

4. CHAPTER FOUR

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No one wanted school to be out more than Jacob. Most days he'd play by himself kicking a soccer ball up and down a vacant field that was void of any school aged kids. On rainy days he'd float his small toy boats in any puddle of water that was large enough to be like the big ships in the Lagos harbor. His internal clock was more accurate than any school wall clock. At ten minutes past two he was standing across the street from DR. Goodluck Elementary School. On most days he could feel the vibrations of the loud school bell all the way across the road.

Jacob felt the loud buzzer, his heart stirred and within five seconds both school doors swung open. The elementary kids rushed out and down the concrete stairs. Finally, Ekon appeared, he was taller than most of his classmates. Jacob so wanted to dart across the road but the family rule was to never step off the curb unless someone was holding his hand. Jacob had caught Malaria when he was an infant and lost about eighty percent of his hearing from the black market drugs that saved his life.

Ekon and Jacob's family moved from their village up north to Lagos in hopes that a hard of hearing child could attend school. Unfortunately the poorer school districts in Lagos didn't have funds to support special needs students. There were private schools that had inclusive classes for special needs children, but on a truck driver's salary and with another baby on the way Jacob was on his own. Ekon was his rock.

The safety patrol stopped traffic and Jacob half broke the family rule. He only ran out to the middle of the road to meet Ekon. Some of the students gave Jacob a pat on the back, a high five and one of the bigger kids rubbed his nappy head of hair. Every afternoon Jacob was there to meet his big brother. Jacob was in some strange way like the school mascot — different and loved by all.

Hand and hand the two brothers ran full speed for home. Ekon tossed his homework on the table and told Fifi that they had the rest

35 of their commission to get paid for. The shortcut was across a couple
36 of fields, down an ally and through a hole in a fence. They both were
37 breathing hard when Ekon knocked on the door.

38 "Who is it?" blared out a mad sounding voice.

39 "It's us. We are here for the rest of our commission!" Yelled out
40 Ekon, from behind the closed apartment door.

41 "Tina, I got some boys pounding at my door wanting their
42 commission. I will call you late tonight or tomorrow."

43 "Like, what time is it where you are at?"

44 "Almost, three in the afternoon."

45 "Like, it's not even six in the morning here." Tina was still in bed.
46 "You got boys earning a commission?" Tina asked with uncertainty.
47 She remembered back to how Tom always told her she could earn a
48 commission as a model. "How old are the boys?"

49 "I think the mute is about six or seven. His older brother is in
50 fourth grade."

51 "Okay, call me after work or tomorrow. I will be sure to ask again
52 about shipping a motorhome to the Tin Can Island Resort."

53 "Tina it's not a resort island. It is a port island for shipping
54 companies."

55 "Okay, uncle Tom." Tina put the phone back on her nightstand and
56 her head sunk back into the red overstuffed pillow.

57 Tom yanked opened the door. "I don't need any more signs put
58 up!"

59 Jacob cowered behind Ekon. He felt the distain on the bigger than
60 life pale faced ogre.

61 "We put up one hundred- forty posters. You only paid us for one
62 hundred." Ekon said and then held his hand out.

63 Tom reached into his pocket and then paused. "I need all the
64 posters taken down now. I'll pay you three dollars to do that. That will
65 cover what I owe you from last night too."

66 Ekon was good at math and mentally calculated that they would
67 only be earning about a penny to now take down the hundred-forty
68 posters. "Our commission should still be two pennies for each poster."

69 Tom pulled out a five dollar bill from the gold money clip. "Here
70 this should cover all of it."

71 Ekon snatched the five dollar bill. "Are there any folding chairs left
72 for me to stand on?"

73 "No they took them all," Tom replied

74 "Okay we need to go home and get our bucket." Ekon turned and
75 signed to Jacob.

76 "Why did you ask if any chairs were left? How do you know that
77 chairs are missing?" Pastor Tom asked.

78 "Last night, when we went home the moving men started putting
79 the folding chairs into a big grey truck."

80 "What are you talking about?" Tom asked.

81 "We saw them from the field." Ekon pointed down the alley.

82 "You saw what?" Tom's voice shifted into interrogation mode.

83 "Three men and a big gray truck!"

84 "Can you describe the men or the truck?"

85 "The boss man had a lot of gold stuff like your money holder."

86 "What do you mean?"

87 "He had gold chains and gold wrist bands. The stuff that people
88 show off to show that they are rich."

89 "Was he white or black?"

90 "Two were like me and Jacob. One was like you."

91 "Do you think you could describe these men and the truck to the
92 police?"

93 "Jacob could draw you a picture." Ekon turned around and signed
94 to Jacob and then pulled a notepad and half a pencil out of his pocket.

95 Tom watched Jacob draw a squared off step van and then pencil in
96 a W on the side of the truck. Then he drew out three stick men and
97 put chains around one of the men's neck. "Ask your brother if he could
98 work with a sketch artist at the police station."

99 "What's a sketch artist?"

100 "He's a person that draws like your brother, but on a computer."

101 Ekon signed and Jacob didn't respond. The police were scary for
102 Jacob. He always felt their sirens and vibrations of their horns when
103 they were chasing after people.

104 "Tell your brother I'll give him a five dollars reward if he helps me
105 find the men that robbed me."

106 Ekon yanked his head back around and looked up at Tom. "Those
107 men were robbers?"

108 "Yes they were bad men. They stole all my stuff."

109 For a fourth grader Ekon was an average student, but for being
110 street wise, he'd earn an A plus. "We need to go home and get our
111 bucket to take down the signs." Ekon shoved the pad and pencil in his
112 rear pocket and grabbed Jacob by the hand. They were down the alley
113 and around the corner before Tom had a chance to up the reward
114 money to ten dollars.

115 Back inside the apartment Tom pulled the laptop from the pack.
116 The screen automatically shifted out of standby mode to the last file
117 that had been looked at. *That's strange I don't recall looking at the*
118 *old church directory spread sheet. I remember looking thru my past*
119 *sermons not church member information.*

120 Tom strained to think of a reason he would have been looking at
121 the church spread sheet that had tax donation information and social
122 security numbers. The furthest back he could remember was following
123 Tanny thru the motel laundry room to behind the motel. They stood
124 between two trucks with the cook and smoked some weed. Then
125 things really got fuzzy.

126 More than an hour went by and Tom only had a dozen or so bullet
127 points typed in an outline. Maybe he'd preach on the last seven words
128 Jesus spoke or the three different types of wood the cross was made
129 from. He needed to open with Charismatic charm so to grab and hold
130 Lagosians, since the bag of door prizes were gone.

131 Tanny had talked up her boyfriend Victor Vee of being a great
132 musician. *I wonder if Victor Vee can play gospel music.* Tom folded up
133 the laptop and went over to the church.

134 Idogbe was patching the wall where the brass dedication plaque
135 had been. Tom approached and asked, "Did the old bowlegged
136 constable take a report."

137 "He took the information I gave him. Without any invoices I didn't
138 report your new TV or the air conditioner. He didn't list the door prizes
139 since they were less than eight thousand Naira or twenty dollars USD."

140 "Well, I guess I won't be shopping on Tin Can Island again."

141 Idogbe made a couple of swipes with the paint brush on the wall.
142 "Legs did list the folding chairs, the PA system, your running shoes
143 and brass metal on a stolen items report."

144 "Those two boys that have been doing odd jobs for me saw three
145 men loading the chairs in a truck. The constable might want to talk to
146 them."

147 "Probably not... In this slice of Lagos people don't talk much. It
148 could bring on trouble." Idogbe dipped the paintbrush in the can.

149 "The young one drew a picture of a box truck with a big W on the
150 side. He's the one the police need to talk to."

151 "That is Jacob. He can hardly hear. I'll talk to Sergeant Paul.

152 "Who's Sergeant Paul?"

153 He's kind of like their guardian when their real dad is out of town.
154 He drives supplies to the girls outreach school up north."

155 "Is that the guy with the big scar thru his hand?" Tom remembered
156 seeing a scared hand hanging out the window of the old army
157 transport truck his first day at the church.

158 "Yes, it's a Stigmata." Idogbe stepped back and looked at the patch
159 area.

160 "You don't believe in that hocus-pocus Stigmata stuff do you?"

161 "Idogbe didn't respond. He put the paint brush into the paint
162 bucket and then balled up the plastic tarp.

163 Tom looked over the patch area; the paint didn't match. He started
164 to say something to Idogbe but held back. *I'll hang a self portrait of*
165 *myself over the patch. Maybe I'll wear a Kenta cloth over a white suit.*
166 *That will help me fit in with the locals?"*

167 Idogbe was the handyman for the Glory and Praise headquarters
168 base out of Los Angeles. Every pastor he had worked for made it a
169 mission to school Africans on the American way. They all burned out in
170 less than two years. Pastor Tom was right on track — he probably
171 wouldn't make it a year.

172 It was dusk when Pastor Tom heard a light knock on the door. He
173 saved the **Thou shalt not steal** sermon he was working on. At the
174 door Jacob held out a garbage bag full of taken down posters. "Here
175 they are. We got them all. We need to get home. I have school
176 tomorrow."

177 "What about your brother, doesn't he have school?"

178 "Jacob can't go to school because he don't hear good enough."

179 "So that is why Jacob draws on the pad of paper you keep in your
180 pocket?"

181 "Yes, and we have our own hand signals to talk."

182 "Would Jacob like to come by here tomorrow? He can draw
183 pictures of the men in the truck who took the folding chairs. I'm going
184 to offer a big reward."

185 "What kind of reward?"

186 "I'm going to give ten-thousand naira to anyone that helps me
187 convict those robbers that stole my stuff.

188 "That is a big reward." For a fourth grader Ekon was good at math;
189 especially when it came to money. "That's would be about twenty-five
190 American dollars."

191 "That's what I calculate. I watched your brother draw the truck
192 with the W on the side. If his information helps to get these robbers
193 put in jail I would give Jacob ten-thousand naira or twenty-five dollars
194 whatever he would like."

195 After reading Pastor Tom's lips Jacob stepped out from behind Ekon
196 He understood the words ten thousand naira. Jacob pulled on Ekon's
197 arm and then moved his head up and down in the affirmative motion.

198 "It's past supper we need to get home. Our mom will be mad!"
199 Ekon dropped the garbage bag of taken down posters and then
200 grabbed Jacob by the hand. They were down the alley and around the
201 rear corner of the church in a flash.

202 Out of breath and back home Fifi was cautiously concerned. Ekon
203 told her about the twenty-five dollar reward. At the first church open
204 house she had scrutinized Tom. He looked and sounded like he would
205 be a good preacher. Twenty-five dollars would be a nice bump to the
206 family's budget. But turning in three neighborhood thugs would be

207 asking for too much trouble. She was okay with the boys doing odd
208 jobs around the church but told Ekon definitely not to get involved
209 with police matters.

210 It rained all night and the field where Jacob often kicked his soccer
211 ball while Ekon was in school was muddy. He knew a different place.
212 Jacob crawled thru the hole in the fence and starting kicking the ball
213 up and down the cobble stone parking area behind the church.

214 Sometime later Pastor Tom closed the laptop and came out of the
215 apartment for some fresh air. He walked to the rear of the church and
216 stood and watched a young boy play by himself. Jacob waved.

217 Tom motioned for Jacob to kick the ball to him. They kicked the
218 ball back and forth for about ten minutes and a trust was starting to
219 build. Tom never got involved with the children back home at his
220 church in Texas. He had a staff of Sunday school teachers that took
221 care of them. Since he and Beth couldn't conceive a child they both
222 focused on their individual careers and different faith path's. Beth had
223 been raised Catholic and abided by the artificial contraception doctrine.
224 Over the years Tom argued for them to go see a fertility doctor. He
225 cited the ever changing Catholic dogma sighting cremation, infant
226 baptisms' and evolution for recent examples.

227 Jacob had found someone to kick the ball back to him, even if it
228 were for just a few minutes. Back inside the apartment Tom heard the
229 soccer ball being kicked up and down the alley. Then there was a light
230 knock on the apartment door.

231 Tom had earned Jacob's trust, he invited him inside. Tom sat in
232 one of the chairs and then pulled Jacob up into his lap. He drew a stick
233 man and then drew a second stick man and then a third. He shaded in
234 one of the faces Jacob watched intently. Then Tom drew a square with
235 a W inside it and put two circles under it for tires. He then handed the
236 pencil to Jacob and put a clean piece of paper out and mouthed, "You
237 do it."

238 Jacob knew exactly what Pastor Tom wanted. He drew three stick
239 men and shaded in two of the three faces. He then drew a box truck
240 and put a **V** and a second **V** on the side.

241 Tom pointed at his drawing, the one that had a **W** and mouthed,
242 "Are you sure?"

243 Jacob hopped out of Pastor Tom's lap and moved his head up and
244 down in the affirmative motion.

245 Tom put a dollar on the table. Jacob crawled up onto the other
246 chair and kneeled so he could lean across the green table. Tom loudly
247 and slowly said, "Draw more."

248 Jacob started on a new piece of paper and added chains around
249 one of figures neck and drew a small goatee on his chin and a flat top.
250 After about forty minutes and two more dollars lay on the table Jacob
251 was sketching on a third piece of paper. The details were better each
252 time Jacob put pencil to paper.

253 Tom had already turned the stolen property into the church
254 insurance company but this was more about sending a message out to
255 the neighborhood. Steal from Tom's church and there would be a price
256 to be paid. Eye for eye was a good message to send out. Turn the
257 other cheek didn't feel like a good fit for this neighborhood. Tom was a
258 pro at mixing Old Testament with New Testament scripture to drive a
259 narrative that fit current day issues.

260 A pounding on the door was loud enough that even Jacob could feel
261 it. A full figure pregnant woman in sweats and tennis shoes was at the
262 door. She stuck her head thru the doorway and then demanded an
263 answer. "What my son doing in your flat?"

264 Tom opened the door all the way. "Your son is drawing stuff for
265 me. I'm going to have Jacob and Ekon hang more posters for me."

266 Fifi stepped thru the door and did a quick scan of the apartment.
267 The bed in the far corner was neatly made. The coffee pot on the
268 counter was on and half full. There was a steam vapor coming off the
269 coffee cup on the green table. A mother's intuition told Fifi things
270 seemed innocent enough. "Jacob knows he's not to come this far from
271 home unless he is with his brother."

272 Jacob looked at Fifi and then let his head slump. He knew he was
273 in trouble when he saw the belt. He grabbed the three dollars off the
274 table, slid off the chair and rushed over and put the money in Fifi's
275 hand.

276 "What is this for?" She looked up at Pastor Tom.

277 "Jacob is helping me with my new poster. He is a good artist."

278 "Yes he is." Fifi tucked the money into her bra. "Are you changing
279 your poster to allow children at church?"

280 "I'm thinking about it," Tom answered.

281 "We need to get home. Lunch is cooking" Fifi wasn't sure about
282 Pastor Tom. It seemed that he liked children in the right way. He paid
283 them for everything — even for drawing. The extra money helped out,
284 especially with another child on the way.

285 For the next hour Tom did the old way of cut and paste using
286 scissors and tape. He cutout and then taped the box truck drawing
287 with the V V and the rough sketches of the three thieves. With a thick
288 black marker he added 25,000 Naira reward to the bottom. He used
289 the address of the church to report information to; not the police
290 department.

291 On the way back from having a hundred wanted posters printed
292 Tom's cell phone vibrated. "Hello!"

293 "Uncle Tom, like what time is it there. I was just talking to the big
294 boss in China. I think it was nighttime over there."

295 "Tina, it's past noon here in Lagos."

296 "Mr. Hung Meng said okay to shipping your motorhome. He wants
297 me to ride-along to make sure it gets there."

298 "Tina, what do you mean ride-along? Tom shot a staple thru the
299 poster into a wood fence. "Won't they be shipping the motorhome on a
300 container ship?"

301 "Geez, Uncle Tom. I don't know all the details. Like, I thought you
302 would be excited to hear the good news." There was disappointment in
303 Tina's voice.

304 "I am Tina! But I'm having second thought about my church over
305 here. I don't want to spend thousands of dollars to ship my
306 motorhome and then have to ship it back to Texas."

307 "Mr. Meng said he will ship it for free. He's paying me my salary
308 plus giving me vacation money. I have a number that you are to call
309 to get everything setup."

310 “Wow that would be great. And it would be great to see you again
311 Tina,” Tom replied with an upbeat tone. “Maybe Beth could come over
312 with you?”

313 “I will be traveling with a manager so there won’t be any need for
314 Aunt Beth to come with.”

315 Tom sensed the reluctance. Beth and Tina never did get along.
316 “Okay give me the number and I’ll call the contact tomorrow during
317 normal business hours. It’s past midnight in China right now.”

318 “Like wow Uncle Tom, you are so smart about the time zone thing
319 and stuff like that. I hope to see you in a week or so.”

320 Tom wrote down the phone number and name of Tina’s contact on
321 the back of one of the wanted posted. He knew that the minimum time
322 a container ship could get from Texas to the Port of Nigeria was
323 probably at least three weeks. “Tina, I’ll get back to you after I talk to
324 this Kenny Chan.”

325 Tom tore off the bottom of the wanted poster with the phone
326 number and contact name and stuffed it into his pocket. He then
327 flagged down a Keke. Ekon and Jacob could hang the wanted posters.
328 Without any chairs to sit on and the bag of door prizes stolen he had
329 to push his first Sunday service out a week.

330 While waiting on the stairs of the church for the boys to come by
331 after school Tom called home. “Tom is everything okay?” Beth asked
332 groggily.

333 “Yeah everything is okay. Sorry to call so early in the morning. A
334 Kenny Chan might give you a call to pick up the motorhome.”

335 “Okay, so what do I need to do?” Beth rolled to the edge of the
336 king bed and put her feet on the floor. “I haven’t made any more
337 payments like you told me.”

338 “Good, that’s what I wanted to know. I might have you park the
339 motorhome in the Catholic Church parking lot or maybe in a Kmart
340 parking lot so that they don’t have to come by the house.”

341 “Okay...” Beth was slowly waking up. She was used to Tom always
342 cutting some sort of deal. But why her church?

343 “Do you know where the Title is?”

344 “It should be in the safe.”

345 "Get it out today and get my gun and the box of ammunition from
346 the safe too."

347 "Tom are you in trouble? I thought you told me guns were illegal in
348 Nigeria?"

349 "Not if you are traveling in a RV."

350 "I thought you just wanted to park our motorhome on the side of
351 the church to sleep in for the air conditioner?"

352 "The church insurance company is installing a new air conditioner
353 in the apartment."

354 "Insurance! What happened?" Beth was now fully awake and
355 sensed something was off.

356 "Someone stole the window AC unit I just bought. I'll explain it to
357 you later. How is your friend David doing?" Tom changed the subject.

358 "He's under hospice care now. His son Danny and daughter Ann
359 flew a private jet down here yesterday. It was good for them to be
360 here when Last Rites were administered." Beth paused to get her
361 composure. "David is ready to be called home."

362 "Private jet! Who paid for that?"

363 "I told you before. Danny is a private internet security consultant;
364 he has clients all over the world. He even offered to fly me to Nigeria."

365 "You should take him up on it. I really miss not sleeping next to
366 you Beth."

367 "I miss you too Tom." Beth's didn't like sleeping alone either;
368 they'd been apart for almost a month. They talked for thirty minutes
369 about reducing the price of their home or maybe letting the bank
370 foreclose on it. Tom was okay with Beth having an estate sale. The
371 only thing Tom did not want sold was his vintage red 1967 Chevy
372 Corvette L88. Beth didn't want the Vett sold neither. It was the car she
373 had her first date with Tom. It was also the car they took on their
374 honeymoon to Mt. Rushmore.

375 The predawn traffic and city noise woke Tom before dawn. He
376 made a pot of coffee and then tried the number Tina had given him.
377 The prerecorded message stated, "Your phone is not setup for this
378 area code." Tom tried the number again and got the same message.
379 It was a couple of hours before the electronic market and other stores

380 would open. Tom poured himself a cup of coffee and sat down in front
381 of the laptop. Only a few words made it from his fingers onto the
382 screen.

383 The clerk that sold Tom his first cell phone went into the back room
384 to setup a black market phone that could call China. Tom had a burner
385 phone back in Texas for when he'd go out and help prostitute's
386 cleanup and get off the streets. It was a mission that the church elders
387 didn't support. Tom was accused of coveting and warned to stay clear
388 of the loose women or he might lose his soul. Tom insisted that he
389 wanted to be like a father figure for these broken daughters of the
390 Lord.

391 After about ten minutes the clerk came back and set the hot phone
392 on top of the glass display case. "You do know that the phone number
393 you want to call is to Zhongnanhai, China?"

394 "What is so bad about Zhong-nan-hai?" Tom carefully repeated
395 and enunciated the city name.

396 "It is where the headquarters of the CCP is located."

397 "CCP what is that?" Tom asked

398 "CCP is for the Chinese Communist Party." The clerk looked around
399 and then wrote a URL down on the back of a scrap of paper. "Look at
400 this AI website on the dark web. Search for that number you gave me
401 there."

402 Tom looked around. He noticed there were security cameras in
403 every corner of the small shop. A cold chill ran up his back! "Okay
404 what do I owe you?"

405 "Thirty eight thousand Naira and there is no bill of sale or
406 warranty." The clerk walked to the far corner of the display case out
407 of view the working securities camera.

408 Tom handed over a fifty and 5 twenties. "This should cover the
409 phone." Outside in the open market Tom noticed security cameras
410 were everywhere. They were on the side of buildings, on telephone
411 poles, under balconies and behind counters. Artificial Intelligence (AI)
412 harvesting and spying on human elements wasn't his interest. If
413 everyone followed the Ten Commandments there wouldn't be a need
414 for this type of technology.

415 Tom walked from the Electronic Market to the Holiday Inn to check
416 on reserving a room for Tina. It was already ninety degrees with
417 seventy-five percent humidity. The cool conditioned air was welcomed
418 as Tom walked across the lobby to the front desk.

419 The British desk clerk's throat tightened when he saw Tom. "How
420 can I help?" Phillip was wearing the blue and green tennis shoes they
421 had stolen from the apartment. If he walked away from the front desk
422 Tom would surely notice them.

423 "I need to check on renting a room for my niece."

424 "When will your niece be in Lagos and how long will the lass be
425 staying?"

426 "She should be here next month and I don't think she'll be here
427 more than a week."

428 "Let me check." While the Brit started looking at the reservations
429 made for thirty days out he casually said. "That one room flat next to
430 the church is not really big enough for two people."

431 "How do you know about my apartment?" Tom quipped.

432 "Oh a... I heard that a new pastor was in town."

433 "How do you know where I'm staying and how do you know that
434 I'm a pastor?" Tom was suspicious.

435 "A... The other night when you passed out behind the building we
436 got your address. Its on our reservation card."

437 "If I passed out how could I have filled out a reservation card? I
438 want to see my signature on that card!" Tom demanded.

439 Victor Vee had been listening in and watching via the security
440 camera mounted above the front desk. He pushed the line button for
441 the front desk phone.

442 "Excuse me; I got to get this call." Phillip picked up the phone.

443 "Tell Pastor Tom that it was me that told you about the apartment
444 next to the church."

445 Phillip put the desk phone on hold. "I'm sorry about that. You
446 asked me about what?"

447 "I asked how you know about the small apartment next to the
448 church."

449 "Oh? That's right mate. Victor Vee was the person that filled out
450 the reservation card for you. He's a friend of Tanny."

451 Tom looked back over his shoulder across the lobby at the
452 entrance into the Relaxation Lounge. "Is Tanny working?"

453 "I think she just came on shift. Why don't you go check?"

454 "I'm going to do that right now!" Tom pushed back from the front
455 desk and headed toward the lounge.

456 A heavy dead bolt *snapping* sound came from the hallway where
457 the restrooms, the video security room, the hotel business office and
458 an ATM machine were located. Victor Vee stopped at the end of the
459 hallway and motioned Phillip to come over.

460 Victor immediately noticed Phillip was wearing the stolen green and
461 blue tennis shoes. "I told you to throw those away! I'm not going to
462 warn you again!"

463 "Mate these are at least two-hundred euro sneakers in the UK. How
464 bout I sell them or send them home to some poor lad?"

465 Victor Vee wasn't the person to disobey orders from. He pulled a
466 undersized Rungu stick from a deep pocket specifically sewn into his
467 baggy pants and snapped it across Phillip's forearm. He'd been trained
468 by a Maasai Warrior how to use the ebony club. The ball headed
469 flexible club could easily break bones and even crush a lion's skull. It
470 was more dangerous than being hit with a baseball bat.

471 Phillip grabbed his forearm and gritted his teeth; it took all his
472 strength not to scream out in pain. He'd seen Victor use the Runga
473 club before to break up bar fights. A rap to the neck could drop the
474 biggest and meanest drunk to his knees. Phillip hobbled back behind
475 the counter and kicked off the tennis shoes.

476 Victor Vee slipped the Runga back into the slot pocket on his baggy
477 pants and meandered into the lounge and then over to the bar. "I hear
478 you are looking for me?"

479 Pastor Tom turned away from Tanny. "Yes, I am looking for you!
480 How do you know me and where I'm living at?"

481 "I was the one that took Tanny by your church the day you had the
482 open house. I didn't come in. I waited for her in the parking lot in my
483 truck. Why do you ask?"

484 "Because my church got robbed the night I stayed in this motel."

485 "So why are you accusing me? Is it because I'm a black man?"

486 Tom was immediately put on systemic racist defense. "No! But I
487 have two witnesses that said it was two black men and one white man
488 that robbed the church."

489 The words 'two witnesses' put Victor Vee on alert. He held his
490 composure and then asked. "Have your witnesses been to the police?"

491 "Not yet. They'll be hanging wanted posters around the
492 neighborhood tonight or tomorrow. I'm offering a reward."

493 "So your witnesses have not been to the police?"

494 "No! I reported it to this old bowlegged constable. He came out and
495 took the information but didn't do much."

496 "Just take the loss. Putting up posters could be dangerous for you
497 and for the witnesses. Lagosian's in this district don't snitch on each
498 other."

499 "I already put a claim into the insurance company and they are
500 replacing all the stolen items with better stuff. But, criminals need to
501 be held accountable or society will collapse."

502 "Wow! What kind of insurance do you have?"

503 "The insurance coverage comes out of our head office in Los
504 Angeles. My agent padded the claim; he's an old college friend."

505 "Los Angeles! That is where I need to go to cut a recording deal.
506 Does your friend know anyone in the music business?"

507 Tanny returned with two Star Lagers. Tom and Victor took up tall
508 bar stools. They hit it off. Both were gifted with the ability to excite
509 and stir a crowd. Tom was skilled from the pulpit with preaching the
510 Word. Victor was talented on stage with his Juju style rap music.

511 Victor insisted Tom try some authentic West African food for lunch.
512 He called a local street cart vendor and placed an order. The food
513 arrived in grease stained brown paper bags and two white Styrofoam
514 quart size cups. The goat meat pepper soup was more like a stew.
515 The meat and yams were so tender that they broke apart with the
516 plastic knife. The smoked bushmeat was spicy and dry, it required
517 more beer. When Tanny whispered, "You might be eating monkey or
518 rat jerky," Tom's stomach knotted.

519 Ten minutes later Tom thanked Victor for lunch and excused
520 himself. He walked out of the lounge across the lobby toward the
521 bathrooms. Halfway down the hallway there was an alcove with a
522 Bitcoin ATM and a Zenith currency conversion terminal. Directly across
523 from the electronic machines was the motel security room.

524 *That Goat meat soup was much better than any wild hog meat*
525 *served back in Texas,* Tom said to himself while he sat on the toilet.

526 Tom emerged from the hallway and bee lined to the front desk.
527 "What the heck did you do to your arm?" Tom asked as he stared at
528 the 4 inch purple welt running across Phillip's forearm.

529 "Oh a filing cabinet tipped forward and smashed my arm."

530 "Wow, you might want to get an x-ray. That looks serious."

531 "I'll be fine," replied Phillip. "I worked up some room prices for
532 your niece. I'll go get the paperwork."

533 When Phillip went into the office Tom noticed he was barefoot. *A*
534 *Workers Comp attorney would have a field day here with a tipping*
535 *filing cabinet and an employee working barefoot.*

536 Phillip returned and handed a sheet of room prices with dates
537 across the counter to Tom. "November and Decembers are our busiest
538 months, when it gets cold up in the EU. That's when we get a lot of
539 tourists. Americans seem to like coming in January and spring break."

540 As Tom walked down Frontage Road he rationalized. *I can't have*
541 *church this Sunday since the theft and all. I need to get serious and*
542 *dedicate more time on my first sermon. Plus, Victor Vee said he would*
543 *set me up with some of his musician friends that can play gospel.*

544 From about half a block Tom spotted a van in the church parking lot.
545 When he got close enough he read **Lagos AC and Electrical** on the
546 side panel.

547 Idogbe was moving brand new stackable chairs into the church. On
548 the porch Tom examined the chairs. They were padded and a lot
549 better quality than the old folding chairs were. "Looks like being
550 robbed was a good thing for you." Idogbe said as he came out to move
551 in another stack of chairs.

552 "Yeah, I guess so," Tom replied.

553 "Looks like you are getting one of those high efficient air
554 conditioners too." Idogbe motioned with his arm toward the technician
555 cutting a hole in the wall of the apartment.

556 "I didn't expect things to happen so quickly," Tom said.

557 "Nigeria has high unemployment. People will often start work the
558 same day you hire them. Just like those young boys that came by
559 looking for you. Cash in hand means a lot in Africa."

560 "Have those boys been by already?"

561 Idogbe shoved a dolly under a stack of chairs. "Yes about thirty
562 minutes ago. They said they'd stop by again."

563 Tom moved on to the AC installer and introduced himself. "Hi. I'm
564 Pastor Tom. Are you going to install a separate circuit for the air
565 conditioner?"

566 "Yes sir. I told your insurance man that the AC unit needed its own
567 circuit or there could be a fire. I'll run that branch circuit tomorrow
568 morning."

569 "Great, I'll count on having air-conditioning by tomorrow night."

570 Tom went inside and put the backpack on the green table. He then left
571 a message for Tina, "It looks like I won't need my motorhome shipped
572 to Tin Can Island. Give me a call when you get a chance."

573 *Putting things into God's hands might be something I can preach*
574 *on next Sunday. Things are working out for the best. The church got*
575 *new padded chairs and an upgraded PA system. I might upgrade the*
576 *32 inch HDTV to something larger to hide the patch in the church. That*
577 *Victor Vee is hooking me up with a Christian band. Music will be a big*
578 *help to draw in newbie's. I still need to replace the door prizes. Maybe*
579 *I should allow kids or hire Jacob to play with them in the field behind*
580 *the church?*

581 Tom got out the laptop and started typing. He didn't get ten
582 words down before Idogbe knocked on the door. "What do you need?"
583 Tom asked from behind the screen door.

584 "I'm done for the day. I forgot the home office wants you to call
585 them about a new church dedication plaque. They are suggesting
586 using something different than brass. Something that's not tempting
587 to steal." Idogbe quipped thru the screen.

588 "Okay, I'll give them a call."

589 Ekon and Jacob ran up the alley with their bucket in hand. They
590 waited behind Idogbe. Tom gave them the stapler, a roll of blue tape
591 and a handful of wanted posters. Jacob agreed to the usual
592 commission of two cents a poster. Idogbe locked up the church and
593 headed to his twin sister's house for dinner.

594 Lastly the AC installer yelled through the screen door, "I'll be back
595 in the morning to finish up!"

596 Tom reheated a cup of coffee in the microwave and all was quiet.
597 He had almost two thousand words typed within an hour. How getting
598 robbed and then putting it into God's hands was a great subject to
599 preach on for next Sunday. He was on a roll when a wood on wood
600 banging sound on the front door startled him.

601 "Mr. Tom Seton there's been a serious accident! One of the boys
602 you hired to hang those wanted posters is in the hospital. You need to
603 come with me. **Now!**"

604