

9. CHAPTER NINE

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Ship-to-Shore appeared for the third time on the phone screen. This time Tom moved the number to his **block sender** list. Nigeria was tied with India for Robo-calling, SPAM and email fraud. Ransom-ware was more destructive to big business and municipalities and mainly came from Russia or the United States. Having a reputation for a country that didn't combat illicit internet scams hurt your standing within the World Trade Organization. This was one reason the Nigerian government recently banned crypto-currency trading; to show they were serious about internet fraud.

Jacob had finished mopping the church floor and was sitting on the church stairs next to his red bucket and wet rags. Odogbe had locked up and was gone picking up supplies for the dog kennel. When the yellow Kekes stopped in front of the church gate Jacob stood and crossed his arms like a big X across his chest. It was the international sign that deaf communities used all around the world — it meant love.

The man to boy bond was getting stronger each time they played their game. Hopefully someday Jacob would learn about promotion. Tom glanced at the clock display on his phone. There was plenty of time to show Jacob a few basic moves. Using hand movements actually made it easier to coach Jacob than verbal instruction.

Tom put his hand over Jacob's tiny hand and showed him how to move up and then back. To be promoted, this move had to be repeated at least eight times. Jacob already showed signs that he could become a master player. Learning all the moves would take time but Tom knew not to push too hard.

Jacob couldn't hear the phone but felt it vibrating thru the wood of the green table. The display blinked: **Dallas, Texas**. Words that he'd never seen before; on the sly Jacob memorized the letters.

Since Jacob couldn't hear Tom put the phone on speaker. "Good morning my Elizabethan love."

33 "It was a good morning, until your niece called at 5 am. She was
34 calling from a ship in the Gulf of Guinea. Tina said you won't answer
35 your phone!"

36 "I thought those ship-to-shore calls were SPAM. That's why I didn't
37 answer them."

38 "The motorhome is going to be off loaded this week. You need to
39 take the ship to shore call. Don't go to the Port Authorities is what Tina
40 said. That's all I know"

41 "Okay, I'll take the call." Tom noticed Jacob had taken the pad of
42 paper from his rear pocket and had sketched a woman with a phone to
43 her ear and had an apron on. Jacob then made two interlocking circles
44 and printed the words **Dallas Texas**.

45 "Tom, are you listening to me?" Beth asked firmly.

46 "Sorry. Did you remember to pack that old notebook computer?"

47 "It's in the cupboard under the sink," Beth answered.

48 "Good I'm going to give it to Jacob. That deaf boy I've been telling
49 you about. It has some games on it and it will give him something to
50 do when his brother is in school."

51 "Tom, you better ask his parents first! They might not want him
52 playing computer games all day."

53 "I'm teaching him to play chess. That old notepad has a chess
54 game on it." Tom rubbed Jacob's nappy head of hair. "I'll run it by his
55 parents."

56 "What about his brother, are you going to give him something?"

57 "I didn't think about it. Do you think I should get something for
58 Ekon too?"

59 "Yes, definitely! Often family's with a special child will over
60 compensate for that child and it builds resentment with the siblings.

61 "Beth, all that I want to do is give Jacob an old notepad computer
62 so that he can learn to play chess. Why make it so complicated?"

63 "I know Tom. But run it by his parents first. You don't know their
64 family dynamic."

65 "I will, but either way I'm going to help Jacob become a good chess
66 player. As we speak, I'm teaching him how to promote a pawn. "

67 They'd been married long enough Beth knew Tom's mind was set
68 and that Jacob would soon be playing computer games. "By the way,
69 Hank your hog hunter friend gave you a gift. I hid it under the bench
70 seat with your other guns."

71 "That was nice of big old Hank."

72 "Hank said he assembled it himself and you'll be able to knock
73 down a hog from a thousand yards."

74 "That's cool. I bet Hank built me an AR-15 from a kit."

75 "I don't know what it is! It was in a box and I just shoved it in
76 cubby hole under the bench seat. Hank said when you get back home
77 he knows a new place to helicopter hunt at."

78 Tom sensed the resentment in the tone of Beth's voice. "Honey,
79 don't worry; before I run off on a hog hunting trip with Hank we'll do
80 that Italy trip you've always wanted to do."

81 "Okay." Beth was somewhat appeased. Rome, Vatican City and
82 seeing Michael Angelo's artwork was a deep spiritual desire ever since
83 catholic school.

84 "Italy is half the distance from here in Lagos. After you get here
85 maybe we can fly up there for a weekend?"

86 A weekend rush thru Italy wasn't Beth's lifelong dream. "Just take
87 Tina's call. Please make sure you talk with the parents of those boys
88 before you do any gift giving!"

89 "Yeah, I will," Tom replied off the cuff. "Jacob might be old enough
90 for one of my old target rifles. I'll talk to his dad first. Women don't
91 get that gun ownership teaches responsibility."

92 Beth had enough! "I'm going to take Cain and Able for a run. I
93 might do a Ten-K this morning; since I got woke up so early by Tina."

94 Way back in college Beth's boyfriend forced her to always play the
95 docile role and always reminded her that the place on his motorcycle
96 was behind him. Being the wife of a preacher wasn't much different —
97 Tom preached it as wives are to be submissive.

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101 This time when the **Ship-to-Shore** message appeared Tom
102 answered. "Like where have you been uncle Tom?"
103 "Sorry Tina, I thought your calls were SPAM."
104 "You need to pick me up Thursday, when we port?"
105 "Not a problem. Do you know what terminal you will be docking
106 at?"
107 "No, all I know is that we will be landing on Tin Can Island. I want
108 off this stinking ship and you need to pick me up!"
109 "Not a problem. Tina, find out from the Captain what terminal you
110 will be docked at. What is the name of container ship you are on?"
111 Tom pulled the pencil from between Jacob's fingers.
112 "It's the Dong Fang. It's black on top and red down by the water.
113 Like there is Chinese writing after the name on the front part of the
114 boat." Tom wrote Dong Fang on a blank page in Jacob's pocket sized
115 tablet
116 "That helps. I'll get you a room for Thursday night."
117 "That will be good. Make sure to get me a room at the beach on
118 Tin Can Island?"
119 "Tina, you'll be staying near my church which is about six miles
120 from the coastline. I know a guy that knows his way around Lagos.
121 Victor Vee will know a safe beach for a tourist. He's a musician and
122 works security too."
123 "That sounds cool. Maybe Victor can show me some clubs to hang
124 at."
125 "He has a girlfriend."
126 "Like that's okay. She can come along too." A girlfriend or even a
127 wife was never an issue with Tina. Sex was more of a dirty and
128 sometimes painful act for Tina. At fourteen her mother taught her how
129 to seduce men and practice safe sex at the same time."
130 "Tina, after you get the terminal and docking information call me
131 back." Tom hesitated; he knew there could be a problem. Tina, if any
132 custom agents start searching the motorhome get away from the ship
133 and give me a call."

134 “Like that won’t happen uncle Tom. Kenny Chen has been sleeping
135 in your motorhome and like he is the big boss. Nobody goes up against
136 Kenny Chen!”

137 There was a pounding sound on the back wall of the apartment.
138 “Tina, I’ve got to go see what’s going on.”

139 Jacob followed Tom out of the apartment and jumped over a roll of
140 fencing. Next he tight-roped on a metal post lying on the ground.

141 “Be careful. You don’t want to end up with a broken arm like your
142 brother!” Tom forgot that Jacob couldn’t hear. Jacob sixth-sensed the
143 warning and stopped tight-walking on the metal post.

144 “I thought you were going to build the dog kennel behind the
145 church.”

146 “I was but kids play in the field back there and it is not worth the
147 risk of a dog bite.”

148 “That’s what I was telling you.” Tom liked being right; especially
149 when it came to child safety.

150 Idogbe did a casual up and down look over Jacob. Ever since the
151 constable asked him to place a hidden camera in the apartment he
152 noticed the friendship between an adult man and young boy seemed
153 off. “I’ll put a peep window thru the back wall so you can see into the
154 kennel.”

155 “That a great idea. Something small that I could feed and see thru
156 would be great. My dogs are German Shepherds so maybe a foot by a
157 foot and two feet off the ground so that they couldn’t crawl through
158 it.”

159 “I’ll figure out something.” Idogbe now had a reason to be working
160 on the inside of the apartment; making it possible to hide a wireless
161 spy-camera.

162 Tom reached into his pocket and pulled out a few kobo coins and
163 put them in Jacob’s small hand and then pushed Jacob toward the hole
164 in the fence behind the church.

165 Jacob pointed at himself and then at the apartment door. He made
166 a few simple hand signals up and down and then back and forth.
167 Idogbe took the hand signals to mean that Tom and he would play act
168 in the apartment again. Tom moved his head up and down meaning

169 yes. Jacob ran over to the church steps retrieved the red bucket and
170 headed for home.

171 "You and Jacob are getting to be good friends." Idogbe said as he
172 made a measurement on the back wall to cut the dog feeding door.

173 I want to be more like a coach than a friend," Tom replied in a
174 none-of-your-business tone and walked toward the side door of the
175 apartment.

176 Idogbe was getting less reluctant to constable Ayoola's asking
177 about installing a mini camera. Something about Tom was sketchy.
178 Why a preacher from Texas whom told false war stories got
179 transferred halfway around the world to Nigeria didn't fit the crime. A
180 priest from his mother's parish accused of abusing altar boys ended up
181 just being transferred to a different parish in Abuja.

182 *Old bowlegged constable must have done a background check or*
183 *pulled Tom's rap-sheet,* Idogbe rationalized. He didn't want to spy or
184 eavesdrop on anybody — especially a man of God. *I bet Ayoola would*
185 *not install a camera to watch a Muslim Cleric?* Idogbe was having a
186 second thought.

187 Cutting a hole thru the wall was ear splitting loud. Tom headed to
188 Olyin's Holiday Inn to reserve a room for Tina.

189 "How's the arm doing?" Tom asked as the Brit came up to the
190 reception desk.

191 "I still don't have all my strength back. I dropped my end of the
192 Bitcoin ATM machine this morning."

193 Tom shook his head side to side. "I'm confused. Is it Bitcoin or
194 Bitcoin?"

195 "That particular machine was an old Bitcoin machine that we had
196 shipped down from the UK. You can trade most crypto-currencies on it.
197 We are moving it into a private room for the élite class. Do you want
198 to use it?"

199 "No thanks, my accountant and the church treasurer back in Texas
200 got involved with Bitcoin and the FBI came looking for him."

201 "Our machine is programmed to covert US currency to Naira or
202 Euros Pounds. Similar to how voting machines change votes. The FBI,
203 CIA or any other intelligence agency don't know simple code hacking.

204 Then our transactions are mined on a server in the Ukraine by a
205 oligarch run Power Company.

206 The unlocking snap of a deadbolt echoed off the hallway walls,
207 Victor bolted from the security room and strutted down the hallway to
208 the reception desk. "What can we do for the big man pastor today?" If
209 you want, I can set your church up with a private crypto-currency
210 account."

211 "No thanks. But I do need to get a room on Thursday for a week or
212 so." Tom turned away from Victor; he always suspected that Victor
213 used the front desk security camera to listen in on conversations.

214 "So, I'm going to finally get to meet the wife." Victor Vee patted
215 Tom on the shoulder with his right hand; his left hand was wrapped up
216 with gauze.

217 "I don't need a room for my wife. The room is for my niece, Tina."

218 "Oh, what brings Tina to Lagos?"

219 "She is helping get my motorhome shipped into Tin Can Port. Tina
220 wants to see a few places while she is here. Maybe you can help?"

221 "Oh, what kind of places does Tina want to see?"

222 "The Lufasi Nature Center, the beach and some museums. Idogbe
223 my church handyman offered to take her up to see his Mom's
224 strawberry farm but that's probably not her thing."

225 "What about a Safari? The hotel has a few tour guides that we
226 work with." The nature center and museums weren't places Victor Vee
227 wanted to show anybody.

228 "Probably not for my niece. Tina's more the animal-rights, tree-
229 hugger type." Tom looked back over his shoulder at Victor. "But when
230 my friend Hank visits I'll check in with you. Hank's a big helicopter hog
231 hunter in Texas."

232 Hank was more than a feral game hunter in Texas. He owned the
233 largest cattle ranch in North America that was enclosed with just one
234 fence. Down in Mexico Hank was also known as the Flyby Coyote
235 Killer, smuggling immigrants across his ranch didn't end well for the
236 cartels.

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Thursday morning Tom expected a call to find out what terminal number the motorhome was being unloaded at. He had checked and found out that customs rarely opened vehicle containers. What Tom didn't know is that Tina hadn't renewed her passport and that could trigger an inspection of the container; since the motorhome wasn't registered in her name.

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Jacob stopped by, not necessarily to earn a few Kobo but mainly to be mentored by Tom. There was a mature bond forming between them. Jacob had just pulled himself up in the chair and was on his knees when he felt mechanical sound vibrations. Tom stood up and looked out the window. The horn blasting stopped. "What the hell?" Jacob read Tom's lips.

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Outside Tom unlocked the gate and pushed one panel open. Jacob used all his weight to push open the other panel sideways. The Asian driver followed Tom's hand signals and pulled the motorhome up over the curb and in between the apartment and church. The blasting horns from Frontage road subsided as traffic started to move again.

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Tina jumped out of the passenger door and did a 360 twirl. "Like wow! This place is more crammed up than LA."

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"Almost twenty million people live in Lagos." Tom guardedly watched the Asian driver get out from behind the wheel.

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Tina pointed at Jacob milling around the motorhome. "Like is that your little slave boy?"

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Normally Tom would have schooled anybody that referred Africans to slaves but Tina had grown up the typical Californian girl; blond and white seemed right to her. "That's Jacob; he's my mentee and helper."

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Tina didn't reply, she thought a mentee was an animal at the zoo. The driver came around the front of the Sprinter. "I'm Kenny Chen from Zhongnanhai. We spoke on the phone."

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"Thanks for delivering my motorhome. I wasn't looking forward to navigating the pot holes and muddy roads on Tin Can Island."

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"Like, that dirty harbor is nothing like the Long Beach harbor that my boyfriend Kevin Trask runs his trailer business from," Tina offered her two cents worth.

274 "Long Beach Port is owned and ran by the Communist Chinese
275 Party. That is what we want to do here; clean up and modernize Tin
276 Can Island." Kenny Chen wasn't supposed to speak about the goal and
277 desire for CCP world dominance.

278 Jacob had slowly worked himself around the motorhome and then
279 latched on to Tom's hand. "Jacob is mute and he has a ten year old
280 brother that is in school right now.

281 "Oh, so that mean Jacob can't talk?" Tina asked.

282 "Jacob lost his hearing from Malaria drugs. He can make verbal
283 sounds but can't communicate with most people."

284 "Malaria has been eradicated from China. That is another thing we
285 can do for Africa," Kenny Chen spoke with pride.

286 "That would be wonderful. But have you asked the hard working
287 Nigerians if they want China to re-colonize their country? You should
288 talk to Jacob's Dad about the CPC's proposed four dams on the Benue
289 River." Tom rubbed Jacob's full head of hair and then massaged the
290 back of his neck.

291 "Like could I do that? I've never felt an afro before." Tina reached
292 out toward Jacob's head.

293 Tom swatted her hand back. "Maybe after you get to know Jacob
294 and he says it okay."

295 "But he can't talk." Tina argued her one sided point.

296 "Jacob has curly hair, not an Afro!" Tom backed away. The
297 uninformed stereotyping words from Tina; along with Mr. Meng's
298 arrogant pride was too much. Tom opened the rear doors of the
299 Mercedes Sprinter and immediately had to hold his breath when strong
300 stench rolled out. Twenty six days of survival in less than 320 cubic
301 feet of living space wasn't healthy.

302 There were dirty dishes, greasy pots and a wok piled in the sink.
303 About a dozen black flies were circling a pile of damp bath towels
304 heaped in front of the bathroom door. The grey water tank had backed
305 up into the shower. Fortunately the black water tank had not over
306 flowed. The CCP had planned for that problem and had placed two
307 chemical toilets at the front of the steel forty foot steel cargo
308 container.

309 Tom slammed the door and looked at Tina. "Grab your stuff. I got
310 a hotel room reserved for you."

311 Tina opened the side compartment and unloaded three pieces of
312 matching Gucci luggage. "I hope this hotel has a spa. The salty air at
313 sea has been really really hard on my skin."

314 Tom looked at Kenny Chen. "Grab your stuff! We'll have to get you
315 a room too."

316 "No, I will to stay with the motorhome."

317 "Like hell you will. I'm going to get it cleaned and detailed. I didn't
318 know anybody would be living in it."

319 Mr. Chen opened the side door and grabbed a green army style
320 duffel bag. He didn't argue; unlike Tina he'd spent the entire trip in the
321 motorhome which was squeezed inside an altered forty foot shipping
322 container. At night he'd come out and amble among the maze of steel
323 boxes for fresh air and to exercise. His solitary training started just
324 before his eighth birthday, when his parents sent him off to the
325 Republic of China Military Academy in the Fengshan District on the
326 island of Taiwan.

327 The CCP slogan at that time in history was: **Have fewer children**
328 **raise more pigs.** To a youngster this meant a pig's life had more
329 value than a child. '*Honor thy father and thy mother*' was a
330 commandment that Kenny Chen never had the opportunity to learn or
331 to live by. At that young age he so wished to be a part of a connected
332 ancestry — not an orphan at a boarding school. Kenny never
333 celebrated his eighth birthday with his mother, his father nor his big
334 brother. From that time on he was a child of the state — to put self
335 over the CCP family was forbid.

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