do you need and how long will it take?”

“You tell me.” Hank breathed a sigh. “How long to set a course for the Kong Fang to sail into the Bermuda Triangle? I don’t want a rescue ship to approach with all that fentanyl spilling out.”

“Plotting a course through the Virgin Islands will take hours.” Dan looked at his watch again.

“You should be home before fifteen hundred hours.” Hank was getting nervous with Dan’s rush and loss of focus. “How long to deadhead the Hong Fang directly into the Little Saint James Island?”

“Let me check.” Dan removed his watch and set it next to his laptop. He then brought up some satellite maps of the US Virgins Islands. “There are a lot of shallow reefs around both Saint James Islands. It would be better to keep the Kong Fang on its northwest heading into the deep unforgiving waters on the Devil’s Triangle.”

31 Dan's impatience was making Hank more nervous. This mission
32 was for the extraction of three girls — only. Shooting the yellow plastic
33 cases was meant to be a feel good conclusion for the team.

34 Unfortunately, the spewing fentanyl added hours to the mission.

35 "You've been constantly checking the time since zero eight hundred
36 hour, is there something more I need to know?"

37 "I haven't made it to one of my son's soccer games yet. I promised
38 Andy that I would be there today. But now..."

39 "Service over family is a painful part of history! It can't be avoided.
40 It's a good reason for missionary preachers not to marry. Did you
41 know only one apostle had a wife and none had children?" Hank
42 rationalized. One too many times Hank had to stand on a porch and
43 tell a family that their loved one had given it all.

44 Dan had his laptop out and reconnecting into the network.

45 **WARNING: MYK78T Chipper Chip activated. Enter password or**
46 **else Pi-3.14 VIRUS will be launched.**

47 Hank watched Dan type in the password and then © 1995

48 **Skipjack algorithm David McIntosh** appeared on the screen.

49 *I never vetted David McIntosh. I know he recently died. What if he*
50 *had some end of life manifesto to purge all the data centers and cloud*
51 *severs around the world? His Pi-3.14 virus could be the end all of*
52 *artificial intelligence? Granted AI needs to be slowed but...*

53 Hank rushed from the control room to his officer. He did a Google
54 search for David McIntosh and found out that he had been a deacon in
55 the Catholic faith; that he had adopted two children. Hank also saw
56 that David McIntosh had served in Vietnam and was honorably
57 discharged. Hank pushed the intercom button on his desk phone to
58 the flight hanger and then made a call to the Fort Worth Sheriff's
59 department.

60 It took about forty-five minutes for Dan to upload a northwest
61 course into the Kong Fang navigation system. He'd also jammed the
62 communication and emergency frequencies. The text message to a
63 Kevin Trask from Tina Williams was the only distress call that Dan
64 wasn't able to block—it was already on a cloud server.

65 Hank slipped back into the command and spied over Dan's head at
66 the laptop screen. "You can wrap things up!"

67 Dan jumped. Hank's beacon of a voice would startle anyone. Dan
68 looked up and back over his shoulder. "The Kong Fang is low on diesel.
69 It could run out of fuel in a couple of days. A rescue by the Bermudian
70 Coast Guard would be a death trap with all that spilling fentanyl."

71 "Let me worry about that. You're done here!"

72 One of the female Blackhawk pilots standing next to Hank spoke
73 into her flight helmet microphone. "Wind that bird up!"

74 "Roger that, Sis. I just got flight clearance from the Governor."

75 Hank was pushing Dan almost at a full run. The two crewmen
76 grabbed the wheelchair and hoisted their payload into the cabin. The
77 skinny IT tech jostled out between the hanger doors ran across the
78 tarmac and handed the MYK78T black box to Dan.

79 The copilot checked the straps across the wheelchair and then
80 strapped herself in. "We're locked and loaded. Let's get this Dad to a
81 soccer game!"

82 With clearance from the Governor's office four police cars had
83 lights on and strategically parked so to clear off a landing area. The
84 soccer parents didn't know what was happening. Most everyone held
85 their breath hoping a child hadn't been injured; one coach circled his
86 team and took a knee to pray. When the side door slid open kids and
87 parents expected medics to jump out with a liter or first aid kit.

88 As soon as Andy saw the wheelchair he broke from the prayer
89 circle. He'd always told his teammates the reason his Dad never made
90 it to any of their games was because he was busy saving the world.
91 Service over family protects communities and makes it possible to
92 take a knee.

93

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94

95 Halfway around the world Tom was on a gut wrenching mission. He
96 was headed up to the strawberry farm to personally tell Abidemi that

97 without a birth certificate and no family genealogy getting a student
98 foreign exchange visa would be next to impossible. The unannounced
99 visit turned into a wide range of emotions when Adogbe's mother
100 stated that the little village girl hadn't arrived yet. Tom bolted for the
101 rental car and dialed home on his burner phone.

102 "Hello," a child's voice said from thousands of miles away.

103 "Who's this?" Tom asked already knowing the answer.

104 "It's me, Mr. Tom. I'm at your farmhouse in Texas.

105 "Is this Abidemi?" Tom strained to hold back his rage.

106 "Yes it is. I slept in that bed that has steps to get into."

107 "Okay..." The sound of Abidemi's sweet voice was choking off the
108 rage. "Did you sleep well?"

109 "Oh yes, Mr. Tom. Just like in the Princess and the Pea story."

110 "I don't know that story."

111 "I can tell it to you, Mr. Tom." The fairytale turned out to be the
112 longest time Tom had ever talked to a child on the phone — ever.

113 Finally Beth got on the phone. "Tom, I need paperwork on all four
114 of those village girls so that I can get them enrolled at Saint Mary's."

115 "You have the three other girls too?" More disobedience that Beth
116 had done behind his back.

117 "Hank will drop the three other girls by here later this week. He's
118 getting the COS team doctor to check them out. I need to get all their
119 paperwork in order for Sister Evelyn Mary."

120 "Beth you disobeyed my orders!" Tom alleged while circling the
121 rental car and glaring off. At the far end of the field was a shiplap
122 outhouse and some blue plastic barrels to catch rainwater in.

123 "Yes, I did Tom." There was a long pause. "If somehow I can help
124 get these young girls an education then I'm going to do it."

125 Tom looked at the other end of the field and saw a dozen laborers
126 bent over under the hot sun picking berries. "I'll get you as much
127 information as I can. Tom's anger faded from anger to joy. "Beth, you
128 always follow your heart. I love you for always doing the right thing. I
129 hope to be home to help soon... Love you.

130 Tom went back to the farmhouse and explained to Idogbe's mother
131 that there was a change of plans. She insisted that Tom stay for
132 dinner and spend the night. Tom found out more about Idogbe and
133 how much he was struggling with the hierarchy and the progressive's
134 within the Catholic Church. She liked Tom's view on how so many
135 churches toss out one or two of the Ten Commandments.

136 Tom topped off fuel at the cutoff road station. Both the merchant
137 and his son begged Tom to do another gas run. Tom told them that if
138 all went well at Zangam Village that he would on the way back to Jos
139 Town. They insisted Tom stay for lunch; he declined, still stuffed from
140 fresh African strawberry pap with akara.

141 The rock mound that he'd built over Able was a good marker to let
142 him know that there was buried rebar booby traps for the next half
143 mile. The spare tire in the ditch marked where Divine Intervention
144 took place. Tom prayed that somehow he could get some type of legal
145 documents for Abidemi. He often preached, that all prayers are heard,
146 it was how they get answered is how our faith is tested.

147 The first stop was at the village elder's half hut - half shed
148 homestead. He recalled for Tom the day that Abidemi's mother walked
149 into the village ready to give birth some fourteen years ago. Over the
150 years Abena's different jams had become sought after. Abena never
151 shared anything about her lineage except that she walked from Ghana.

152 Tom had the keys to the school house; it was empty. All the books
153 paper work, desks and chairs had been burned by the Boko Haram the
154 day they slaughtered the three innocence girls. Rumor spread fast the
155 highly trained foreign warrior was back. Tom denied that it was him
156 and refused what little things they offered him. Valor nor nobility was
157 something he no longer desired.

158 The next morning with the village elder and two older witnesses'
159 from the village they headed for Jos Town to fill out adoption papers.
160 Ben Okri now had someone to carry on his name and pass on his small
161 homestead too. Abidemi Elizabeth Okri was a solid name.

162 On the way back Tom asked his passengers about the Ten
163 Commandments monument in Dwoi district south of Jos Town; he got

164 three different sets of directions. Tom decided that ever seeing the
165 largest Decalogue in Africa wasn't meant to be. He'd be back in Texas
166 soon maybe back home he fundraise to bring back the Ten
167 Commandments in places that they had been removed. There was one
168 last thing Tom had to do before returning to the United States. It was
169 the main reason he always had a burner phone.

170 Tom placed a call. "Hon. Simeon Bako Lalong is not available.
171 Please leave a message."

172 "Simeon, are you up for another round of golf?"

173 Not even thirty seconds passed and Tom's phone vibrated.

174 "Sure I'm up for a round of golf. What should we play for?" Simon
175 was already getting the gambler rush.

176 "Last eighteen we played, you clipped me for a million naira. How
177 about playing for some diamonds?"

178 Tom was now feeling the gambler rush. Without help hardcore
179 gambling addicts never say no. They set a tee time for Friday morning
180 and the diamonds against a thousand US dollars was agreed to.

181 That night on the strawberry farm Tom got enlightened by Idogbe's
182 Mom about the diocesan bishop and the disdain his office had for the
183 Catholic Latin mass. Tom felt the same with the hierarchy within Glory
184 and Praise Ministries as Idogbe did. Both institutions were more about
185 inclusiveness of all — even if it meant turning a blind eye to one or two
186 of the commandments. Acceptance of sinners was not the approval or
187 blessings of the sin.

188 "Hey Brother, some more stuff came up. Looks like I'll be up here
189 for a few more days. Could you deliver this Sunday's service?"

190 "Sure no problem." Idogbe welcomed the opportunity to proclaim
191 the Word. "Is there anything special you want me to preach on?"

192 "Maybe something about bearing false witness. But, preach on
193 whatever you want. After talking with your Mum, I know that we are
194 on the same spiritual path. We are true brothers in Christ."

195 "A... Yeah okay." Idogbe felt weak in spirit and filled with guilt. He
196 had sold out Tom when he installed Ayoola's spy camera. Removing it

197 was only part of being reconciled. Telling Tom would be the second
198 half, even if it meant ending their brotherly friendship.

199 Tom had his own reconciliation to make with Beth. Months ago he
200 shared the time he lost self control with Tina. But, there was one self
201 control that he'd done their entire twenty plus years of marriage. Tom
202 estimated that over the years he'd loss over four hundred thousand
203 dollars to betting, the horses and sporting events. All he needed was
204 to tighten up his golf game. God willing he'd get on the upswing and
205 win back some losses. Beth would be disappointed — Tom always
206 claimed the lost money as contributions to worthy causes.

207

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208

209 Idogbe called Constable Ayoola and told him that on Sunday he
210 was going to tell the congregation about the spy camera that they'd
211 put into the apartment. The Constable insisted that if he did so that he
212 would be forced to lock Rev Tom up immediately; just for safety-sake.
213 Ayoola ordered Idogbe to come down to the precinct to discuss the
214 situation and find out when Tom would be back.

215 Later that day Idogbe showed up at the station and the desk clerk
216 handed a letter for him to read at the Sunday's service.

217

218 **Dear community, there will be a meeting at station**
219 **hall, room 101 this Thursday to document and give**
220 **witness to all/any inappropriate conduct with**
221 **children in the community by Pastor Tomas Joseph**
222 **Seton. Bring any hard evidence, including photos**
223 **or videos. Adults only. Constable Ayoola Ashiru**

224

225 Idogbe knew that if he didn't follow the instructions that Constable
226 Ayoola would put him on liter patrol for a year or more. That was the
227 way the Constable kept the neighborhood clean and a sought after

228 area to live in. Jail time or community service was his mantra. Kind of
229 like ashes and a sack cloth but everyone benefited.

230 Idogbe read the letter Sunday at the end of his service. It helped
231 explain why a white preacher came to Africa. Most of the congregation
232 forgot that Tom was sent there because of the Stolen Valor story he
233 made up back in Texas. Mr. and Mrs. Onukwulu couldn't believe what
234 they heard. They asked Ekon about Tom and then signed with Jacob.
235 They wanted to know the entire story. Jacob started to cry.

236 Thursday night room 101 was packed. Ayoola came into the room
237 with an attendance sheet attached to a clipboard. He cleared his
238 throat. "Thank you all for coming down to the station this evening."

239 An IT technician pushed a large video monitor on a stand to the
240 front center of the room and inserted a USB memory stick.

241 "Should I start the video?"

242 "Not yet." Ayoola held the clipboard over his head. I only want
243 community members that have evidence and will give testimony
244 against the white pastor from Praise and Glory church off Frontage
245 Road to put their full legal name down.

246 Idogbe was leaning against the wall near the door. He cringed at
247 the 'white pastor' reference. The plump choir coordinator was the first
248 to take the clipboard. She printed her name and wrote photo next to it
249 and then handed it to another choir member. Someone in the third
250 row signed and then someone leaning against the sidewall yipped for
251 the clipboard. About ten more people signed before the clipboard
252 made it back to Constable Ayoola.

253 "Please start the video!" A silence filled room 101.

254 It took a moment for most everyone to figure out the low camera
255 angle and that the point of view was under a green table with a chess
256 game on top. The pair of red shorts with a big wet spot made more
257 sense when the small black hands hooked the elastic waistband and
258 pushed then down. The yellow pee stain that soaked the white
259 underpants made more sense. Next a large white hand holding a
260 washcloth came into view. The boy washed himself off and then

261 wrapped a bath towel around his waist. Next he climbed up on a chair
262 and moved one of the chessmen.

263 All six foot five of Mr. Onukwulu shot up from his folding chair.
264 "That's my son! I know all about that incident. It happened more than
265 once, maybe three or four times."

266 "I told you," the choir leader sang out from the front row.

267 Fifi stood up. "Jacob kept wetting himself and we couldn't figure
268 out why. But after Victor Vee fell down the church chairs we found out
269 why. Shortly after Pastor Tom took over at the church Victor Vee broke
270 our oldest son's arm with a Rungu stick and said if they told anybody
271 that they saw him robbing the church he'd do a lot worse."

272 Another woman stood up. "That is true Victor was abusive to my
273 children also. I'm not really sorry that he's still in a coma."

274 "Well at this point I think most of you can see that there has been
275 a boat load of bearing false witness. Everyone that did not sign this
276 clipboard should leave. The others need to stay so that I can issue
277 court dates."

278 There was a mass exodus for the doors. Everyone knew and
279 respected bow-leg Constable Ayoola Ashiru. He was a stern but fair
280 man — who took being a Peace officer as a spiritual calling...

281