

### 3. CHAPTER THREE

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The wrath of Shaitan is what Muslims refer to as Satan and his evil doers. Pastor Tom had no plans to preach on being saved by grace. The Ten Commandments made no sense if you preached fundamental regeneration theology. Rapture with exaltation was a message that worked in the southern United States. But this was Africa! Tom would need to switch up the narrative to appease his fresh flock.

"Too bad there is not a Thou shalt not scam commandment," Tom said to himself." He shoved the impromptu written permit in his pocket and started down the sidewalk. At the next telephone pole he looked back. The old bowlegged man was most likely running a scam on just Christian's. If he was the official litter police he wasn't doing a good job. As Tom stapled up another flyer his phone rang. He yanked the cell phone from his pocket. "Hello!"

"Mr. Pastor This is Tanny. If you would like to come by this afternoon I can show you one of our air conditioned rooms."

"Tanny, I think I got the air conditioning figured out. But thanks for the call." In the background it sounded like someone was whispering on the other side of the call.

"Are you sure Pastor Tom? I could give you a personal tour of the master suite. It has a king bed and wet bar."

Her offer was persuasive. Tom often preached on how and why to avoid temptation. "Tanny, I do appreciate your offer. But I got our living arrangements worked out."

"Our? I didn't know you had someone with you?"

"Not yet. But my wife should be moving over soon. I'm working to get our motorhome shipped thru Tin Can Port."

From inside the back of a gray van, parked behind the Holiday Inn, Tanny breathed a sigh. Scamming tourists was one thing. Sleeping with them was out of bounds. "Okay, I'm glad your wife will be coming with a motorhome for you to live in." She ended the call and handed the phone back to Victor Vee.

34 "You stupid Ho!" Victor Vee backhanded Tanny so hard that it  
35 knocked her off the five gallon white bucket she was sitting on. "I need  
36 you to get him away from that church. Call him back and offer him a  
37 free dinner, free drinks or maybe to smoke a little weed. Do what you  
38 have to do to get him away from that church!"

39 Victor Vee hit redial and then pushed the speaker phone icon. He  
40 held the phone next to her bleeding nose and swelling cheek.

41 "Mr. Tom we have happy hour drinks with a complementary dinner  
42 tonight in the relaxation room. Would you like to come by?"

43 "Actually a good meal sounds great. What time is happy hour?"

44 Victor Vee held up his hand with all his fingers and thumb straight  
45 up so to signal five.

46 "Five o'clock would be a good time to come by and see me."

47 "Thanks, a good meal and a good drink sounds perfect."

48 "Okay, I'll see you at five." Tanny wiped at the blood under her  
49 nose. Her left eye was already swelling closed.

50 Victor Vee put his phone back in his pocket. "See how easy that  
51 was. Just use your head and follow my instructions and things will be  
52 fine."

53 "I love you. But, I don't like getting involved in your business.  
54 What would my kids do if I went to jail?"

55 Victor Vee pulled a slim tin holder from his shirt pocket. "Let's  
56 smoke a little wee wee before you have to go back in. Maybe you  
57 should take care of me?"

58 "Not now. But if you come over after work tonight we can play  
59 house." The left side of Tanny's face felt hot as did her soul.

60 Victor lit up the hand rolled cannabis and inhaled a deep long drag.  
61 He then handed it over to Tanny. Hanging around with Victor Vee and  
62 his music friends seemed to legitimize drugs. For sure it improved the  
63 band's music and creativity or it seemed too help. Victory just needed  
64 one break and he'd be on their way to LA and stardom.

65 From about a block away Pastor Tom spotted two boys tossing a  
66 ball back and forth out in front of the church. They ran to meet him  
67 when he walked thru the gate. "School's out. We're here to earn a

68 commission," Ekon said with excitement. Jacob took up a protected  
69 position behind his big brother.

70 "Can you use a stapler?" Tom was having second thoughts. "I need  
71 the flyers up high at eye level."

72 "Jacob can stand on my shoulders." Ekon wasn't going to let  
73 anything stop them from earning money.

74 Tom bent over, reached around Ekon and handed the stapler to  
75 Jacob. "Show me how strong you are."

76 Ekon grabbed the stapler from Jacob and fired off one staple and  
77 then handed it back. Jacob squeezed with all his might and gritted his  
78 teeth; finally one staple fired.

79 "That won't work! Your brother will need one hand to hold the  
80 paper and one hand to staple with," Tom said with a slight scowl.

81 Jacob wiped at a tear. He knew that he wasn't strong enough to  
82 fire the stapler with only one hand. "A boc from hom," Jacob rambled  
83 out muted grunts and then used his hands and fingers to sign, so only  
84 Ekon could see.

85 Ekon turned back toward Pastor Tom. "We can go get a box from  
86 home to stand on."

87 It was obvious how bad the brothers wanted to work. Tom walked  
88 up the steps opened the church doors and grabbed one of the folding  
89 chairs. Back outside, he pointed at a telephone pole down the block.  
90 "Show me that you two can hang a poster at eye level on that pole  
91 down there."

92 Ekon grabbed the top of folding chair and took one poster from  
93 Tom. Then Jacob latched on the bottom of the chair. They carried the  
94 folded chair between themselves like a ladder. When they got to the  
95 telephone pole Ekon unfolded the chair and stood on it, Jacob handed  
96 him the stapler. Ekon made sure the flyer was higher than other signs  
97 on the pole. The brothers were definitely a team. They rushed back,  
98 leaned the chair against the church gate post and waited for approval.

99 "Okay, let me go get a stack of flyers."

100 Inside the studio apartment Tom's irritation level jumped to high  
101 when he realized the window AC unit had quit working again! He

102 grabbed the pile of flyers that he had marked with the words, **No**  
103 **Kids**. He also grabbed a new roll of masking tape and a felt marker.

104 Ekon had moved and was right outside the apartment door. "Me  
105 and Jacob both will earn a commission right?"

106 "Yeah sure. You both will earn a penny each for every poster put  
107 up. Here is some tape for the places you can't use the staple gun."

108 "Like on windows?" Ekon slipped his small hand thru the roll of  
109 masking tape. It looked like he was wearing a blue wristband.

110 "Yes, the tape is for windows. Here is a felt marker for the flyers I  
111 didn't get them all marked. You do know how to write?"

112 "Yes, I'm good at English." Ekon shoved the felt marker into a rear  
113 pocket.

114 Pastor Tom reached into his front pocket and pulled out the gold  
115 money clip. He peeled off two dollar bills. "Here you go. I'm paying  
116 you to hang a hundred posters in advance. I'm going out to dinner and  
117 might not be here when you get done."

118 Ekon snatched the two bills. He had prayed all night and all during  
119 school for this job. "Where should I leave the tools and pen when we  
120 get done?"

121 "Just open this door and put them on the green table. Put the  
122 folding chair back in the church I'll leave that door open too." Tom  
123 reached into a different pocket and pulled out the permit. "If anyone  
124 should stop you from putting up posters show them this permit."

125 "Did Mr. Legs' make you buy a permit?" Ekon asked.

126 "He did. He also said that seven year old kids know how to pray at  
127 a worship service. What do you think about that?"

128 "Jacob is seven. He knows how to pray but don't listen much."  
129 "Ekon stuffed both dollars and the permit deep into the rear pocket on  
130 his tattered red shorts.

131 "What about you? Do you think kids should come to church when  
132 adult stuff is being talked about?"

133 "No, I rather play outside with my friends." Ekon fidgeted with the  
134 roll of tape around his wrist. He was anxious to start earning a  
135 commission.

136                   “Okay, that’s what I thought.” Pastor Tom knew he was making the  
137 right decision not to have kids in attendance; especially if they didn’t  
138 listen. “Go hang my flyers!”

139                   Jacob followed Ekon out the gate and they both latched on to  
140 opposite ends of the folding chair. They were off on a job that the  
141 harder they worked the more they got paid. They liked commission!

142                   Tom started looking around for a stick or some sort of wedge.  
143 Under the sink he found an old paint stick sitting on top a gallon can of  
144 green paint. *This should work*, he said to himself. In one of the  
145 drawers he found a knife. Then he grabbed a new roll of masking tape  
146 off the table and headed outside to the back of the building.

147                   He reset the circuit breaker and then cut off a piece of the stir stick  
148 so to wedge against the breaker. The blue masking tape held the piece  
149 of wood tightly in place. Now the circuit breaker couldn’t trip. Back  
150 inside the fan, lights and most importantly AC unit were operating.  
151 Tom pulled his laptop from a backpack and started working on his  
152 sermon for Sunday. He hadn’t quite decided on fire and brimstone or  
153 the grace of salvation for his first service. Without a band or choir it  
154 would be hard to preach and entertain for more than an hour. He’d  
155 save the give-away for last, so to keep people from leaving early.

156                   An hour and forty minutes later the small room had cooled off and  
157 Tom had only typed **Meet & Greet** on his outline for Sunday. He  
158 folded up the laptop, put it into the backpack and headed out for  
159 dinner. Hopefully a cold beer and good dinner would get the inspiration  
160 flowing. He turned off the light, pulled the door closed and swung the  
161 backpack over one shoulder.

162                   The five o’clock work traffic was almost at a standstill. Horns were  
163 blasting and hand gesturing wasn’t still. Okada scooters were the only  
164 vehicles that could weave in and out of traffic. Tom flagged over a  
165 driver and threw his leg over the extended seat. “I need to go to Oyins  
166 Holiday Inn.” Riding on the back of a small motorcycle holding on to  
167 another man felt awkward but it was transportation that worked. This  
168 Okada driver was good at weaving in and out and knew the back  
169 roads. They were at the Holiday Inn within fifteen minutes.

170 Tanny saw Tom when he walked in and waved. Tom sat at the  
171 same table as he had last week. He put his backpack in the chair that  
172 Idogbe had sat in. "I'm glad you came in. Do you want a palm wine  
173 again?" Tanny placed a coaster on the table.

174 "No, I think I'll just have beer."

175 "Would you like to try a Star Lager?" Tanny asked.

176 "That sounds good." Tom pulled his laptop from the backpack. "I  
177 need to work on my sermon for Sunday. I hope I can get over my  
178 writer's block."

179 "When I stopped by yesterday, you said your first Sunday service  
180 would be in two weeks."

181 "I know, but God spoke to me. He wants me to start spreading the  
182 Word ASAP."

183 "ASAP, what do you mean?"

184 "As soon as possible" Tom noticed Tanny's swollen left cheek.  
185 "What happened to your face?"

186 Embarrassed Tanny put her hand over her left eye. "Oh, nothing  
187 really. I accidentally ran into the corner of the door."

188 "Wow, you better be more careful. Looks like you might be getting  
189 one heck of a shiner."

190 "What do you mean a shiner?" Tanny asked.

191 "Back home in Texas we call it a black eye."

192 "Oh," Tanny replied, now more confused. "Do you want to see a  
193 menu?"

194 "Sure on the phone you said between five and seven were the  
195 hours for a free meal. Is that still on?"

196 "It's mainly for our guests but I'll make an exception for you."

197 Tanny tried to wink but her eye was swollen from being backhanded.

198 "I'll be right back with your Star Lager. From behind the bar she  
199 looked at herself in the mirror that was behind the row of hard liquor  
200 bottles. It wasn't the first time that she had been slapped around. At  
201 least this time she didn't get a broken arm.

202 Tom opened his laptop and the **Meet and Greet** outline was still  
203 on the LCD screen. He searched for a document named **Past**  
204 **Sermons**. Hopefully he could find something that would work for

205 Sunday. Fundamental Christianity wasn't universal; what worked in  
206 Texas might not work in Nigeria. Tom was a skilled orator.

207 Tanny was careful to set the beer and menu a good distance from  
208 the laptop. "Would you like the password to sign on to the motel  
209 router?"

210 Tom looked up from the screen. "Sure, maybe if I surf the web I'll  
211 find something to preach about this Sunday." Tom ordered the Flank  
212 steak cooked with pineapple rind and cumin spice. It was advertized as  
213 tender, spicy and sweet.

214 The cumin seasoning was more hot than sweet. Three Star Lagers  
215 helped cool down the taste buds. Nigerian beer has twice the alcohol  
216 content of most American craft beers. Tanny cleared off the food plate  
217 and salad bowl and then returned with a fourth beer. "Any luck with  
218 your Sunday discourse?"

219 Tom put his hand up. "I'd better back off on the alcohol. I've had  
220 no luck for a sermon. Even surfing the web hasn't helped."

221 "I'll set the Star Lager here. Just in case the cumin spice hasn't  
222 cooled off." Tanny smiled. She had been super attentive to Tom all  
223 night. "I'm going on break in a few minutes. Maybe a little wee wee  
224 would help?"

225 Tom had a brain freeze and then a rush of testosterone. It wasn't  
226 only the beer; it was also being away from Elizabeth. He'd given plenty  
227 of sermons on adultery and knew all about avoiding temptation.  
228 "Thanks, but I'll have to take a pass."

229 "Wee wee always helps my boyfriend to write songs. I just thought  
230 it might help you come up with something to write."

231 Tom had another brain freeze and then asked. "Is Wee Wee  
232 cannabis?"

233 "Yes, home grown in Africa. Victor Vee said it's legal in Los  
234 Angeles, California and that you can grow it for medical use.

235 Tom always struggled to separate true information from false.  
236 Growing marijuana for medical use was probably legal but he didn't  
237 really know if recreational use in LA was okay. What he didn't know  
238 was that smoking pot in Lagos was about as common as in the States  
239 but it was extremely illegal. Tom took a couple of drinks off the fresh

240 beer. He stood up and steadied himself and then made it over to the  
241 bar.

242 Tanny approached on the other side. "Did you change your mind?"  
243 Yeah, I smoked a little weed in college and it did help me during  
244 finals." The next twelve hours went from a blur to a blackout!

245 Late morning sometime before noon an old phone rang out in the  
246 draped off darkened cell. Tom lifted his head enough to see a slit of  
247 light coming in from under a door. His ankles were tied and his  
248 undershirt pulled up under his armpits. He kicked and kicked and  
249 finally got his feet free. The ringing quit in the room but not inside his  
250 skull. In the crack of light under the door the shadow from two feet  
251 was now evident.

252 Tom tried to rewind the night. All that he could remember was  
253 laughing and then yelling at a gray step van that almost ran him over  
254 in an alley. After that he got shoved into a big white canvas container  
255 before two uniformed men picked him out of it. He was guided  
256 between several oversized washing machines. The smell of bleach was  
257 heavy and made it hard to breath. Someone stripped off his shirt and  
258 pants and then everything went totally black.

259 The door bolt snapped open and the crack of light turned to a burst  
260 of light. "Oh! I'm so sorry. I need to clean the room."

261 Tom put his hand up to his face. Thru his fingers he made out a  
262 house maid. "A... Could you give me about thirty minutes?"

263 Tom found a twist switch on the night stand, it snapped and a light  
264 came on. His pants were neatly folded on the chair. His shirt draped  
265 across the back of the chair and his shoes side by side on the floor. He  
266 stood and walked to the window and pulled the heavy double drapes  
267 open. Immediately he scanned the room for his backpack — most  
268 importantly his laptop!

269 The nightstand had nothing but a pen and notepad in it. He pulled  
270 open the doors on the armoire there was nothing. Only the  
271 complementary soap and shampoo bottles in the bathroom. Tom felt  
272 for his wallet as he got dressed. Out in the hall he looked at the room  
273 number on the door and then navigated his way down to the front  
274 desk.



275 "Good day Chap." The receptionist spoke with a British accent.

276 "How may I help you?"

277 "I was in room 209 and I can't find my laptop."

278 "One moment, I'll check in the office."

279 Tom's heart raced as he mentally calculated how much private  
280 information was on the hard drive. There were financial records of  
281 private donors from Glory and Praise church in Texas and  
282 headquarter's in Los Angeles. Information that he downloaded after  
283 the stolen valor story broke and the church elders refused to hire him  
284 a legal team.

285 The well dressed red headed man came back with Tom's  
286 backpack and set it up on the counter. Thru the heavy nylon material  
287 Tom could feel the laptop. He unzipped it just to double check. "That's  
288 a relief." Tom took a deep breath.

289 "I'm going to hurry and check you out so you don't have to pay for  
290 another night."

291 Tom reached into his front pocket for his money clip. "I'll have to  
292 use a credit card if I don't have enough cash on me."

293 "We have a Bitcoin ATM over there if you need cash." The British  
294 sounding man pointed down a small hallway where the restrooms were  
295 located.

296 "Don't you take American Express?"

297 "We can do that. Let me get your total."

298 Tom ended up paying cash. The total bill including room tax was  
299 less than thirty-eight dollars. Tom pulled two twenties from his money  
300 clip and set them on the counter.

301 "I'll get your change."

302 "No, keep it. I'm just happy you had my laptop." Tom grabbed his  
303 backpack and headed for the door.

304 "Thank you," A **ding** rang out when the cash drawer sprang open.  
305 The twenty's went into the bill and coin holder and 760 naira were  
306 taken out and pocketed. "Cheers, Reverend Thomas Seton." Rang out  
307 from behind the counter and across the lobby.

308 Without hesitation Tom started to walk back to the church. The  
309 exercise and fresh air would help to clear his head. The honesty and

310 hospitality of the Holiday Inn staff put a new zeal in his step. Maybe he  
311 could use the free dinner followed by the return of his laptop as his  
312 first sermon theme. 'Thou shalt not steal' was always a good subject.  
313 He could preach on the theft of private intellectual property and its  
314 intrinsic value.

315 From two blocks away Tom could see Idogbe standing outside the  
316 gate looking up and down frontage road. A white preacher dressed in  
317 slacks and a long sleeve dress shirt was an easy mark on any streets  
318 of Lagos. Tom moved the backpack from one shoulder to the other and  
319 waved.

320 Idogbe approached Tom about a block away from the church. In a  
321 panic he asked, "Did you leave because of the smell?"

322 "What?" Tom looked puzzled.

323 "The window is open and the burning smell of burnt plastic is  
324 strong."

325 "What do you mean burnt?" Tom asked and hurried up their pace."

326 "Like overheated wires! That strong smell like when an electrical  
327 circuit fails."

328 Tom immediately thought about the paint stick he wedged in the  
329 electrical panel. Their fast pace turned to a jog. At half a block away  
330 he saw that the AC unit had been pulled out of the window. "It was a  
331 good thing you got here in time," Tom said to Idogbe.

332 Idogbe sniffed at the air. "It's even toxic out here. There could be  
333 overheated wires in the walls. We will have to call an electrician."

334 "That will probably be best. The instructions stated that air  
335 conditioners should be on a dedicated circuit." Pastor Tom hoped that  
336 Idogbe hadn't looked in the panel box and saw how he had jammed  
337 the circuit breaker closed.

338 "Oh?" Idogbe had gotten to the church only a few minutes before  
339 spotting Pastor Tom down Frontage Road. The commute from his  
340 mother's strawberry farm had taken more than what he had planned  
341 for because of oil tanker accident and road construction.

342 "Let's go have a cup of that delicious African coffee I found in the  
343 apartment." When Tom opened the door he immediately noticed the  
344 burnt wiring smell. "Where did you move the air conditioner to?"

345 "What air conditioner?" Idogbe followed Tom thru the door.

346 "The one that was in the window." Tom glanced around. "Where is  
347 my new HDTV?"

348 Idogbe glanced around at the opened drawers and tossed around  
349 clothes and kitchen stuff. "It looks like you have been ransacked."  
350 Idogbe exited the apartment and went over to the church.

351 Tom discovered that an expensive pair of running shoes was  
352 missing, along with his gold cufflinks and tie pin. He was still looking  
353 thru his suitcase when Idogbe came back into the apartment. "All the  
354 folding chairs are gone; along with the brass dedication plaque. I just  
355 called the police!"

356 Almost an hour later the old bowlegged constable came thru the  
357 church gate and started talking to Idogbe. While they talked Tom  
358 disappeared behind the apartment and removed the piece of paint  
359 stick from the circuit breaker box. If the AC unit had not been stolen  
360 the overheated wiring almost certainly would have started a fire.

361 Tom joined up with Idogbe and the constable now inside the  
362 church. "I remember you. I had to purchase a permit to hang my  
363 signs."

364 "Yes that's true. Remember the signs need to come down in a  
365 week."

366 "I might have the boys take them down after school. Without  
367 chairs and without any door prizes there is no reason having a church  
368 service."

369 "The church dedication plaque is gone also." Idogbe pointed at the  
370 front wall.

371 "Why would they steal that?" Pastor Tom looked at the faded out  
372 spot on the wall where the plaque had been mounted.

373 "Brass is worth many nairas at the scrap yard." Officer Leg's jotted  
374 the information down. "Is there anything else missing?"

375 "Yes, my brand new window air conditioner. Plus a flat screen  
376 HDTV still in the box that I just purchased for a door prize."

377 "I can take down the numbers off your sales invoices."

378 "I don't have any receipts. I got the AC unit and HDTV on Tin Can  
379 Island.

380                   “Were these items bought off the black market?” Officer Leg’s  
381 asked.

382                   Idogbe jumped in immediately to the conversation. “Don’t answer  
383 that question.”

384                   Tom froze both mentally and physically! He had been warned about  
385 staying out of the Nigerian court system. No different than in the  
386 United States. Get robbed and try to defend yourself and some shyster  
387 lawyer can turn it around so that it is the fault of the victim. Then the  
388 criminal sues the property owner — crime pays no matter where you  
389 live.

390                   “Were the church and apartment locked?” The old constable asked.

391                   “I think we should make a list of missing stuff and we can bring it  
392 down to the station.” Idogbe injected and then put his hand on the old  
393 man’s shoulder. They started speaking in Hausa and went out the side  
394 door.

395                   Alone inside the church Tom now noticed the PA system was  
396 missing. But, the thieves left the rickety old green benches. The  
397 replica plaster tablets of the Ten Commandments were still stuck on  
398 the front wall. The handmade crucifix looked like it was made from  
399 three different types of wood. In place of the INRI inscription **IESVS**  
400 **NAZARENVS REX IVDAEORVM** was written out. The words were  
401 not in Greek or Hebrew. Both the crucifix and the bogus Ten  
402 Commandments would have to go.

403