

6. CHAPTER SIX

~

Pastor Tom's fifth Sunday in Africa had a better feel than the first four. Finally, Tom felt like he had found his groove. His new congregates liked the fact that he didn't come across as the privileged white man from America that was going to preach about how to be like him. It was just the opposite. Tom admitted that he had a shaded past and needed forgiveness. 'Love the sinner, hate the sin' seemed to be a message this meager Lagos neighborhood wanted to hear.

Pointing out the counterfeit Ten Commandments hanging on the wall hadn't been planned. But afterwards, during the coffee and donut social several guests wanted to know if he would preach on the true Ten Commandments. Tom now had subject matter for the next ten Sundays. His original plan was to preach on the prosperity gospels and how a ten percent tithing would return a hundred fold. Mixing Old Testament scripture with gospel passages helped to build his mega church back home in Texas. Tom was a skilled orator...

Monday mornings were always the time Tom would go back over his Sunday oration to make sure he had hit all the bullet points. Today more important things came first. He folded the laptop screen down, checked the new thermostat on the wall and then double checked that both the church and the apartment were locked. The streets were already filled with horn honking yellow Kekes and smoke belching Okada scooters.

"The Texas style Akara was a hit." Tom stated as he handed a white envelope with Naira cash and coins to the street vendor.

The vendor handed Tom a fresh cup of AA Kenya coffee. "Yes we ran out too quickly. I think I should bring three dozen more of your Texas style Akara and additional coffee next Sunday?"

"We'll see. The collection barely covered the cost of the coffee and donuts." Tom stopped to correct himself. "I mean the Texan Style Akara!" Tom was good at bartering. The collection was actually more than Tom had expected from the meager neighborhood of hard working families.

35 The Holiday Inn was his next stop to arrange for the three piece
36 gospel musicians to play again next Sunday. Victor Vee was acting
37 weird. He didn't come out from the hotel security room; they just
38 talked over the motel intercom at the front desk. Tom left an envelope
39 with some money in the Relaxation room for Tanny. She had watched
40 over the children that had played in the alley alongside the church
41 during his service.

42 "Looks like your arm is healing." Tom pointed at the bruise across
43 the Brit's arm." Tell me again how you injured your arm?"

44 "A... I don't remember telling you how I hurt my arm?" Phillip
45 suspected that Victor was listening and watching thru the camera
46 mounted over the reception desk. "I slipped."

47 "I thought you said a filing cabinet fell on your arm."

48 "Oh yeah that's right. I slipped and caught myself on an open
49 drawer and that was how the filing cabinet smashed my arm."

50 "Yeah, okay." Tom accepted the plausible answer and so did Victor
51 Vee from the security office. "I'm going to need to reserve a room for
52 my niece in a few weeks. When I know the exact dates, I'll get back to
53 you."

54 "Okay let us know soon. I'll see you at church this Sunday." Phillip
55 was not a church person — he was Victor's spy.

56 Pastor Tom got no more than a few blocks from the motel when
57 the burner phone vibrated in his pocket. Caller ID indicated the call
58 was from Zhongnanhai, China. Tom let the call go to a voice message.
59 The sun was already beating down on his forehead and the Lagos car
60 traffic was almost at a standstill. Tom flagged down an Okada. The
61 scooter drivers were good at weaving around cars and dodging
62 pedestrians.

63 The blast of cool air when he opened the apartment door was
64 refreshing. Now, he was ready to deal with the voice message from
65 Zhongnanhai, China. Tom hit the **#1** to listen to the message. "Mr.
66 Tom Seton there has been a change of plans. A crew will be at your
67 home in Dallas providence, early Wednesday to load up the motor van.
68 Call back if you can't obey this order."

69 Nobody told Tom what to do! He hit the **#2** to talk to the sender of
70 the message. A female voice answered, "Nǐhǎo." This pissed off Tom;
71 he ended the call and then tossed the burner phone on the green
72 table.

73 He called Beth on his other phone. "Sorry to call so early but a
74 crew will be picking up the motorhome tomorrow in the morning at our
75 house.

76 "So, I don't have to drive the Sprinter to the Port of Houston?"

77 "No you don't. I just got a voice mail from China. They are taking
78 care of everything."

79 "You think it is safe to just have someone pick it up?"

80 "Yeah, I'm not that worried about it. We owe more than what it is
81 worth. If something happens I'll turn it into insurance."

82 "Okay. Is there anything else I should get ready by tomorrow?"

83 Beth asked.

84 "Yes, in the basement we have a couple boxes of KJV Bibles. Could
85 you load them on the motorhome?"

86 "Sure no problem. I'll get Billy next door to help me. Is there
87 anything else?"

88 "Beth, in the closet in my office there is an old laptop, load that up
89 too."

90 "What are you going to do with that old computer?"

91 "This neighborhood kid keeps coming around when the other kids
92 are in school. I thought he could play solitaire or some of the computer
93 games on it?"

94 "Is that Jacob the deaf child you keep talking about?"

95 "Yeah that's him." Tom paused; actually he had an alternative
96 motive. "Beth, could you load one of your interactive sign language
97 programs on that laptop so that I can communicate better with Jacob."

98 "Tom sign language is not universal. You could really mess up a
99 young boy if you tried to introduce him to a second language at such
100 an early age. Didn't you tell me Jacob is only seven?"

101 "Yeah, I think so. He should be in second grade." Tom's plan to
102 find the neighborhood thieves with the aid of an old version of PAINT
103 drawing program wasn't going to work.

104 "Tom, my understanding of software is one licensed per each
105 computer?"

106 "Don't sweat the laptop then. We'll just keep drawing pictures to
107 communicate with each other."

108 "Tom, I'm so proud of you for helping out and protecting those two
109 brothers. I can't wait to meet them!"

110 The month long separation was hard on both Tom and Beth. At
111 college they were both admired and destined for success. Early on
112 they committed to separate career paths. Tom as preaching the word
113 and Beth working with the under privileged. They also agreed to keep
114 their religious beliefs separated — Tom as a progressive protestant
115 and Beth as a devout catholic. Raising children in an interfaith
116 marriage can have deep rooted spiritual problems on the children —
117 something Tom and Beth didn't have to worry about.

118

119 * * *

120

121 Cain and Able barked and jumped against the kennel wire fence
122 when they heard the sound of air brakes being applied out front. Beth
123 yelled, "Sitz!" Both German Sheppard's sat and their ears perked
124 upward. Beth put the dog food down and said, "Platz." Both guard
125 dogs followed her command; they took up the prone position.

126 "Hey Aunt Beth we're here to pick up the motorhome!" Tina yelled
127 as she bounced down the driveway toward the shop and RV storage
128 building.

129 Beth was miffed. Tom had mentioned Tina made the arrangements
130 to get their Sprinter shipped but never said that Tina was going to be
131 part of the shipping crew. In German Beth yelled, "Blieb" and came
132 out of the kennel. The dogs stayed prone even with the gate left open.

133 "I'll raise the door." Tina met up with Beth at the deep end of the
134 pool. Beth reached in thru the side door of the outbuilding and pushed
135 the **GDO** button. The oversized door went up and put on display the
136 silver Mercedes Sprinter RV and a rare L88 Red Corvette. There were
137 yellow lines painted on the concrete floor for each individual parking
138 spot. On the back wall were several of Tom's hunting trophies. The

139 most recent was a 440 pound feral hog he shot from a helicopter on a
140 private ranch in Alabama.

141 "Like, you guys still have your old car from college?" Tina opened
142 the driver door and plopped down behind the steering wheel. "I'd
143 really look good driving around Hollywood in this old vintage car."

144 Beth was beyond miffed. She had never driven the 580
145 horsepower race car. An inexperienced driver could easily lose control
146 by just pushing too far down on the gas pedal. There were only 216 of
147 this model ever built. It wasn't an old vintage car; it was a one of a
148 kind sought after muscle car.

149 Beth pulled the RV out of the shop and then handed the keys and
150 some paperwork to Tina. "I wasn't sure what paperwork they'd need,
151 but copies of the title, registration and insurance is in here."

152 "Like, I don't know if we need that stuff Aunt Beth. This oversized
153 old people van is being shipped on one of Mr. Meng's private ships."

154 "Tina, just take this paperwork. Better to be proactive than
155 reactive. You're going to be in another country. They probably will
156 search the motorhome at the Port of entry and most likely will want a
157 copy of the title."

158 "Like what will they be searching for?" Tina was now concerned.

159 "Drugs, guns and illegal contraband I would guess." Beth never
160 cared for uninformed people; especially the ones that partied for five
161 years at a liberal arts college.

162 "Like what would illegal contraband be?"

163 "Unlicensed software, counterfeit pharmaceuticals, stolen car parts,
164 things like that. The list is endless!"

165 "Like would the diet pills my stepdad gets for me be considered
166 counterfeit?"

167 "I'd get rid of any drugs that weren't prescribed by a doctor." Beth
168 cared less for Tom's brother even more than she disliked Tina. That
169 entire side of the family was about show and living in the moment.
170 Tina dashed down the driveway with the keys and paperwork.

171 The driver had to let some air out of the tires so that the solar
172 panels on the RV roof would fit into the oversized shipping container.
173 It didn't take but thirty minutes before Tina climbed up into the cab

174 with a Chinese Loyalist. The loud *shiss* of the air brake release set
175 Cain and Able on a barking frenzy, yet they stayed inside of the open
176 kennel. The semi tractor and loaded container was headed for the Port
177 of Huston so to be loaded on to the **DONG FANG**.

178 It had completely slipped Tom's mind to tell Beth to take his AR-15
179 and Winchester model 94 out from under the bench seat storage
180 compartment. There was also enough ammunition to supply a small
181 army and a couple of handguns.

182 Beth finished feeding Cain and Able and then washed out the
183 kennel. After playing 'Fetch' she went back inside to call Tom; it was
184 already past noon in Africa. She got Tom's voice mail and left the
185 message, "The Sprinter is on the way and the laptop is in the cabinet
186 under the sink. Why didn't you tell me about Tina coming to our
187 house?"

188 The container with the Mercedes Sprinter, two boxes of KJV (King
189 James Version) bibles an old laptop along with the guns and
190 ammunition that were concealed under the bench seat was scheduled
191 to be loaded Friday onto the Triple-E class cargo ship. The logistics of
192 loading and unloading was now a concern to Tom. Tina's travel
193 arrangements were clandestine. All that Tom knew was that Tina was
194 with an Asian driver when the motorhome was picked up in Texas.

195 Some containers are refrigerated to keep food fresh. Refrigerated
196 or not, steel containers were never designed to ship livestock. It was
197 a miracle that the animals below deck on the ark never died from
198 Methane gas. Current day the buildup of diesel engine fumes in the
199 hull could cause carbon monoxide poisoning within hours. Above deck
200 a container without the door end facing outward would be a death
201 trap.

202 It didn't take more than a day at sea along and the skimpy red
203 bikini that got Tina moved into the captain quarters guest room.
204 Unbashful flaunting was a risky on board disruption for the twenty-
205 three all male crew. A distraction like Tina needed to be monitored.
206 Now the CCP loyalist had the motorhome all to himself.

207 After three days at sea the first stop was the Port of Cancun. Tina's
208 passport was not updated for Mexico. No matter what Tina offered the

209 captain, he was not going to let her off the billion dollar ship that he
210 was solely responsible for. The six and seventh days were spent in the
211 Port of Havana; Americans were not allowed on shore. Cuba had
212 outdated unloading and tracking software which extended the time at
213 port. It was the same at port in Puerto Rico. Tina was going stir crazy,
214 this trip had zero cruise ship amenities with international restrictions.

215 While docked at Saint Thomas Island the captain gave in to Tina's
216 seduction and then took her ashore for a few hours. Most of the crew
217 was on a twelve hour leave and what happens in port stays in port —
218 even murder.

219 Tina wasn't aware that Saint Thomas Island was a US territory and
220 that US citizens didn't need passports. The few minutes of on board
221 pleasure for the captain had been relayed all the way back to
222 Zhongnanhai, China. Disloyalty to the Communist Chinese Party
223 carried a minimum sentence of ten years in a rehabilitation camp —
224 sometimes death.

225 The Second Officer opened both doors on the retrofitted oversized
226 container at the same time the CCP loyalist/guard opened the
227 backdoors on the Mercedes Sprinter Van. They both started pulling
228 ropes, body bags and bags of concrete that had been shoved up
229 against the rear axle of the motor home. They spoke a few sentences
230 in Mandarin and then went silent; exactly what the mission called for.

231 The Second Officer moved along starboard toward the stern to the
232 beam of the boat. He tied one end of the rope to the railing while the
233 CCP Loyalist put two 60# sacks of concrete into a heavy black bag and
234 zipped it shut. They grabbed an end of the black bag, lifted it to the
235 railing and let it drop overboard. The rope uncoiled, snapped taut and
236 then went limp. The strap on the bag couldn't take a 120 pound load
237 snapping taut. They pulled the rope up and tied another bag with
238 only one 60# concrete bag inside; the same thing happened, the strap
239 tore loose from the bag.

240 The Second Officer broke the silence and suggested that they lower
241 the nylon weighted bags slowly. He assumed that they would be
242 dropping drugs. Most recently the Fentanyl drops were less than fifty

243 pounds and had floats tied to them. He'd been at the game long
244 enough not to ask. Knowing too much would be dangerous.

245 The CCP Loyalist moved his head up and down in agreement.
246 Delivering merchandise with broken arms or legs would not be
247 unacceptable. They attached a third bag with one bag of concrete and
248 lowered it slowly, when the bag hit the water they cut the rope. The
249 last bag was loaded with two sacks of concrete; working together they
250 lowered the bag to the water surface. The CCP loyalist was content —
251 any girl over 120 pounds wouldn't be acceptable anyway.

252 Most of the crew, the captain and Tina were back on ship by
253 midnight. Earlier that day the Second Officer bribed the St Thomas
254 port authority to sign off so they could depart at dawn.

255 It was still dark when two tugs pushed and pulled the DONG FANG
256 out to the Caribbean Sea. The Captain over slept as did some of the
257 crew. At the helm the Second officer set a due east heading. The chief
258 navigator calculated nine days to cross the Atlantic to Nigeria with
259 moderate to rough seas ahead.

260 Just outside of the US territory boarder for the Virgin Islands a
261 gray painted, low- profile, go-fast boat was in pursuit. The operator
262 pushed the throttle forward to full on. The gray boat was shaped much
263 like the long and thin, open bow fishing vessels the Somalia's pirates
264 used to hijack freighters in the Indian Ocean. This wasn't a retrofitted
265 netting boat. It was a million dollar, open bow cigarette boat made
266 mostly of carbon fiber to avoid radar and out run anything the coast
267 guard had. The elite class, the Cartel's and even some presidents
268 owned these speed machines and kept them hidden and unlicensed
269 among the eighty or more Virgin Islands.

270 The flat gray paint blended in with the mile long white froth made
271 by the wake of the DONG FANG. The CCP loyalist was ready on the
272 starboard side at the beam with four ropes and weighted bags tied to
273 the metal railing. He hand lowered the first bag with only one 60# bag
274 of concrete inside. One of the crew snagged the rope with a long
275 handled hook. He cut the bag free and gave the thumbs up to the
276 loyalist way above on deck.

312 like a father figure. Call it a mother's intuition but Fifi felt like it was an
313 innocent bond, after all Tom was a man of the cloth.

314 After counting the collection Tom went back to the apartment.
315 Resting on the Sabbath was one commandment Tom semi observed.
316 The debate on which day of the week was the Sabbath or rather one
317 should rest or keep that day holy didn't matter to Tom. Keeping a
318 congregation on fire with the Word was hard work and he needed to
319 rest. He'd just nodded off when the phone vibrated on the makeshift
320 wood box nightstand.

321 "Hello!" Tom pressed the phone against his head.

322 "How did preaching and the rest of the service go today?"

323 "It went okay Beth. There was an increase in the collection, so that
324 is always a good sign. We ran short of coffee and donuts."

325 "That interesting, you've always told me coffee and donuts was the
326 only reason Catholic's come to church."

327 "Beth you know I'm always kidding you about that." But Tom
328 wasn't kidding, just an hour ago he preached about Catholics
329 worshiping false idols — especially Mary the mother of God.

330 "Well, okay." Beth said and then paused; before they were married
331 a priest had counseled Beth on raising children in an interfaith
332 marriage. Now a mute point, since they never were able to conceive a
333 child. "Tom, remember Sally Slenski?"

334 "Yeah of course!" Tom sat up on the edge of the bed. "Why do you
335 ask?"

336 "Well she stopped by here last night," Beth paused for a second
337 time. "She is due to have a baby any day."

338 "That's wonderful news for her and her family," Tom replied with
339 sincerity. He then asked. "What did Sally want?"

340 "She told me that the FBI is going over all the accounts at your old
341 church. A whole bunch of the large contributors' at your old church
342 had their deposits hacked and converted to Bitcoin."

343 "What?" Tom was now at full on notice. He paced around the green
344 table in the center of the room. "So, is that all that Sally wanted you
345 to tell me?"

346 "I think so. Sally did say that she wishes you well on building
347 another mega church."

348 "I don't think I will be building that big of church over here. Most of
349 the people are just common folk. There won't be any thousand dollar
350 bills in the collection basket."

351 I know how good you are at fundraising. I wouldn't give up that
352 easily," Beth replied.

353 Tom stopped pacing. Absolutely he was good at bringing in the
354 cash and cutting deals. "Is there anything else Beth?"

355 "I hid that old notebook computer under that bench seat where you
356 store your hunting guns. I'm sorry but I don't trust your niece. Tina
357 might snoop around your old files."

358 Tom picked up the pace around the table again. He didn't know
359 that Tina had been there when the motorhome got picked up. What
360 was more concerning was one of his hog hunting, long guns was an
361 unregistered AR-15. He had completely forgotten about the guns and
362 ammunition hidden in the Mercedes Sprinter.

363 Monday morning Tom was up searching about gun laws in Nigeria
364 when there was a light knock on the apartment door. Jacob was there
365 with his bucket, soap and rags looking for work. Tom rubbed Jacob's
366 soft nappy head of black hair and let him in. He drew a picture of a
367 chair and some water drops and then out an **X** across the chair.

368 Jacob understood immediately that the new chairs didn't need
369 washed. Jacob took the pen from Tom and drew a broom and dustpan.
370 Tom gave in and then took Jacob by the hand over to the church. He
371 got a broom from a utility closet and handed it to Jacob. Within a few
372 minutes Jacob was sweeping the floor. Tom went back to the
373 apartment.

374 Less than a half hour passed and there was another knock on the
375 door. "I've got my tools and patching material to pull off those Ten
376 Commandments tablets. I'll be over in the church." Idogbe held up a
377 handsaw and drywall knife.

378 "That sounds good. Jacob's inside sweeping the floor. If you need
379 any help cleaning up have him do it."

380 Idogbe didn't care much for Pastor Tom's sketchy ways but he
381 always found odd jobs for the boy's to do and considered that gesture
382 admirable. Young boys in this poor neighborhood would do almost
383 anything to earn a few spare Naira.

384 Now it was Tom's turn to interrupt; he entered the church. Idogbe
385 had just climbed up on the ladder and was ready to cut into the wall.
386 "Idogbe, hold up for a minute!"

387 Idogbe climbed down and walked to the back of the church. "What
388 do you need?"

389 "I'm wondering if you can build a false wall to hide stuff?" Pastor
390 Tom walked over to the utility closet and opened the door. "Maybe
391 back in that corner?" Tom pointed to the left. "Something about the
392 size that Jacob could hide in." Tom now pointed at Jacob sweeping
393 under chairs.

394 "You mean a hiding place like in the Anne Frank diaries?"

395 "You've read Anne Frank's work?"

396 "Yes, in school. Many of the girls up north keep diaries after they
397 read about her struggle in the slave camp."

398 "You mean concentration camp." Tom corrected Idogbe.

399 "They are the same!" Idogbe corrected Pastor Tom and then
400 walked over to the left wall and pulled a measuring tape from his tool
401 belt. "Do you think fifty centimeters is deep enough?"

402 "I don't know? How many inches is that?"

403 Idogbe did a quick conversion in his head. "That would be about
404 eighteen inches."

405 "That would be great." Tom replied. "I'm going to go get a cup of
406 coffee, would you like one?"

407 "No thanks. I drank plenty of coffee on the drive down from
408 Abuja."

409 "How is your Mom's strawberry farm doing?"

410 "It is going well. I have some strawberries in my truck if you would
411 like to try them."

412 "I'd like that. Are you sure you don't want coffee?"

413 "I'm sure, no coffee. I'll get started on the secret hiding place."

414 Tom flagged down a Kekes driver for a ride. His go to coffee
415 vendor suggest at least three dozen more of the Texas Style Akara for
416 next week. Tom did some finagling; if the order size increased the
417 price needed to decrease. They agreed on 400 naira per dozen and 50
418 naira per cup of coffee. The street vendor suggested Bobo apple milk
419 for the children. Tom declined; he didn't want to encourage anymore
420 children then who were already coming to church.

421 The next stop was to settle up with the musicians and pay Tanny
422 for watching the children during the church service. It wasn't so much
423 that Tom didn't like children; it was more that they were an expense
424 that a budding church couldn't afford. Especially when Tom had
425 noticed some of the children had two of the Texan style Akaras in each
426 hand.

427 After a large AA Kenya coffee and settling debts Tom was back at
428 church and stuck his head into the closet room. "Wow you work fast."

429 "If you want to keep this a secret place, I should get this wall done
430 before your service next Sunday." Idogbe replied with annoyance.

431 "Think of it more like a safe than a secret hiding place." Tom
432 stopped himself. If Idogbe knew that he was planning to store guns
433 and ammunition between the walls there could be a big problem.
434 Especially after reading up about the gun laws in Nigeria.

435 Tom stomped his feet on the wood floor to get Jacob's attention.
436 Jacob stood up from hand mopping the floor and saw the grease
437 stained bag Tom was holding out. Jacob came over and politely only
438 took just one of the deep fried sugar and flour balls.

439 "Idogbe, try one of these Texan style akara that I'm helping one of
440 the street vendors turn into a favorite snack."

441 Idogbe reached into the bag and then popped the deep fried ball of
442 dough into his mouth. "This is a Yum Yum not an Akara."

443 "What?" Pastor Tom thought he was bringing a new food to Africa.

444 "Akara is made from bean. Yum Yum is made from flour and sugar.
445 You call them donuts holes in the states." Idogbe walked in front of
446 Tom and out the front doors of the church.

447 Tom realized he'd been played by the street vendor. Tom rolled the
448 top of the bag and handed the rest of the donuts holes to Jacob and
449 carefully mouthed. "Share these with Ekon."

450 Jacob moved his head up and down to say he understood.

451 Idogbe came back into the church door with a container of
452 strawberries. "Try one of these African style berries."

453 Tom stemmed one of the berries and popped it into his mouth.
454 "Wow these are really good."

455 "They are from my Mom's berry farm." Idogbe replied and then
456 stomped on the floor and motioned for Jacob to come over.

457 Jacob held up three fingers. Idogbe answered by flashing his own
458 three fingers twice, meaning six. Jacob smiled and picked off six of the
459 big red strawberries. Jacob now had Yum Yums and strawberries to
460 share with Ekon and his mom.

461 As Tom was putting the strawberries into the apartment
462 refrigerator his cell phone vibrated. Caller ID showed **SPIRIT**
463 **INSURANCE.**

464 "Tom, no way in hell we can do ten thousand dollars for pain and
465 suffering for a kid that supposedly fell off a bucket. Our doctors looked
466 at the x-ray and they say a buckle fracture near the elbow is more
467 likely from a child being hit across the forearm; not from falling off a
468 bucket. Plus that boy wasn't on the church property. We'll pay the
469 medical bills but that's it?"

470 "Mike slow down! Your insurance company paid out a hundred and
471 fifty thousand to that brat that sprained his wrist at my old church and
472 you can't do ten grand for a broken arm?"

473 "Tom that kid was on an All-Star baseball team. He had potential
474 to go on to play in the majors. What's some poor kid in Africa going to
475 become?"

476 "Mike, don't be such a prick! Tell me right now what's the best you
477 can do for the Onukwulu family."

478 "We'll pay the medical bills and fifteen hundred for pain and
479 suffering. Plus, I want to close this claim by tomorrow."

480 "Mike you can multiply that pain and suffering offer by ten. That
481 African kid that you think won't amount to anything is a straight A

482 student and is a skilled soccer player. His name is Ekon and his name
483 means strong in Africa. He didn't even shed a tear at the hospital."

484 "So if the boy is so strong he can deal with the pain. At the very
485 most I might get the company to do is two grand for pain but nothing
486 for long term suffering."

487 "Mike I remember all the emotional pain and suffering that poor
488 girl you knocked up in college must have went thru. I remember her
489 name. It was Rose? She worked in the cafeteria. Didn't your father pay
490 her off with twenty-five grand?"

491 "Hey Tom you don't have to go there. You don't have a unscathed
492 past with all your war hero lies and bullshit."

493 Mike, I've come clean with my stolen valor claim. Have you and
494 your Father come clean about Rose?"

495 Mike paused. "Five thousand and that's our final offer. Tom, you
496 don't want to go against my Dad. I'm warning you as an old frat
497 buddy. My Father has connections all over the world, including
498 powerful people in Africa."

499 "I'll let you know in the morning." Tom understood Mike's position.
500 Over the years he'd sent a lot of business to Spirit insurance — Quid
501 pro quo works both ways.

502 Tom locked up the apartment and went back into the church. Jacob
503 was watching Idogbe build the false wall in the closet. Tom looked
504 squarely at Jacob and mouthed the words, "Take me to your house."

505 Jacob spoke what sounded like, "OK."

506 Across a field, thru a whole in a fence and down a few dirt roads
507 and they were in a neighborhood of mostly single story homes made of
508 cinder block and metal roofs. Some had carports; there were no
509 homes with triple garages but the neighborhood was well cared for and
510 there was no litter anyplace.

511 Jacob pushed open the unlocked screen door and then stomped his
512 feet and scanned around the neatly kept room. Next he led Pastor Tom
513 into the kitchen and then pushed open the rear screen door. Fifi was
514 taking laundry off a clothesline. Jacob ran to her and pulled her arm
515 and pointed at Pastor Tom.

516 Fifi dropped a white shirt and handful of clothespins into a plastic
517 basket and walked toward Tom. "What brings you to our home?"
518 "Is your husband home? I should talk to both of you."
519 "My husband is up north delivering fuel. He won't be home until the
520 weekend."
521 The conversation was interrupted by the sound of the front door
522 opening and closing and then the sound of feet stamping on the floor.
523 Ekon came out the backdoor and Jacob held up the white bag with
524 donut balls and strawberries.
525 "Is it possible to get a hold of Mr. Onukwulu by tomorrow?"
526 "Not up north. There is not good phone service and he never stays
527 any one place too long. It's not safe."
528 Ekon signed with Jacob and then said, "Thanks for the treats."
529 "How's the arm? Do you think it healing okay?" Tom asked.
530 "It itches underneath the cast but it feels fine. I fell down playing
531 soccer at school but everything is okay." Ekon raised his arm and
532 moved his fingers to show everything was okay.
533 "You probably should hold off on the soccer until the cast is off,"
534 Tom replied with concern.
535 "I told you Ekon! You need to listen to Preacher Tom."
536 Ekon handed the white bag with the remaining yum yum's and
537 strawberries to his mom as a peace offering. No eleven year old boy
538 could sit on the sidelines at middle school soccer.
539 Tom looked directly at Fifi. "The insurance company wants to settle
540 for five thousand dollars. That is only half of what I told you and they
541 need to have an answer by tomorrow."
542 Five thousand USD was over half a year salary for most workers in
543 Nigeria. It would be a nice bump for the Onukwulu's bank account,
544 especially with a new baby on the way. Fifi was speechless.
545 Ekon was speechless also. He had been interviewed twice about
546 falling off the bucket while hanging posters. Now his family was being
547 offered five thousand dollars for a lie that he told. He knew all about
548 being paid off with dark money; his Dad talked about it often when
549 he'd return from trips up north. Lying to a man of the cloth made it
550 worse.