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The Alderson Saints

Chapter One

By Jeff Jarrell

Mrs. Connery wouldn't take no for an answer. She wasn't pushy about it. She just kept on doubling what she was offering for me to come out and have a look around. Just come out she said. We need a smart guy here she said.

That's why I'm on a flight from Denver to Dallas in the middle of the summer. I packed short sleeved sport shirts as well as a suit and sport jackets. I wasn't quite sure what the dress code was in Dallas. I was hoping they were loosening up a little down there and golf shirts would be all I would need. Maybe sports jacket now and then.

Mrs. Connery wouldn't say how she got my name. I have only been an investigator for five years. I have helped some people find old lovers and have

found husbands with new lovers but had never been retained for anything like a murder investigation. I have been doing more investigating solely over the Internet. Before becoming an investigator, I was the senior pastor at one of the largest churches in America. You can't go to another church in the situation I was in so I decided to go to investigator school and get my license. I saw some crazy things in my years as a pastor but I'm amazed everyday at what I call the human spectacle while I'm on a case.

Mrs. Connery didn't want to go into specifics about the pastor at her church that had been murdered. She just said she heard that I might be able to find out what was behind his murder and maybe even help some of the church leaders with the transition into a new pastor. I told her that most homicides were handled by the local police force and that I'm sure her church would be all right. This was the last remark I made before she doubled my fee again and asked if I could fly out to Dallas on Friday.

On the trip down to Dallas was my first time to sit first-class in a MD-11. The seats were so far apart; I needed a stick to push my briefcase under the seat. I explored every gadget they had including the personal TV/VCR and leg rest. The forty-something all-business woman next to me glanced at me like I was some hillbilly on his first airplane ride. In reality, my butt has been in too many airplane seats since I started my career as an investigator.

I remarked that first class is really something on these MD-11's. She looked my direction, not at me, and acknowledged my comment. So she didn't want to talk. That's okay by me. I've never been that bold about sharing my faith on a

plane. I know some people that evangelize on planes – they say they have a captive audience for the length the trip. I usually don't like to make people feel uncomfortable.

Departing the plane in Dallas, I was almost baked alive in the jet-bridge. Not sure if the air conditioner was broke but it must have been 130 degree in here. I didn't expect it to be that hot. Denver was a cool 78 when I left with lows at night in the low 50's. I was thinking that I might not be able to get much jogging in here.

Taking the escalator down to the car rental bus, it doesn't seem that bad outside the terminal building. The bus stopped and people are trying to get on while other people are getting off. Sometimes, I have to really just shake my head at the way people act these days. Are they getting worse or am I just taking it harder?

Mrs. Connery gave me directions to her place from DFW. Take the south exit, go east on 183, exit Mockingbird, then proceed into HighLand Park. She says I can't miss it. It's the house on the corner of XXX and XXXX.

The traffic wasn't bad going that direction at 5:00 p.m. All the traffic on 183 was going the other way. The Cougar's air conditioner works well. It would be hard to sell a car here without air conditioning. I only noticed a few cars on the highway with their windows rolled down. Everyone else was hiding behind their tinted-windows inside their air-conditioned cars.

Mrs. Connery was correct, I could not have missed her place. I figured she had some money but nothing like this. Her property extended several blocks in

either direction. The fence line around the property is landscaped to the hilt with close-cropped golf-green grass, crepe merles, flowers, and Bradford pear trees.

I pull up to the gate. The windows to the guard shack are mirrors so I'm not sure if anyone is in there. There's no button or anything to press so I just wait a few minutes. I figure I'm being looked over and checked out. Finally an older guard that looks like a retired army general comes out and motions for me to roll down the window. He doesn't say anything, just looks at me with suspicion.

"I'm Teddy – Ted Powell. Mrs. Connery is expecting me."

The guard's expression doesn't change. "Who's car is this?" he asks.

"It's a rental". The guard still doesn't change his expression until I add "from Avis".

"I need to see some identification" he states.

I give him my driver's license and he goes back into the shack and comes out a few moments later with a German shepherd.

"Do you have one of those levers to pop the trunk?" he asks.

I reach down and find the button and the trunk pops. I watch as he and the dogs make their way around my car. I'm not sure if all Mrs. Connery's visitors get this same treatment or I just look suspicious.

He goes back in the shack and I wait a few minutes more for the gate to open. He comes back out with my license and says to follow the drive to the house. He also says don't get out of the car until I get to the front of the house.

The drive goes by fountains, gardens, and sport fields. I have never seen such beauty and extravagance. Everything blade of grass, shrub, and tree looks

like it was attended too personally by a professional designer. Then I see why he said not to get out of the car. Two Doberman pinchers are chasing my car. I caught them in my rear-view mirror going around a curve. Can't see them now because I think they are running directly behind my car and they are too low to see in the mirror. I wonder what I'm going to do when I get to the house.

Chapter Two

The house is magnificent. What I would call the drive up view has a high arch with several pillars trailing down on each side. The entrance has a long, external chandelier on a several golden chains. From the front, both sides of the house go off angled. Looks like more than twenty rooms on each side. It doesn't look like any of extended family will need to share bedrooms during the holidays.

I stop in the front. I haven't seen those dogs in awhile so I'm going to step out in faith that they are trained well enough not attack me here in the front. I lock the car door. That guard has me spooked about this whole thing.

While walking up to the door, I'm wondering if there is even a doorbell on a place like this. I don't think Mrs. Connery gets to many solicitors or unexpected guests. I knock on what sounds like a one-foot thick door. After a few minutes, an older lady with piercing dark blue eyes opens the door.

“Teddy? I’m Mrs. Connery. Won’t you please come in?” I follow her into the cool marbled hallway. “Welcome to Dallas. I hope you brought some cooler clothes than that hot ol’ suit. Everybody says it’s not true, but I think it’s getting hotter every year. When I was a young girl, we didn’t have air-conditioning. And you know? We all seemed to survive just fine. Now a’days, you just can’t go anywhere if it’s not air conditioned.”

I follow her through the expansive hallway into a great art-gallery type room. There are statues and paintings and antique furniture. I try to act like I’m not that impressed.

“This house was built in the 40’s without air-conditioning. It was designed to allow breezes and shade to keep it cool. We added the air in the 60’s. Cost more than the house did when we first built it. Let’s go in my art room. We can sit in here and talk. Did you bring something to write with?”

I’m still in awe of this place and I’m operating like schoolboy on his first date. “Yes ma’am – right here in my coat.”

“You’re going to have to take that thing off. Here, let me lay it right here.” She lays my sports coat across a sofa – something that looks like it came directly from some English castle in the early 16th century. She motions for me to sit by her on another antique looking chair – the kind that you always wish you could try out in a museum display.

Her “art room” over looks a garden through a gigantic picture window that looked like it was framed in cedars from Lebanon. There are paintings, sculptures, antiques, plants and flowers, professionally placed throughout the

entire room. Mrs. Connery was gracious enough to allow me to regain my balance and take in some of the beauty.

“I believe all art really reflects the Master Creator. Whether they want to believe it or not, God gave all these artists the talent they had to create these masterpieces. Some people just see expensive art in here. I see God’s hand.

“I have brought in all kinds of soft drinks, ice tea, water, and also some fresh lemonade I just made. I recommend the lemonade.”

“That sounds wonderful” remembering the jet bridge at the airport.

“You ready to get started?” she asks.

“Yes – fire away.”

“My late husband, Bill, and I were one of the founding members of Grace Community Church. I still remember meeting in a hotel’s ballroom for Sunday services until we got enough money together to buy some land and build a church. Of course, this was right during the time that Bill was developing his oil business and God was really blessing his work. Bill kept on giving wheelbarrows of money to build the church and God kept on blessing the holes that he was digging.

“Bill had a good heart. He was one of those men that come along once in a lifetime. He was after God’s own heart. A real spiritual giant. He had a good heart but one of his valves closed up and killed him a few years back. Most people at Grace respected him – not because he built about every building on that campus and supported almost every missionary that called Grace home, but because he was the most gentle and meek person you would ever want to meet. You know,

in the Beatitudes, Jesus says that the meek will inherit the earth. I learned what meekness was when I met my Bill – power under control.

“Anyway, since Bill died, we’ve had some different power struggles within our church. Frank Barclay was a great senior pastor – he really had a gift of teaching and prophecy. The elders are also all God-fearing men with a head on their shoulders. The different singles’ and children’s pastors and the support staff are all very talented and mean well.”

I take a deep breath and state, “I guess that I don’t see how the elders or the church staff have anything to do with the pastor’s murder. I looked up the newspaper articles about this case and the police have a pretty strong case against his wife. I read that they might even have some type of confession from her.”

“The problem is that God has used Grace Community Church so mightily to set people free, not just in Dallas but around the world, that the enemy is attacking us at our core. And I believe he might have used some jealousy and divisions within our church leaders to carry out his plans. There is also a piece I’m leaving out that you’ll have to investigate.”

There always is. There’s always more to the story. The parts that get left out are usually the most important ones. “What piece is that Mrs. Connery?” I ask.

“I’ve been mentoring a young lady for years. Her name is Vicki Cooper. She’s Jim Mason’s daughter. If you remember, Jim Mason is the head of the elder board. Anyway, Vicki came to me and said that she’s concerned for her father’s

life. Apparently her father had several secret meetings with Pastor Barclay right before his death.”

She pauses to let this sink in. I’m still trying to connect the dots here and figure out why an older lady with this kind of wealth is so concerned about this church. I also try to figure out if Mrs. Connery is completely sane or just a very rich widow that is losing her mind.

“So you’re thinking that someone in the church killed the pastor?”

“I’m just saying that before Frank’s untimely death, our church was experiencing turmoil from within. Nobody agreed with each other, several divisions were forming, and it was starting to get real nasty. Some people loved Pastor Barclay, some people didn’t mind him, and some others hated him. I thought he had a gift for teaching. He even taught this old girl something every now and then. But he wasn’t real dynamic. Most of the leaders felt he wasn’t that good on television. The elders are right – he’s not charismatic. He’s very low-key but shares some very powerful messages that God has revealed to him.

“It was a tough time for our church. The membership voted in the senior pastor but some elders – especially one in particular, Jim Mason, was trying everything he could do to get him to step down. Jim has been an elder for years. He used to be one of my husband’s partners. He’s more or less running things right now at Grace. Of course, our by-laws are set up that most things require a vote but most of the other elders usually go along with what Jim Mason wants.

“You know I don’t like to judge anyone. But Jim doesn’t seem to me to have that close intimacy with God that is reflected in a lot of other believers I know.

Now that Jim is running things, I wouldn't put it past Satan to use him to accomplish his purposes.

"So you want me to investigate Frank Barclay's murder from the perspective that someone from within your church might have had him killed?" I ask, batting my eyelids in a manner that would convey some healthy skepticism.

"No." She says and pauses for a long time. She looks straight into my eyes with her piercing blue eyes. "No, I don't want you to investigate like that. I want you to investigate and find the truth in who killed him."

"What about his wife? Do you have reason to believe that his wife did not commit the crime?"

"That's a good question. As you know or will know soon, his wife, Allison, is mentally ill. She is a paranoid schizophrenia. She very well might have killed Frank. The police seem to think so."

I had heard about schizophrenic from a psychology class I took as an undergraduate. I wasn't real sure how real all this mental illness stuff you hear about in the press is true though. Most crimes you hear about on the news that involve murders that are mentally ill; they commit suicide right before the police move in to capture them. I've always thought that the mentally ill ones would stick around and face the punishment.

"Do you know anything about her illness? Things like how long she had it, has she been violent before? And why she would want to kill her husband I guess would be a good question."

“I never really got to know Allison that well. She wasn’t your typical preacher’s wife. She wasn’t an entertainer in her home. Some of the ladies that visited her home said that it looked like she could use a maid. She would also make some strange remarks sometimes that kept most of the congregation at a distance from her.” Mrs. Connery moves over to the window and stares out into the garden.

“One thing that concerns me and the police is that she thought her husband was having an affair with several of the women in the church. She even made a death threat to one of the ladies in our church when she called the pastor’s home late one night in an emergency.”

“So why don’t you agree with the police that the Allison killed her husband. I mean I want work with you but I don’t just want to take you money if there is overwhelming evidence that his wife killed him. I know that’s hard to believe but most murders happen between family members if you can believe that.”

“Did you know that Frank and Allison have two kids? What do you think is going to happen to them now that their daddy is dead and their mom is in the psychiatric ward in the downtown jail? All I’m doing is making sure that I’m doing the right thing by Frank. I’m sure if his wife didn’t kill him, he would want the truth to come out.”

“That’s very generous of you, seeing that you’ll never see him again. This side of heaven that is.” I said.

“I think that you’ll find that this isn’t such a open and shut case. There were some very intense and emotional issues brewing the last year before his death. He was traveling a lot and meeting all kinds of different people. He was also

trying to get an outreach going that would minister to the gays, people in the occult, and then the “artsy” crowd. He was coming under extreme criticism for those plans. Most people were upset that he would even think of exposing the church to such dangerous influences.”

“How far did he get with these different programs? Did they get off the ground or what?”

“I’m not sure. I know that he really had a heart for the disenfranchised. He felt that all they needed is a little love and understanding. That their major problem had been a lifetime filled with rejection. To Pastor Barclay, he thought the best way to minister to these groups was to be their friend. To show genuine love and compassion for them. He even attended a “wedding” of a gay man that he had befriended. Let me tell you, that didn’t go over well on the Amen Corner.”

“Not gone over well enough to get him murdered? It’s been some years since I was a pastor but usually disagreements like this don’t end in murder.”

“As I mentioned, Satan is a murderer and he used someone to carry out his plans. I’m not sure whom it is but I would like to find out. If it is his wife, so be it. All I know is there is dark, demonic forces trying to prevent us from spreading the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ and I’m willing to spend some money to prevent any further destruction,”

“As I mentioned on the phone, I’m not a licensed investigator in the State of Texas. I’m not sure how much access I’ll have.”

“I’m sure you’ll do just fine Teddy.”

“Thank you ma’am.”

Chapter 3

Before I flew out to Dallas, Mrs. Connery insisted that she would make the hotel arrangements for me. She said she wanted me to be comfortable so I could do a good job. The hotel she arranged was in Las Colinas, a plush business district between Dallas and the airport, and it's right on a lake. Driving up to the hotel Saturday night, I knew she was right; I would be very comfortable there.

When I woke up Sunday morning, I figured I could find some class of trail around the lake for a nice run. I put on my running gear, go through the lobby, out into the hot humid morning, turn right out of the hotel and head up Las Colinas Blvd. Even though there are some residential units in Las Colinas, the street is deserted this time of morning.

The humidity is oppressive. I feel like I'm out of shape but I know it's just because there isn't much air to breathe in all this humidity. I thought that running at high altitude like I do would prepare me better for running here. I'm not sure if I'm going to make it around this lake.

I deduced real soon that there isn't a formal walking/running path around the lake and just resolve to run in the street around the lake. After a mile or so, I see a guy on a bicycle on what looks like a cement trail through the woods. I cut across a field and start heading on the trail. I pass by a sign that says "Texas

State Record Oak”. I don’t stop because I’m keeping my fingers crossed that there is going to be a water fountain soon.

The trail dead-ends right into a creek. I turn around and head back to the hotel. I have to get there in time to stop sweating and get ready to visit Grace Community Church. I want to see an entire service and hopefully talk to a few of the elders.

Mrs. Connery said she was going to work on getting me access to the elders under the guise of some type of transitional consultant. Actually, that’s not really far from the truth since when I was asked to step down from my position of senior pastor at one of the largest churches in the United States, I did some work as a recruiter for the religious community. I would match seminary graduates with different church staffs. Of course, I wouldn’t make much of a cut on each placement so that’s when I took a night course on investigating.

I have spent many hours at auto accident sites, workmen’s compensation accident sites, interviewing witnesses, and waiting on the husband to leave his lover’s apartment. My first big case to work on was when an extremely wealthy man’s wife disappeared. After I found out where she went and why, I started to get some business from other rich and famous people. That’s how I suspect Mrs. Connery got my name but she wouldn’t say.

Grace Community Church is situated off Central Expressway near Mockingbird Lane. You can just see a simple sign and part of the side of the sanctuary from the street. Most of the campus is tucked away between large Live Oak trees away from Mockingbird Lane. I drive around the campus for awhile,

getting a feel for the layout. An older guy that is directing traffic motions for me to pull right in to an empty parking place.

In the parking lot, there are families, couples, and singles all getting out their notebooks and Bibles and heading to church and Sunday school. Nobody seems to know each other. Lot's of Ford Expeditions, Lexus', and Hondas. Mostly middle to upper class white folk. I've seen this model before: all the beautiful people come to church and the less fortunate, disenfranchised stay at home and watch on television.

An older gentleman greets me at the door to the sanctuary and he gives me a bulletin. I go sit on the side near the front so I can watch the facial expressions the pastor, congregation, and whatever church officials are in attendance. The bulletin has your normal announcements: Baby Dedications next week, Missions Trip, Women's Breakfast, All-Church Town Hall meeting in two weeks.

All pretty standard announcements. The Town Hall meeting is probably about the pastor search committee. Search committees are interesting organizations because there is usually five or ten people that agree to anything that the leader wants to do. They just want to get back home to their families or football.

Grace Community is designed like most church sanctuaries around the country: high ceilings, oak pews, carpeted stairs up to the stage, and an oak choir section in the back. Everyone looks like they are in their places. The piano player, the organist, the choir are all set. After some problems that the sound technician sorts out, everyone takes their place in the front, the cameras start to roll, the choir stands up and we're off!

Nice traditional hymn's with piano and organ. Elder John Demore comes to the microphone and opens in prayer. He goes back and sits down in the "Amen Corner", the row of chairs behind the pulpit where the church leadership sits. Elder John Demore leaves a seat empty between him and their interim pastor, Mark Campbell.

After a South American sounding song, Elder John Demore goes back to the microphone and makes the announcements. When he comes to the Town Hall meeting, he sounds as matter-of-fact about it as possible. Make it if you can he says. The elders want to get you feedback on several issues affecting the church; including the new parking lot and the pastoral search committee.

Elder Jody Roberts delivers a strong sermon on Psalm ??? about mounting up with eagle's wings. He points out that eagles waterproof their wings every morning so they'll be ready for the day's hunt. He also pointed out that when an eagle sees some prey, they don't take their eyes off of it.

I'm thinking why do they need a pastor? These guest speakers usually do a great job. Each elder has at least two good sermons in him and they can always tap a lot of talent at of the local seminary. Good senior pastors that everyone can agree on are hard to find. Very few preachers I have ever seen are wise, consistently inspired, and charismatic. Usually they only have two of the three. I've seen some charismatic and consistently inspired preachers that burned up because they were foolish. I've seen some wise and charismatic preachers that were shallow and soon lost support.

After the service I watch the interactions that the elders, especially Jim Mason, have with other and the congregation. The elders that were sitting next to Elder Jim Mason sprang up and were gone before the last word of the benediction. Some people stop by to shake the Elder Robert's hand. He looks a little relieved that it's over. I guess that waterproofing he did this morning worked.

I catch up with Elder Jim Mason as he is walking towards the exit. "Mr. Mason, I'm Teddy Powell. Mrs. Connery said she was going to be contacting you about me." That got his attention. He turned and looked sternly in my eyes. He definitely sized me up. He thrust his hand out and shook my hand. His whole demeanor changed and positioned his body a little sideways in a defensive posture. "I haven't talked to Mrs. Connery lately. What did you say your name was again? Teddy?"

"Yeah, Teddy Powell. The name just stuck." I said, smiling and trying to ease some tension. He started walking toward the door and I followed behind. "I'm here from Denver looking into Frank's murder. I'm wondering if I can talk to you privately."

"Well Teddy, I haven't heard from Mrs. Connery for awhile. If she tried to call yesterday, I'm sure that I wouldn't have received her message. I've been out of town on business and just got back into town yesterday afternoon." He said while he continued to walk towards the parking lot.

"Can we meet anytime tomorrow? I just have some questions that I would like to ask. We can work around your schedule."

Elder Jim Mason unlocks his car and before he gets in asks me who I am again. I tell him that I'm working for Mrs. Connery investigating Frank's murder and he tells me that he's busy all week and that he's already given his statement to the police. He shuts the car door and drives off.

I'm standing out in the parking lot in the late morning sun watching all the families get into their SUV's and vans and drive off to Sunday lunch. The thought crosses my mind that there is more to this than Mrs. Connery let on to yesterday.

Chapter 4

I knew I was over my head in this one when I was heading over to the Barclay's residence where different members of the church were taking care of the two kids. This was one of Allison's requests that Mrs. Connery helped coordinate.

The house was a pretty nice custom home on the end of a cul-de-sac of west of the church near Northwest Highway and Midway. The yard was extremely well

maintained. Mrs. Connery said that the men of the church were coordinating keeping the maintenance on the yard and house up.

I wasn't really sure what I was looking for as I drove up and parked in the front. A bike with training wheels was on the front sidewalk. Somebody peeked through the curtains in the front room. I ring the doorbell and this sweet little precious blonde girl answers the door.

"Are you a policeman? Are you going to bring my mommy back?" she asks me before I have a chance to say anything.

"You must be Julie. I've heard a lot about you." I said. She lights up and asks me if I knew she that she was a dancer. "No, I didn't know that. You must be a very talented young lady." I said following her into the front room.

"Where is your babysitter?" I asked thinking it would might have been better to wait outside before coming into the house.

"Oh, she's on the phone. She's always on the phone. She's got a boyfriend." She says as she turns up a rap song on the CD player and shows me her dance routine. I look around the front room. I notice police tape at the entrance to the dining room. Julie sees me looking at the dining room and says we're not supposed to go in there. There is still a bloodstain on the wooden floor. It appears that the pastor didn't move from the place where he got shot since the stain was pretty much contained in one small area.

I could hear talking from the back of the house so I walk down the hall to the kitchen. When I appear in the doorway, the babysitter gasps and says that I

scared her to death. I introduce myself as a private investigator and that I'm just looking around.

"Jake is out with his friends playing baseball." She says like she wants me to know that she's got everything accounted for. "My dad is coming over to spend the night with us tonight." She said.

"What's your name and did you know Pastor Barclay?" I ask.

"Sure. Everybody knew Pastor Barclay. He was real cool. He always wanted to make sure the younger crowd was happy. He'd go on most of our activities. He was a real good volleyball player. He was always cracking jokes. I'm Karen."

"Do you know why anyone would want to kill him?" Karen stepped back a step before answering. "I thought his wife did it. That's what I heard," she said slowly.

"Did you know his wife, Allison Barclay?"

"No not really. She wasn't around much. I saw her a few times at church. She was very quite. She was what we call 'drop dead gorgeous'. Too bad she's where she is now." Karen says while looking at the phone like she needs to get back on it.

"Do you mind if I look around the bedroom?"

"Help yourself. I have to make a call."

The master bedroom was your typical setup with a queen-sized bed and two nightstands. One nightstand had the clock and telephone. Probably Frank's side. I look in the drawer and find tissue, some books, and assorted over-the-counter allergy medication.

The other nightstand had bottles and bottles of prescription medication. All kinds of anti-depressants and sleep aids. The name on all the labels was Allison Barclay. Some of the dates on the bottles went back a couple of years. I thought that it was pretty dangerous having these drugs out like this with that sweet little Julie running around.

Next to the master bedroom was a small bedroom that was setup for an office. It had a computer and two bookcases filled with Christian how-to and some fiction. There were some interesting books on the desk: Hacking for Dummies, Cuckoo's Egg, Kevin Poulson, etc. It seemed strange that a minister of the Gospel would be reading books on hacking computers.

The desk drawers contained tape, stamps, calculator, a Dallas Cowboy's schedule from two years ago, and some bank statements. I didn't feel right looking too closely at the statements but from a quick glance, the entries looked typical.

"So, you're going through the drawers? Karen the babysitter asks right when I'm putting the last statement back in the drawer. "Talking about scaring somebody," I say to turn the tables, "you can't walk up behind an old codger like me and scare him like that. You're lucky I didn't have a heart attack right here in this bedroom." I said, winking at her.

"You're like my Uncle Jim. He always says he's an old codger but he really looks alright."

“Well, Karen, thank you I guess.” I said while getting up from the desk and walking past her toward the front room. “Are you going to be here this week?”

“I’m not sure what the plans are. I think me parents were trying to get someone else for next week.”

“Well, I really appreciate you letting me look around. Are you going to be here tomorrow?”

“Yeah, I think I’ll be here tomorrow for sure. I’m just not sure about after that.”

Chapter Five

Lester Cummings, Allison Barclay’s lawyer, didn’t seem to mind me getting involved in the case. In fact, Mrs. Connery was paying his fees as well. Lester Cummings has been a long time member of Grace Community and knew Frank Barclay personally. Getting in to see Allison Barclay in the Dallas County Jail’s psychiatric wing was going to be an easier task with her lawyer along. Lester would just sign me in as one of his aides. If it weren’t for Lester, I would have to declare myself a journalist. That’s one secret I learned from the Private

Investigator class: anyone can be a journalist. I have a monthly webzine that I do about new investigative methods.

The hard part was actually getting Allison to agree to talk with me. That was almost impossible. Mrs. Connery had a few women from the church talk her into it. I finally got the go-ahead and planned to meet Lester at his downtown office Wednesday morning and we'd just go over to the jail together from there.

Lester's downtown Dallas office wasn't anything like I had it pictured. It was in the low-rent area where there were loiters milling around. His office was located inside a bail bonds office but had it's own separate entrance. You first enter a small reception room with three chairs and coffee table. Lester's door with his name on it is closed. I knock on the door and hear some rustling of papers.

Lester says for me to come in.

Lester is peering out from behind stacks and stacks of papers. The first thing you notice about Lester is his long curly brown hair. It's not tight curls but looser curls like you have when you're a baby. His long hair doesn't come down to his shoulders. It frames his head like a large brown helmet. He has on thick, round glasses that match the color of his hair. His long sleeved white shirt is wrinkled and the sleeves are rolled half way up his skinny and smooth arms. His tie is loosened at the collar and he has about five long chin hairs that have been fashioned into a goatee.

His voice is surprisingly deep. "You're here about Allison Barclay." He shuffles digs through some papers on his desk. "Tragic really. Insanity is really more common than you think. I see it all the time."

I'm still studying Lester. I don't want to show I agree with him. "Has she met with a psychiatrist," I ask.

He picks up stapled document and starts reading it at the same time he's talking to me. "The insanity defense is hard to prove. She'll have to admit doing it. I usually don't recommend to my clients to try it. It's a gamble."

"When does she have to plea? Is she competent enough to know what she's doing?" I ask.

"We better get over there. I have to be in court this afternoon." He says and gets up and puts on his jacket. "You're not armed are you?"

On the way out, he stops and turns to me. "In Texas, a jury of your peers has to say whether or not you're competent to stand trial. The District Attorney in this case is adverse to the insanity plea. He's gotten burned by it before and usually always fights us in these competency hearings.

The county jail in Dallas is a modern looking facility right off of Stemmons Expressway near downtown. The parking lot on this Wednesday morning was full of older cars. Several cars had full families in them waiting on loved ones to be released. Once you enter the building, you go through a metal detector and then enter a holding room one at a time. The holding room has surveillance cameras to give you a look over. A serious sounding voice comes over the room's speakers and says "State your business". Lester informs the cameras of whom we are and whom it is we want to see. After several minutes, I hear a click and the voice says "Enter through the gray door".

The gray door opened into a waiting area where upwards of fifty people were in all different stages of recompose on couches and chairs. We just stood around for awhile and heard several names called. Once they called your name, you would go to the desk and check-in. Then they would tell you which visiting area you were supposed to go to.

We waited for about an hour before they called Lester's name. Since Allison Barclay was being held on a violent charge, the meeting would take place with a glass divider between us. We sat in the booth for an additional fifteen minutes before they escorted Allison into her side of the booth. The female jailer was about five feet tall and went about two hundred pounds.

My first impression of Allison was that she needed some sleep. Her eyes had dark circles around them. She shuffled up to the chair, pulled it out with some effort, and sat down. Her hair hung down to her shoulders and she barely kept it pushed off her face. Her dark roots were slowly overtaking her blonde hair. The Dallas County Jail standard issue orange jump suit engulfed her small frame. I noticed that she had a hospital band on her skinny wrist that was barely sticking out of the half-sleeved suit.

Lester motioned for her to pick up the phone at the same time I did.

"Hi Allison, I'm Teddy. I'm a friend of Mrs. Connery's," I said smiling.

She just nods her head in acknowledgment, closes her eyes, and falls asleep for a second. She wakes up when her head started to drop.

“Have you not been sleeping well?”

Her expression changes slightly, like she appreciated my concern and shakes her head no.

“I met your kids the other day. Well I mean, I met Julie. She sure is a cute little ol’ something.”

She nods. This is going to be harder than I expected. I start to wonder if they got her too drugged up to do much good. I decide to get straight to the point.

“Did you kill your husband?”

Her expression doesn’t change. She puts the phone next to her other ear. “Marsha says that I don’t belong in here. They are listening to us.” She makes a wide sweep with her banded wrist. “They listen to everything.”

“I know. But do you know who killed your husband?” I ask and just wait. She looks straight at me with her hollow, dark eyes.

“They know everything.” She whispers.

“Who’s they?”

“Don’t let them know your name. They can’t listen to you if they don’t know your name.”

“Who’s they?”

She becomes extremely agitated. She starts looking around and points behind me to the camera. She lays the phone down, gets up, and walks to the door behind her and knocks. The female jailer opens the door and leads her off.

Chapter 6

I catch a Texas Ranger's Wednesday evening. I had heard about The BallPark in Arlington and wanted to see how it stacked up next to Coors Field in Denver. When I got to the Ballpark around six, I asked for the cheap seats in the shade. She put me near right field above the "Homerun Porch".

Talk about your All-American past-time, I have never seen so many kids with their gloves on sitting next to their dads – all the while eating cotton candy and nachos. It was "Bat" night, which means all the kids received a miniature bat to bang on the seats and then club to death the neighborhood cat when they get home.

I've struggled with alcohol prohibition since I became a follower of Jesus. There's that verse that says don't get drunk with wine but filled with the Spirit. But the Scriptures also have Jesus creating wine out of water and drinking wine during the Last Supper.

I figure if I only stick to two beers, I'm all right. When I was a full-time pastor, I wouldn't drink any alcohol so I wouldn't start any tongues wagging. But since then, I try to be discreet about it and I limit myself to two.

Of course, tonight, I limit myself to two large beers in those gigantic souvenir cups. I feel that loosening of the stress and the numbness of the brain stem about half way through my second beer.

I decide to call my wife in Denver from my cell phone during the seventh-inning stretch. I know she usually starts bedding down around 10:00 P.M. and I didn't want to call too late.

"Hello hon. How's it going?"

"I was wondering if you were going to call."

"I'm at a baseball game." The minute I said that I knew it was the wrong thing to say.

"You're always having such a good time on your road trips".

"That's just what it sounds like sometimes. I just had some time to kill and thought I would check out this new stadium. It's similar to the stadium the Rockies play in; maybe a little cleaner. "

"Are you with anyone?"

"No. I just came out by myself. Got a single up here in the cheap seats. Have a pretty easy day tomorrow so I don't have to be in bed anytime soon." Another sentence that could be turned against me.

“I’m really not feeling that well. Why don’t you call me back tomorrow?”

“What’s wrong?” I remember the days that I would run get a Kleenex and hold it while she blew her nose when she sneezed. Now, I’m more likely to express frustration and impatience with any sign of physical ailments.

“Just have one of those headaches.” Those headaches are killing our marriage if you ask me. I know during the course of a lifetime together that things like this will come up. But come on God, I have needs too don’t I? You created me; You know everything about me.

“Did you take your medicine?”

“It doesn’t help. It just makes me nauseous.” Can’t I have a normal life with a normal wife that we can go through one whole week together without major physical problems?

“Maybe you should go back to the doctors and see if there is something else. You know, something stronger.”

“This is the third doctor I’ve seen. I’m starting to believe that the only cure for me is the guillotine”.

“Don’t talk like that. You scare me. How do you think I’m supposed to feel out on the road like this and not knowing if you’re working on a plan like that?”

“I’m not going to do anything. I wouldn’t want to make it that easy for you.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“You know that you would get re-married to someone that didn’t have all the problems I have.”

“We’ve come a long way. Do you remember when we were a model couple – I was the senior pastor and you were the perfect wife? Now look at us – I’m away from home getting drunk at a baseball game and you’re home delusional and suicidal. How did we ever get like this?”

“You know when it all started.”

“I can’t believe you even bring that up now”.

“You’re the one that started the whole thing. I was happy. I thought you were too. We had everything we worked all of our lives for. That all ended when I first heard about Sharon.”

“I thought you have forgiven me and we agreed to move on. Why do you have to always bring that up? Are we ever going to be able to get over it?”

“I used to trust you. Now that you are on the road so much, you wouldn’t believe the ideas that go through me head. I’m going to suffer a break-down just wondering”.

I have always used the “turn the tables” tactic to great advantage: “What about you and Bruce. It seems that maybe I shouldn’t trust you either. I know that he works out of his house and you’re spending a lot of time over there.” Bruce is our single neighbor that has become an unwelcome friend of the family.

“Where’d that come from?”

“It’s just that re-decorating project of yours over there seems to have been going on for way too long.”

“He likes my work. Do you want me to tell him I can’t work with him anymore because my husband is jealous?”

My flanking strategy didn't work as well as I had planned. "No. I shouldn't have brought it up. Listen, it's hard for me to hear you over the game like this. I'll call you tomorrow. Okay?"

Okay."

"Goodnight."

She hung up before I could tell her I loved her. That's an issue we're both struggling with. Are we still in love? Does she still love me? Do I still love her?

Chapter 7

My message light was on in my room when I got back from the game. It was Mrs. Connery. She wanted to let me know that she had arranged for me to meet with some of the elders from Grace Community Church. The meeting was to be Thursday evening at Jim Mason's house.

Then I finally woke up Thursday morning; I had a tinge of a hangover. I rationalized that the hot and humid weather made me dehydrated. Nothing that a nice morning run won't take care.

The run around Las Colinas went a little better since I found a path. Up to the mustangs, turn right, stay in the grass field so I'm not run over by someone late

to work, and over to the recreational path that ends suddenly a few miles away. It wasn't a whole lot cooler than it was at the game the night before. I lost most of the fluid in my system before returning to the hotel. I'm hoping that I got rid of the nachos and beer as well.

I went back to the room and started on my organization chart for Grace Community Church. I figured if there were power struggles going on as Mrs. Connery thinks, it would be easier to visualize who would be getting pinched by looking at an organizational chart. I like to start with the decision-makers and then pencil in the influencers. There really aren't that many decision-makers in any organization. The decision-makers are usually a close knit group that makes up the "inner circle".

I put Mrs. Connery, Jim Mason, and Pastor Barclay in the inner to start with the rest of the elder board as "influencers" Tonight I'll be better able to tell if any of the other elders are in the inner circle.

Jim Mason's house is also in the exclusive Highland Park area of Dallas. Just north of Southern Methodist University on University. When I arrived, Jim Mason's beautiful wife, Pat, met me at the door with a smile and a handshake. "You must be Teddy Powell. I'm Pat Mason, Jim's wife." She offered me her well-manicured hand. As I shook her hand I thought that she was one of those rare women that are extremely attractive when they young and grow more beautiful in grace and wisdom as they age. Most women work harder on keeping their looks than they do growing in love, compassion and usually end up less attractive for their efforts.

“You have a lovely home here” I remark while following Mrs. Mason through the hallway, past the professionally decorated living areas.

“Thank you.” Is all that she said with a little frown that I took was disappointment with such a common remark.

She led me to Jim’s office/board room that was appointed with dark mahogany paneling and bookshelves, a large executive desk, and a boardroom table that looked like it was out of a Fortune 100 company. There were already several men gathered around the table.

“Hello Teddy. I’m Jim.” Jim walks forward, firmly shakes my hand, and holds on to it as he looks through his dark rimmed glasses into my eyes for at least fifteen seconds. He still had on a shirt and tie at this hour. Perfectly styled white hair topped his tall, medium frame.

I step to the side and around Jim to loose Jim’s hand and eyes from mine. I go around the room shaking hands and Jim narrates. “This is Joe Simmonds. Neil Pritchard, Stan King, and Bob Jones.” I shake hands with each on of them. The rest of the guys seem warmer and less intimidating than Jim does.

“Well, let’s go ahead and have a seat. As you all know, Teddy here is a investigator that was hired by Mrs. Connery to help find out if there was any foul-play involved with the Barclay thing.” Jim says while with a little tinge of anger or annoyance in his voice.

“I just have to say Teddy, that we have been elected by the good people of Grace to carry-out their church’s business. I’ve only agreed to this meeting for

you to meet us and show you that we are all God-fearing men here; wanting to carry out the obligations of our office as elders of Grace.”

“I’m sorry that Mrs. Connery didn’t make her self clear to you. Mrs. Connery contacted me because she believes that Allison Barclay might be innocent of murdering her husband and wants to see the real murderer revealed. I’m just asking your help in determining if Frank had any enemies or was involved in anything that might have cost him his life.”

During our discussion, several more elders joined our group including Scott Woolf, Jerry Henderson, and Steven Hyde. All eyes were on Jim Mason.

“What makes you think that you won’t come to the same conclusion as the police? That Allison shot her husband” Jim finally asked. “Well, that’s a conclusion that I might come to. I have to get the facts in first.” I answer. The silence was deafening while all eyes turned on me. Eyes that were defensive, unfriendly, and doubting.

Now comes my sales pitch. “I specialize in problem solving. I like to take a situation like this and get all the why’s answered. Why did he get killed? Why now? Why in his home? After I get all the why’s answered, I write a pretty extensive report on my findings that can be presented to the law enforcement agencies for follow-up. I am uniquely equipped for this job because God gave me a gift of problem solving and also I know people real well. During my 10 years as a senior pastor, I learned so much about the human condition that I should write a book. Or several.”

“You were a senior pastor?” Jim asks.

“Back in Denver several years ago. Had some family issues and had to step down.” I said. All the elders turned their gaze back to Jim. Waiting for him to make the next move.

“Well, as I stated. We’re just here doing our congregation’s business. We weren’t exactly seeing everything eye to eye with Frank but I can assure you, we didn’t have him knocked off.” Most of the men chuckle. “Frank was a good man. Our ministry was expanding. If you look at our ratings, our viewership is up over ten percent and we’re adding new stations and times every day. Also, our budget is the highest it has ever been and is being sustained by the increased giving levels.”

“What was the problem then? With Frank?” I ask.

“That’s not so simple of an answer. His style wasn’t that dynamic. He really didn’t do well on television. Our associate pastor did most of the television work. He also wanted to get into these different outreach programs that would only hurt the church. Don’t you guys agree with me? That it would hurt the church?” It looked like most of the elders agreed.

“What type of outreach programs with hurt the church?” I asked.

“Well, you know, gays and the after midnight crowd down in the arts district. That kind of thing.” He said in a tone that was a little softer so no one could hear from outside the room. “Don’t get me wrong, I believe Jesus loves them too, but this is a family church.”

“I take it that these outreach programs didn’t get off the ground then?”

“Well, he hired a staff member to start sensitivity training classes. They would watch these films in these classes to learn how to relate to gays and lesbians. Only a few of those classes went on before he was murdered. After that, I think they have been stopped altogether which is the best thing for our church. “Don’t you guys agree?” All the elders agree with Jim. Except the Bob Jones, the elder that Mrs. Connery said was just elected. Mrs. Connery said that she didn’t know how he got on the ballot since Jim Mason usually hand picks the elder board candidates. Bob Jones is just sitting there, taking it all in. Weighing what each man says. Maybe this is the first time he has even heard that there were any problems in the church.

“As I was saying Teddy, we are elected by the church to carry out the congregation’s directives for Grace. We help implement programs that the church has decided on. We are also responsible for all financial dealings that the church has. We’re responsible but we can’t spend a dime that the church doesn’t tell us to.”

He gets some agreement and laughter from the other elders.

“What I’m saying here is that we’re not authorized to bring in a private investigator like yourself without going before the church and asking for the additional funds to be allocated.”

“Mrs. Connery is paying my fee.” I say quickly and wave my hand meaning that it is not an issue. I don’t want him to get sidetracked now.

“Well, even if that is the case, we still might have to get approval from the congregation to allow a private investigator into our church business. What do you guys think?”

It’s hard asking a bunch of yes-men a question like this when the right answer isn’t that clear. The other elders didn’t respond before I said:

“I can understand your need for confidentiality. How about if I just have access to you, Jim. No need to involve anyone else. As I gather my information and more questions come up, I’ll pass them by you. Do you think that would be acceptable?” Silence. All eyes are back on Jim Mason.

“What would you guys think about one of us working with Teddy on this? I guess if it would help Allison Barclay, I don’t think there would be any harm in that.”

Finally, a question they have the right answer to.

“No. I don’t see a problem with that. Just as long everything remains confidential,” Neil Pritchard added.

“Okay.” Jim says, excusing me from the meeting. “Can you think of anything else you need from us before we get on with the rest of our business?”

“No. Not right now. I’m sure I’ll have plenty of questions later. Let me meet with you a few times and we’ll go from there. Can I have your telephone numbers?”

“Sure. Here’s my office number. Just call Sue. She handles all of my time.”

“What’s your availability looking like the rest of this week? Is it better to meet during the day or evening?”

“You’ll have to talk to Sue. I’m not sure what’s going on this week. I know I’ll probably be out West a few days this week.”

“Okay, I’ll just call her tomorrow. Well, goodnight gentlemen. I’ll be in touch. Thank you for your time.”

Walking down the hall to the front door, I noticed a portrait of a nice-looking woman hanging on the wall. She had long brown hair and dark eyes. She was pretty enough for me to stop and look at her.

“That’s my daughter” Mrs. Mason startled me by walking up behind me.

“She’s very pretty, Mrs. Mason. Goodnight”

“Good night Mr. Powell.” She says with a smirk likes she can read my mind.

Chapter 8

The next morning’s run I decided to go out for an hour. When I got back to the room, I sat out on the patio until I quit sweating. Before I had a chance to get into

the shower, the phone rings. It's a woman that has a very nice voice. Sounds like a television news anchor. At first I think its Mrs. Mason, Jim Mason's wife. I'm close. "My name is Vicky. I understand that you are here in Dallas working for Mrs. Connery."

That's a tough one. Do I agree and if I don't, what do I say?

"I'm sorry, who is this again?"

"My name is Vicky Wells. I think I have some information that could be of use to you."

There she goes again. Putting me in an awkward position of admitting I have been retained to work with Mrs. Connery.

"Ms. Wells, I'm afraid I don't understand."

Silence.

"I'm Jim Mason's daughter and I think there are some things you should know that are going on around here."

Bingo. This is getting more interesting all the time.

"What's your phone number Ms. Wells. I'll have to call you back later."

"It's Vicky. 214-364-3098. Don't leave a message."

I'll have to check on Vicky Wells with Mrs. Connery during my lunch with her today.

I'm planning to go directly to the church this morning and just show up at Pastor Barclay's office. I want to see if anything on his desk would give me any clue to what happened. Also, it will allow me to talk to any staff members that might be around.

There are only a few cars in the church lot, as you would expect on a summer Tuesday. It's going to be another scorcher today in Dallas. I'm glad I don't have far to walk to the administrative offices.

I enter the side door and an older lady looks up from behind the reception desk.

"Hi there. Man it's hot."

"Sure is. My I help you?"

"Yes. My name is Teddy Powell. I'm an investigator." I show her my investigator's credentials from Colorado.

"Oh. I mean, we've already given our statements to the police. I'm not sure what else we could do?"

"I have been hired by Mrs. Connery. She just wants to make sure that Allison Barclay isn't being suspected in error."

"Oh, I bet she did it alright. I don't know if you have heard by now but that woman was crazy. She threatened to kill me one time. That scared me so bad that I almost had to quit here. I started to suffer anxiety attacks and had to get some medicine."

"She threatened you?"

"She's threatened a bunch of people. Even her children. They had to take her to the mental hospital last year after she told her son, Jacob, that she was going to kill herself and take him with her. It's been a terrible ordeal. And Frank had to keep up this full-time ministry and deal with her at home. I can't believe it came to this."

“What’s your name?” I ask the receptionist, writing her responses on my notepad.

“It’s Betty. Betty White.”

“You sound like you’ve been working here a while, Betty.”

“Fifteen years. I started working here when we just had one phone and no computers. Now I don’t know how we’d get by without the computer.”

“Do you attend this church as well?”

“Oh heavens yes. It would be hard for an outsider to do this job. We’ve had temps come in here and it really just doesn’t work out.”

“So you’ve seen this church grow a television and international ministry?”

“It’s been really exciting to see how God works. We sponsor missionaries all over the world. My son and his wife are in the Sudan right now. Our Sunday worship service is broadcast here locally and replayed on 40 different cable stations worldwide.”

“Did you know anything about the program for ministry to gays and lesbians?”

“You sure don’t waste anytime, do you Mr. Powell? Sure, there’s not a lot that goes on around here that I don’t know about. That whole thing was just wrong for this church. We don’t want sex education in school but they were playing films here in the classroom that showed guys holding holds and carrying on and such.” She rubs her temples and shakes her head for effect.

“Do you mind if I look around Frank’s office?”

“Well, I’m not sure. I wish Eric were back. He’s the interim pastor. He’s out today.”

“You can come in there with me. I just want to see if I can see anything that would give me any idea of what he was working on before he was killed.”

“I guess we could go in there. The police already searched in there. Didn’t find anything. I hear the gun is still missing.”

“The gun is missing?”

“That’s what I’ve heard.”

“Where’d you hear that?” I ask as we are walking down the hall towards Frank’s office.

“Are you kidding? Most of the congregation has been following this case since the beginning. This is the most exciting thing that has happened around here. Everybody’s talking about it. As a matter of fact, Eric’s sermon last Sunday was on gossiping. He said that we all need to get back on course and carry out our ministry. I agree with him.” She smiled slyly. “But it still is an exciting topic.”

She opens the door with her key. “Here it is. Just like he left it. I’m not sure when I’m going to clean it out for the next pastor.”

The office was dark. Betty opened a few blinds. His office looked similar to a stockbroker’s with dark mahogany furniture and a brass banker’s lamp on the desk. Pastor Barclay’s office had a great view of the campus. His bookshelves were lined with textbooks written by the greatest theologians of the times. One his desk, a couple of books were stacked neatly to one side.

I sit at the desk and look around. I wanted to see what Frank saw. There was an 8x7 picture of his wife Allison on his desk. She had her hair styled and a low-cut dress on. I could see why she would attract so much attention. The usual

diplomas from seminaries, pictures of him standing with some politicians, books, and children's artwork dominated his walls. A framed painting that looked like a child did it caught my eyes. It looked like a man flapping his wings.

"That's supposed to be Frank in the front of the church preaching. His daughter, Julie painted that. Frank loved that little girl. She had him wrapped around her little finger."

"I can see why. I met her yesterday. She is very cute." I pick up one of the books. "How to Love – Loving People that Eat Locust" I thumb through it and the whole concept is how to minister to people that had different lifestyles.

"A lot of Frank's sermons were on getting out of our comfort zones and learning about other cultures and races. He always encouraged short-term missionary trips. He always quoted Mark Twain that said 'Travel is fatal to bigotry, prejudice, and narrow-mindedness'."

"What was the response of the elders to his efforts to start these ministries? Was it met with wild acclaim or resistance?"

"I would think everyone was pretty agreeable. How can you argue with reaching out to people in Africa? The resistance came in when he wanted to bring gays and lesbians in the church. Also when he hired Steve and Steve started showing those films in Sunday school classes. That's when Jim and his guys started being concerned."

"Concerned?"

"That's when they started having all kinds of meetings with Frank. One night, Jim Mason stormed out of here red as a beet. I still remember the contrast of his

red face and white hair. It was pretty uncomfortable for me to be in that situation. Frank was murdered the next day.”

Chapter 9

Back at my room I'm thinking that this case isn't your normal everyday church splitting and pastor getting murdered situation. So far we have the prime suspect, the pastor's wife, and a long shot theory that an authoritative elder chairman somehow went too far in his reorganization efforts. Then you have a rich widow that wants the truth to come out. And then there's me, an outsider that is trying to sort this whole mess out.

The phone startles me. It's Vicki, Jim Mason's daughter. I could listen to this southern girl talk all night.

“Listen Teddy, I know what you're thinking. That I'm some crazy gal that thinks she can protect her father. There are some things going on that I don't think are right and you should know about them. It would help you do your job.”

“You know about my job?”

“Mrs. Connery told me. Why do you think you are here? I’m the one that wanted an independent” Long silence. “I’m not going to say anything more until I know for sure that I can trust you and that you are really going to try to help, not just collect your fee and go home.”

I’m thinking about that breath-taking portrait I saw of her on the way out of Jim Mason’s house the other night. There was chemistry on the phone as well. I’m not sure if we were both using the same pitch or tone of voice but something was going on that made her easy to talk to.

“Okay. Can you give me a hint?”

“Are you interested in what I have to say?”

“Sure I am. You must understand the position I’m in though. It’s not like I can work on hearsay and gossip.”

“I’m not a gossip. Listen, if and when you want to talk, call me. Do you still have my number?”

Oops. She didn’t take that too well and she even turned the tables on me.

“Yeah, I still have it.”

“Okay, Goodbye.”

“Wait. How are you going to know if you can trust me?”

“I won’t until we meet. I’m very intuitive and can smell a rat a mile awhile.”

“You must understand the position I’m in here. If I’m seen with you, it could jeopardize everything that I’m trying to do here.”

“And if you don’t meet with me, you won’t have the information you need to help us out.”

“Do you live around the hotel?”

“Pretty close. Over in Valley Ranch.”

“There’s a nice dark restaurant here in the hotel. Could you meet me there at 8:00?”

“How will I know it is you?”

“I’ll get there early. I’ll leave my name at the front. Ask for Teddy Powell.”

I knew that meeting with Vicki wasn’t the best thing that I could be doing. I just sat around the rest of the day justifying to myself why I was meeting with her. I’m good at it though. Weak men have to do a lot of justifying.

There are two women that I need to call. Mrs. Connery first.

“I’m doing well Teddy. How is your work coming along? Have you been able to meet with the people you need to see?”

“Pretty much. I don’t think they really wanted me over at Jim’s house the other night. It’s not like they rolled out the red carpet and covered their mouths when I spoke.”

“Well, what did you expect? I can only get you in the door son, I can’t make them want to talk to you.”

“You’re right, you’re right. Anyway, I’m going to meet with Jim sometime this week.”

“Ha. That will never happen. Did he say to call and he’ll schedule you in? That’s what all those big businessmen do. You’ll never be able to get an appointment. And if you do, you’ll get a call saying that it has been cancelled.”

“Don’t worry about that. I’ll get back with him. I’ll find something that he’ll want to talk to me about. I also went to the church today and talked with Betty.”

“I bet you got an ear full of it, didn’t you? We don’t need to send out any correspondence. Just tell Betty and the word gets out.”

“I didn’t realize that Allison threatened the church secretary.”

“Well, I heard that. I’m not sure if I really believe it. Betty has been known to exaggerate now and then.”

“I’m still trying to get my arms around this thing. I talked to Vicki Wells today. We’re meeting tonight.”

“Beautiful girl. Married way too young. She was trying to get away from her tyrannical father I suppose.”

One more call:

“Hi Honey.” With some excitement and gentleness.

“Hi.” Same tone.

“I’m sorry we had that argument the other night. I don’t like it when we talk like that.”

“Me either.”

“How are you?”

“Doing alright. Nothing much going on here. I need to go in to town to look at some wallpaper soon before they close. What’s going on in Dallas?”

“I’m definitely earning my fee on this one. Not sure how this thing is going to bounce. I think that I’m just scratching the surface.”

“When are you coming home?”

“Not sure. But I’m making enough on this one for us to take a nice vacation when I get back. Where do you want to go?”

“Good question. I’ll have to think about that. I don’t really have the figure to go to the beach this year.”

This is where I’m supposed to say you have never looked better but she really does need to lose some weight.

“Well, just think about it.”

“Okay, I’ll think about it.”

“Love you hon.”

I got downstairs to the restaurant around seven forty five and asked for a secluded table. I also left my name with the front. We passed by the tables that have a view out to Lake Carloyn and the pool that most vacationers have abandoned for the Dallas nightlife scene.

I decline anything to drink except for some water with lemon. It’s been so hot here the last few days that I’m still trying to catch up on my fluids. I see Vicky walking up to my table with the Matried. I get up, smile, and offer Vicki my hand.

“Hi Vicki, thanks for coming.” I pull out her chair so she can sit down. “I was hoping you could find me back here in the back. How are you doing?” Maybe I was being a little too congenial. Beautiful women always seemed to turn me into some other man I hardly recognize.

“Is it Teddy or just Ted?”

“All my friends call me Teddy. I grew up and the name just stuck around.

Actually, most people would rather deal with a Teddy as opposed to a Ted or a Theodore.”

“I see what you mean.”

The waiter comes up and asks Vicki if she would like something to drink.

She looks at me and asks if I was going to get something to drink with dinner.

“Sure. Would you like some wine?”

“I was thinking about it.”

“What do you have in a nice Chardonnay?”

***** insert some wine labels here

“Fetzer, XXX, XXX, “

“Let’s us try a bottle of that xxxxx.”

“Very good, sir”.

I try to break the ice by making some stupid remarks. “I don’t know how you survive down here. I mean it is hot! It looks like you spend some time outside. I don’t know how you do it.”

“You never really get used to it. I’ve been running for years and still have a hard time making it through the summer months.”

“So you run huh? I’ve been trying to put in a few miles while I’m here on business.”

“Do you just run around the area here?”

“Yeah, I’ve been running up to that nature trail or whatever you call it. I do about 5 miles.”

“You should go out to White Rock Lake. It has a nice nine mile trail around it with plenty of water stops.”

“You know, I saw that on the map. I guess that’s pretty far from here though.”

“Yeah, it would be a drive. Some friends and me go out there on Saturday mornings. If you’re up for it, you could meet us.”

The waiter makes a big deal out me tasting the wine. The sample tasted good to me. And the waiter poured us both a glass.

“Well, here’s to running.” We clink glasses and both take a sip.

Both of us are loosening up. Maybe too much.

“Do you want to look at the menu and order some food?”

“I guess we should. I’m starving. Let’s see, I’m going to have that chicken Caesar. That will be a nice summer-time with white wine dinner.”

“You’re right. I might do the same. I don’t need anything more than that.”

“You look fine.”

“Thanks.” We go on like this for fifteen minutes. I’m trying to turn this back to a business meeting as opposed to a date. Even though it feels so right talking to her and there is some electricity that I haven’t felt since my college days. We both are drinking the wine. It’s going down way to good for both of us. I finally have to make a statement that all the sudden stops the music.

“About what you called about.”

The whole scene changes. You would think that I was the mean dad that made everybody go home. I feel like the bad guy. The music we were making with the energy forces between us was extremely loud. Both of us heard it. Her voice was the perfect pitch for my ears to parse and analyze every syllable, every breath. Her long brown hair, dark eyes, and fresh face, was something that I could look at the whole day easily. Now, I've gone ahead and was the mean dad.

"I was having such a good time talking, I almost forgot that I was here on business," she said.

See, I knew she felt it too. You can't have that much energy flowing and have it only one-way. I can't believe a middle-aged married man that is supposed to be a follower of Jesus can still have these feelings. I guess I'm a reprobate. I'll never win this battle until I'm dead.

We look deeply into each other's eyes. "I've enjoyed it to. I guess I just wanted to find out why you wanted Mrs. Connery to hire me. This case is getting more involved all the time. It's not your ordinary, run-of-the-mill murder case."

"I know. That's why I called. I've grown up at Grace Community. I went to Sunday school there when I was a little girl; was saved there; was baptized there; got married there; then divorced of course."

"I didn't know."

"Yeah, it was something I always wanted since I was a little girl. Getting married I mean. I thought that we would live the rest of our lives together. He was just like my dad. I guess I wasn't ready for the reality of it. My dad seemed to think that I deserved it; that it was somehow my fault."

“Your fault?”

“He hit me a couple of times. The first time I did provoke him. After the second time, I felt like I had to leave for my safety and self-respect.”

“I’m sorry. I wish there was something I could say.”

“There’s really nothing. So I’ve been to counseling and worked through the issues and I’m back stronger than ever. That’s what my counselor says anyway. I guess I’m not over it completely because sometimes I feel like a small, helpless animal in a trap when I get too close to a man in a relationship.”

“How was your relationship with your dad?”

“My dad has always been a very strong and opinionated man. He was in the Army as a Lieutenant. I think that’s where he got it. All that violence and controlling. My mom said he was never the same after he did his time. They were high school sweethearts and she says she never wanted anyone else.”

“It must have been rough, growing up with him and all.”

“You know, I said I was in counseling because my ex-husband used to hit me. It’s funny, I went there to get back going when we separated but the most of the time has been spent talking about my dad and all the things he did to me growing up.”

“Abuse?”

“Nothing sexual. Just constant controlling and punishment. You know that verse that says not to embitter your children? Well, he embittered me and I’m still trying to get it right. It all came to a head my junior year in high school when I was grounded for some reason and I snuck out of the house. I was about two

blocks away from my house; standing in the street talking to some guys in their car and here comes my dad. He doesn't say anything but man you could tell he was mad. He just walks up to me, grabs me by the front of the tee shirt I was wearing, and literally drags me home."

"Didn't anyone say anything."

"Everybody just stood around shocked. I've never been so humiliated in all my life. After that, I played by the rules just long enough to get out of the house and in college. In college I was pretty wild. You couldn't tell I was a Christian. I told my dad I was going to church there but rarely did. I was trying to get back at him for raising me like he did. I guess that's why I'm here."

"I don't know what to say Vicki. That's quite a story." I said as putting my head down and rubbing my forehead. "I'm not sure if you should tell me anything. You're not in a very unbiased position here."

"It's amazing though. Since I've been in counseling, I've forgiven my father and actually, our relationship is better than ever. That's one reason I'm so concerned about him. I don't know why I told you my whole life story. It just felt so good to talk to you. That's probably why you're here. People really open to you don't they."

"They have here in Dallas so far. That's why I said that this case is getting more involved all the time. Do you want some more wine."

"Another glass would be nice but don't get another whole bottle. If I drank that much, I'd have to stay here tonight."

“So you’re going to tell me that your dad is behind all this about wanting Pastor Barclay to resign from being the senior pastor at Grace, aren’t you? But I’m more interested in who murdered him”

“It’s really not that simple. After my dad got out of the Army, he started working for insurance in downtown Dallas. He ran into some pretty high rollers at the country club. That’s where he met Bill Connery, Mrs. Connery’s late husband. Mr. Connery really didn’t like the organized churches in Dallas in those days and he had a vision to start a new church. That’s where my dad came in. Bill Connery was always the visionary, the one with the ideas for programs and ministries. My dad was a great administrator – or in those days, he was more like a general contractor. When they were building the church, he made sure all the workers did it the right way or he’d make them do it over. Pretty soon, everybody was tired of all his tirades and he started having trouble getting sub-contractors to do the work. That’s when Bill Connery would have to get involved and smooth things over.

She took a long drink of her wine while we both looked into each other’s eyes. “Anyway, my dad has more or less been the lieutenant this whole time. He hates not to get his way. He wanted Pastor Barclay to leave and was running up against some pretty stiff resistance. But some things were going on right around the time Pastor Barclay got murdered that have been bothering me.”

“For example?”

“Secret meetings. The month before he was killed, Pastor Barclay was coming over to my parents house a few nights a week. Him and my dad would

spend hours in the study together with the door closed so my mom couldn't here what was going on. Even before those meetings started, my mom says my dad was up to something."

"Just like I told Mrs. Connery, I'm just struggling with the motive for murder here. It sounds like maybe they were meeting to work on how to transition a new senior pastor in. Murder is a pretty drastic measure to take to get a new pastor. Unless his sermons were going past when the Dallas Cowboys games were on.'

"Your really do have a sense of humor. For awhile there I thought that you were one of those guys that was all business. Are you enjoying your stay in Dallas?"

"It's getting better all the time," I said with a sly smile.

"You're married right?" I shake my head in the affirmative. "All the good-looking, funny ones always are. Anyway, you said you doubted that anyone would murder a pastor to get him out the way. It sounds far-fetched to me as well. Everything is still pretty unclear. I think there is more to the picture than what we know. My mom says my dad has been acting funny for the last six months."

"Did she say what she means by funny? Do you think he has been faithful to your mom?"

"She says he's been going out at night and coming home late. He doesn't have alcohol on his breath when he gets home. He says he's visiting the members of the church and things like that. My mom wouldn't suspect anything

but he's just acting weird. Like he's preoccupied. And then these secret meetings and the murder. My mom is really concerned about this whole thing."

"Any history of him cheating on your mom that you know of?"

"None. My mom would kill him."

"I don't know any wife that wouldn't. It still happens all the time. I started this career working for wives that wanted to know what their husbands were up to. You wouldn't believe the double lives a lot of men lead. The women too but it seems like it's mostly the men."

"You ever cheat on your wife?" she asks expectantly. I almost choke on the sip of wine I just took.

"Wow. I'm not sure how to answer that."

She looks me in the eye and has a little smart smirk on her face. "It's simple. It's either you have or you haven't".

I place the wineglass down and lean back against the cushion and take a deep breath. "Okay, then it's no."

She laughs a little and says, "You didn't have to answer. I just wanted to see you how you would answer."

I'm thinking to myself how badly I handled that question. I must be 20 years older than Vicki and she's trying to get me to confess my deepest darkest sins.

"Well, how'd I do?"

"You squirmed around a bit. I'm not sure what to think about that. I watch body language. I think subtle things sometimes are the most effective way to communicate. Especially if your paying attention" she said with that same

knowing look her mom gave me the other when she caught me admiring her daughters portrait.

“You know what’ amazing to me?” I ask, trying to change the subject. I’ve done enough confessing for the night. “It’s amazing that men, spiritually strong and committed men, get involved with things like this. It’s like they live in two worlds; one is the spiritual world and then their personal world. But I’m still having a hard time believing that your dad or anyone else from Grace Community Church was involved in Frank’s murder.”

“Don’t misunderstand me, I don’t think my dad had anything to do with Frank’s murder. I’m afraid he might be mixed up in something and he might be next.”

“Okay, so there had been some positioning for a new pastor. Are you that in-touch with Grace? Do you go there?”

“Sometimes. After my divorce, I went there a lot. I’ve been looking around for other churches in the area. I don’t like that whole singles scene in these churches around Dallas. It’s more like a beauty pageant than anything else.”

“You don’t seem like you would have that much trouble competing.”

“Thanks. It’s just that after awhile, you get tired of the stares.”

“I just didn’t know if you had any gut-feel about how the congregation felt about Pastor Barclay. Did they like him? Is he effective in his role? You know, things like that.”

“I think a lot of the people really like him. He’s not real charismatic and trendy. He’s a sound teacher but too easy and gentle for television. Maybe he’d be good on late-night radio.”

“You’re something else,” I said, laughing and finishing off my last taste of the extra glass of wine we ordered after we drank the first bottle. Definitely could feel the effect of alcohol on my brain. “Is there anything else that you want to share with me? It’s getting late. Do you have to work tomorrow?”

“Yes. I have to get up tomorrow and appraise a house out in Richardson.”

“You sell houses?”

“No, I don’t sell them. I’m an appraiser. Selling houses is for middle-aged women that need a second career after their kids go off to school.”

“I must have hit a nerve.”

“Not really. It’s just that I went to school for four years to learn what I’m doing and I have to keep current every year. Besides, I work for \$400.00 a pop and can do two, sometimes three a day.”

“That’s BMW money.”

“That’s what I have. That’s what everybody around here has.”

We were both getting up. It was an awkward moment. I know I didn’t want her to leave and she didn’t seem like she wanted to go. I finally think of something so I can talk to her again. “Hey listen, about running. How far is it that you go?”

We stopped by our table. I didn’t want to walk out with her. You never know whom you are going to see.

“Well if you’re still here on Saturday, I’ll take you to White Rock Lake. It’s the best place to run in Dallas. Call me.”

I watched her walk out. I noticed the waiter that was standing in the corner follow her with his eyes all the out. I decide to tip him more than usual for having such good taste.

Chapter 10

While running the next morning I had a chance to analyze the pieces of the puzzle that I had so far. Nothing that I’ve come across pointed to any foul play. My gut feeling was it was a simple case of a mentally disturbed person shooting someone. Only two things kept me wondering. The first thing was the fact that the murder weapon had not been found. Or, at least that’s what Betty said. The second thing was Jim Mason. There was something going on in his life but it might not be related to this case.

When I got back to the hotel, I called his office. As Mrs. Connery predicted, his assistant said he was in a meeting and couldn’t take my call. When I asked about setting up a time to see him, she said that there wasn’t anything available this week but how about next Wednesday. I asked her for his mailing address.

Two hours later I arrive at his office. Lisa, the secretary takes my card and gently tells me Mr. Mason is not available.

“That’s okay. I’ll wait.” I tell her and sit in the fluffy leather chair.

“You need to make an appointment,” she says a little less gently.

I can see her name plaque. “If it’s okay with you Lisa, I’ll just wait.” I pick up a magazine off the coffee table and start reading. I hear some movement at her desk but I don’t look up. I can hear her speaking softly but can’t make out what she is saying.

In her best authoritative, last-chance voice, she says “Mr. Powell, you will need to make an appointment to see Mr. Mason.”

I calmly look up from my magazine and naively ask “When is he available to see me?”

All patience has left her and barely able to not yell she says, “I told you, next Wednesday. Do you want me to put you down?”

“For what time Lisa?”

“Two o’clock” she barks out.

“I’ll wait,” I said and I went back to reading the magazine.

I can feel her red-hot anger from my chair but I don’t look up. She’s on the phone again speaking in whispers. After five minutes I hear a door open up and someone with hard-soled shoes walk towards me. I look at my watch and think that the people in Dallas must be a little more tensed-up; it usually takes longer for someone to storm out of their office in Denver.

“Hi there Jim,” I said getting up to shake his hand.

He takes two steps towards me, raises his left hand, points his finger right at my nose, and says, “I don’t appreciate you being rude to my administrator”.

“I wasn’t rude to administrator.” I step to the side, smile, and ask Lisa “Was I rude to you Lisa?” I come back in front of Jim and softly say, “If you knew why I’m here, you’d want me to interrupt.”

Jim still has too much adrenaline in his system. “You don’t have anything that I want or need,” he says while he’s turning to walk away.

“I know about the secret meetings,” I say softly. He stops and stands still for a few seconds. He slowly turns around and looks at me. This was the first time that I have really been able to look deeply into his eyes. They were hazel with a green starburst. He had a questioning expression on his face like he was wondering why I would bring that up in front of Lisa.

He sighs deeply and says for me to follow him back to his office. We walk through a boardroom and then into his gigantic office. Three large padded leather chairs and a matching couch surround his mahogany desk. There are well-coordinated draperies on both sides of his corner windows overlooking the Dallas skyline. I smell a faint trace of cigar smoke. Jim is leaning on side in his high-backed chair behind the desk. He’s in deep thought.

“I appreciate you meeting me like this Jim,” I start off with. “I know you’re a busy man and won’t take up make of your time. I’m just trying to get my arms around this thing and make sure that we get all the facts out.”

“Who told you?” Jim asks without looking at me.

“This is where I show you that I’m trustworthy Jim. I can’t reveal my sources if they ask me not to and I won’t make public any information you give me either. Is that a deal?”

“It didn’t take you long to get in our business around here, did it?” he asks without really wanting an answer.

“Let’s just say I’m doing my job. Can you tell me when you started meeting and what was discussed?”

“Discussed? I’m not following you,” he stated, genuinely perplexed.

“What you and Pastor Barclay discussed during the meetings. Was it church related or personal?”

His whole countenance brightens. “Oh yes, those meetings. Sure. We discussed church and personal business. He was thinking of leaving Grace you know. We were discussing a way for him to exit without impacting the church. Working on a strategy,” he says with a newfound confidence.

“Was that all? He wasn’t in trouble in anyway was he? I mean, did he confide in you anything that would help us here, in this situation?”

“You know, even the most devote men sometimes need someone with maturity to bounce things off of. I was glad I could be there for him. He really wasn’t facing anything that isn’t pretty common among us men. I don’t think that I have to go into any details here. Let’s just say the time we spent together was very beneficial for both of us.”

“So, what you’re saying is that you don’t know anything that could help this investigation, right?”

“That’s what I’ve also told the police,” he says getting up from his chair to escort me out. I stand up and take a quick look at the laptop that he sitting on his desk. I determine it has a network cable attached.

“Can I have one of your cards with the your email address? It might be easier if I have any more questions just to email you.” I ask and stop so he will walk back to his desk to get me a card. “How long have you been on the Internet?”

“For at least a year now. I just mainly use it to check stock quotes though. And of course email.” He hands me a card and motions for me to start walking out.

One the way out I stop by the receptionist’s desk. “I just wanted to verify Jim’s email address. If I wanted to send him an email, I would send it to jmason.www.blackgold.com. Right?” She looks at me like I might be strange. I smile and tell her that I just got my first computer.

“You would send it to jmason@blackgold.com,” she says in her sweet tone again.

“That @ something or another and www always confuse me for some reason. Would you show me on yours real quick Lisa?”

“Sure.” I come around on her side and she starts up a common email client program. “See, you just put the address in here, the subject here, and then your message here. Then just click and it’s sent.”

“You made that look so easy. I guess my son makes it look hard for some reason. He’s always talking about right-mouse clicks and things like that. I get

pretty confused. For example, what happens when you right-click on that icon that says Network?”

“I don’t know. Let’s see.” She clicks on it and it shows all the network settings for her company. She closes it. “I guess it just shows some stuff I don’t really know what it is. Anyway, just send it to jmason@blackgold.com and he’ll get.”

I write down the computer’s network settings on the ride down in the elevator. I used to be able to remember long strings of numbers but now my memory fades quickly. I leave their office wondering what secret meetings Jim is so concerned about. If his daughter doesn’t know, at least I now have another possible source of information.

Chapter 11

Lester Cummings, Allison Barclay’s lawyer, had left me a message saying that there was going to be a hearing in the morning. He gave detailed directions and which courtroom they were meeting in: Auxiliary Court Number Eight.

I got to the courtroom early and sat out in the hallway. Several jurors were milling around waiting to be selected for a case. I saw Lester walking down the hall. He looked as disheveled as he did the first time I had met him. His shirt was

wrinkled and only half of it was tucked in, his tie was crooked, and his suit looked like he got it for fifty cents at a garage sale.

He walks up with an armful of papers that looked about as disorganized as he did. Very pleasant smile though. "Good morning Teddy. Glad you could make it. The District Attorney's office is really struggling with how they want to prosecute this case. Apparently, there has been a grass roots effort by Grace Community Church and assorted mental-illness support groups to get this situation resolved fairly. I talked to Allison yesterday and she still won't talk about anything in a real coherent fashion. This hearing is all about getting a psychiatric exam before testifying. I sure don't want her pleading guilty by reason of insanity if she's not guilty."

I follow Lester into the courtroom. He acknowledges the bailiff and tells him that he's ready to counsel with his client. The bailiff goes out and about ten later brings Allison in wearing her bright orange county jail coveralls. She walks in staring down at her handcuffs and then takes a seat next to Lester. I move in from the back of the courtroom and take a seat next to Allison.

I think Lester would have made a better than a lawyer. He turned to Allison, took her hand and gently said "Good morning Allison. It's really good to see you. I hope you are doing well."

You could tell that Allison needed the warm, human touch because her whole face brightened. "I'm I going home today?" she asked. "My kids need some new clothes. I need to get them some new clothes".

Lester continues to hold her hand and he says softly, "Today we are getting a the judge to order a doctor to do a thorough examination of you. The doctor will try to figure out how to help you. He might bring you some medicine that will make you feel better."

Allison snaps her hand out of his and turns forward. "I don't want any medicine. I already get the medicine I need remotely. I have a device implanted that is controlled by my doctor in California."

"Allison, I want you to just sit here with me today and listen to what the judge says. There will probably be some arguing but don't let it concern you. It's just the way lawyers are sometimes." He takes her hand back. "Okay Allison? Just trust me and relax. Do you want a mint?"

"How do I know you're not trying to poison me?"

"You can trust me Allison, I'm your friend. So is Teddy." Lester points my way and Allison looks at me for the first time.

Since she is turned towards Lester, I put my hand on the back of her shoulder and say "That's right Allison, I'm your friend too. I want to help you get back to your kids." She reaches over and takes a mint from Lester. More people have filed in to the courtroom including the Assistant District Attorney Karen Smith. Karen Smith is dressed in a dark blue business suit with a white silk blouse. She looks like this might be her first job out of law school.

The judge walks in and we all stand up. Lester helps Allison up. Judge McDonald sits down quickly and opens her laptop. After a moment she asks the counsel to approach the bench. I can't hear what's going on but she's doing all of

the talking. After about three minutes, Lester comes back to our table. He then stands up. "Your honor, I'm asking for 30 days extension on Allison's proceedings until she can be evaluated by a psychiatrist."

"On what grounds are you basing your request Mr. Cummings?" the judge asks.

"On the grounds that she has been diagnosed with a mental disorder previously and any testimony she has given to the police might have been delusional."

"I object your honor. It's not just her testimony to the police that have prompted the State of Texas to bring these charges. There are other facts of the case that merit suspicion as well."

The judge looks over some papers and asks for a minute. After a long, quite, five minutes, she calls both lawyers back to the bench. This time Lester is doing most of the talking. Karen is just looking at him ramble away with a faraway look in her eyes. Finally, Lester comes back and sits down at our table.

"Due to the circumstances in this case, I feel that the right thing to do is to have Allison evaluated by two different psychiatrists. These evaluations will be completed by the twenty third of this month when we will resume these proceedings. This court is adjourned,"

Allison's expression doesn't change. Lester didn't get as much time as he would have liked but has bought us a little to try to sort this out. The first thing I knew that I wanted to do to help was to find the gun. The bailiff came and got

Allison to take her back. I turned around and noticed Mrs. Connery sitting in the galley. She was with five other ladies. I focus my attention on Lester.

“What kind of firearm was used in the killing?”

Lester shuffles through some papers and finds the police report. “It looks like a .38. One shot in the gut, point blank range.”

“Why do they suspect her if they can’t find the weapon?” I ask.

“She more or less confessed at the police station. They brought her in because she was being uncooperative and next thing you know, she’s in jail with a million dollar bond.”

“Have you heard the confession?”

“I’ve seen the transcript. It’s not very compelling. It’s the same gibberish she’s always saying. Something about them knowing everything.”

“I’m going to focus on two things: Where the .38 is and what secret meetings Jim Mason attended recently.”

“What? What’s this about secret meetings and Jim Mason?”

“I don’t know yet. I’ll let you know if it means anything.”

The first thing that I wanted to figure out is if Pastor Frank Barclay even had a pistol in the house before he was killed. I went back to the hotel room and dialed my 800 number for my Internet service provider with my laptop. Hotel phone lines aren't usually the highest quality so it took a few attempts to connect successfully.

Once on, I went into the State of Texas Web site and then to the Division of Public Safety. They had set up an area on their site where they allowed the general public to query the database of registered handgun owners. I tried all the combinations of Frank Barclay that I could think of but didn't find any matches. Just because he didn't show up in the database doesn't mean he didn't have a pistol in his nightstand. It just means that it wasn't registered.

Next, I emailed the network information I got from Jim Mason's company to Jacob, my network expert in Denver. Even though I tell Jacob that he's not to break the law, he's like most other hackers in that he thinks most rules are unimportant and don't apply to him. I don't usually ask him how he gets the information he does.

Even though the whole world is online now and most of the information known to man is available, the best way to find out information about a dead man is to ask his wife. I dial Lester. "Lester, listen, I need to get back in and see Allison Barclay in the jail. This whole missing gun thing just doesn't add up. What is your understanding? Did he own a handgun? How are they prosecuting this case with no weapon?"

Lester answers in his deep, non-characteristic voice. "I'm not sure what another trip to the jail is going to get you. She's unintelligible most of the time. Also, when you have a murder victim, a witness, and a confession, you usually don't need the gun too."

"I just need to see her again. I think she might be telling us something but we're not listening."

"Well, I guess we could stop by there tomorrow. I have a hearing at ten. Let's make it for one o'clock. I'll see you out front of the jail."

Next, I wanted to go back to the Frank's house and have another look around. I don't know what I'm looking for; I just want to see if I can see something that doesn't add up. I leave the hotel and take 183 east to Mockingbird. At Mockingbird, I take a left, drive past Love Field, and then into Highland Park. Near Frank's house, I notice a blue police car following close behind. I turn on my signal and pull in front of Frank's house. The police car goes past me and then stops at the next house.

I go up to the front door and ring the doorbell. A different young girl answers the door. I show her my PI badge and she lets me in to the house. The first thing I notice is that the police tape has been removed but the bloodstain is still in the dining room. It looks like someone has been trying to remove the stain but it is still visible on the light carpet. I stand in the hallway and try to re-enact the whole scene.

So here's Frank, he comes home from a hard day at church and his wife is waiting with a gun. So why didn't she shot him in the kitchen where he comes in

through the garage? Why would she wait until he's near the front of the house? On the other hand, if Frank answered the front door, he'd be nearer to the dining room. He might have answered the door, recognized who it was and let them in, and then was shot in the stomach.

I walked back into where the computer was set up. I sit down briefly at the desk and try to get a feel for what Frank would be doing and what kind of person he was. Normal things were on the desk: Bills, magazines, an old newspaper, and a small bowl of sunflower seeds. I move some papers around and find a book. "How to Minister to Men Struggling with Homosexuality". That makes sense since he wanted to start these types of ministries in the church. I look behind me and then quietly boot up the PC. It takes a long while to finally show me the login screen. I just press enter and it doesn't seem to mind.

You can tell a lot about a man by looking in the cache files from his activity on the Internet. Frank's computer had page after page of assorted seminaries and dot edu sites. So that made the next entries stand out that much more. It looked like Frank was spending an inordinate amount of time on known hacker sites. Sites where hackers congregate to exchange their own brand of currency: forbidden knowledge. While I'm writing down some of the sites I hear the doorbell ring.

I continue to look around Frank's directories. He has a popular word-processing package that saves all documents written to a standard directory. I take out a blank floppy disk from my jacket and put it in the drive. I then copy the

entire directory where his work is stored on to the floppy. I'm was just about to lean over and pop out the floppy when I hear "What do you think you are doing?"

I turn around and two uniformed police officers standing in the doorway. The one in the front is short and has threatening eyes. The taller one in the back has closely cut blond hair looks like he is just spectating. "We're Highland Park police officers and this is a crime scene. Do you have any identification?"

I'm wondering if I should show him my Private Investigator's license from Colorado or just my driver's license. I hand them both over. The blond one calls in with portable radio's microphone that is attached to his shoulder. The short one continues to stare me down while he waits for the dispatcher to come back with an all clear. She finally comes back that I have no warrants.

"You're not licensed in the State of Texas for investigative work?" The short one asks in more of a statement than a question. I nod my head no. "Let's see Mr. Powell, we're going to have to take you to the station. Please turn around and put your hands behind your head like this." He shows me how to interlock my fingers behind my hand. I turn around and do as instructed. "Good," he says and binds one hand and then the other behind my back. He then proceeds to read to me my rights.

"What are the charges?" I ask.

"Didn't you listen?" the short one spits out. He's braver now that I'm in cuffs. "The best thing for you is to just shut up."

“I mean, you just can’t arrest me for no reason.” I say as he’s leading me out. We pass by the babysitter. She has a stunned look on her face. “You investigators are all the same. You think you you’re smarter than the police. You’ve been watching too much television.” The short one continues to berate me as we walk outside into the heat. The blond one opens the back door and says “Watch your head,” as he helps me duck into the backseat.

The car smells brand new and the front looks like it has more computer equipment than the space shuttle. The blond gets in on the front passenger side and makes a call on the radio to the station that they are bringing in a suspect. The ride to the station is nice. I watch how well behaved all the drivers are around a police car. Everybody is using turn signals and not speeding or tailgating.

We get to the Highland Park police station that sits behind the city’s administration building. They lead me in through a secured area and then into a holding cell. All that is in the cell is a commode and sink. The blond one takes off my cuffs and looks at me like he’s sorry about the whole thing. “What are you charging me with,” I ask with a tone like I want him to reveal to me a secret that is being kept from me. “Listen, I’m just following orders. We were told to arrest you for investigating without a Texas license,” he said.

“You were told to?”

“Listen, just keep a civil attitude and you’ll be out in no time,” he says while walking backwards out of the cell. “What about my phone call,” I yell out but the cell door slams shut and I can hear him buzz through the next set of bars. In

about a half hour, a wiry Hispanic jailer opens the cell door and says “Come on Magnum, you’re going to get your picture taken. You can even leave your prints on the walk of fame.”

I follow him down to the booking station where I have my fingerprints and mug shots taken. I also use the phone to call Lester. He’s not in but I leave a message. Back at the cell I’m thinking that for a jail cell floor, it’s pretty clean. I sit on the floor for a few minutes and I hear someone coming through the first set of bars. A middle aged man with a stomach that hangs over the top of his pants so far it looks painful stops in front of the cell. He takes a good look at me. “So you want to come to my city and play cop,” he says with a southern drawl in a demeaning tone. “You think you can just come down here and make us look bad?” He gets loader. “I won’t tolerate anymore of you wannabes coming here and interfering with our investigations.” He keeps it coming. “I bet you’d flunk out of the police academy in the first week.”

I’ve gotten smart enough to know that the best thing I could do was just sit there and take it. He left after a while and I took off my sports jacket and used it as a pillow to take a nap on the floor. I was in a deep sleep when the cell opens. It’s the Hispanic jailer again motioning for me to come on. “Come on Magnum, time to go.”

I first go to the booking office where I get back my wallet and keys. Next down to the waiting area where both Lester and Mrs. Connery are there to get me. I walk up to Lester and shake his hand. “Thanks for coming,” I said. I turn towards

Mrs. Connery. “Sorry about you having to come down here Mrs. Connery. I’ll have to be a little bit more discreet.”

“That’s alright Teddy. I always say that you have to break some rules to get things done. Be sure to expense the fine.”

We walk out of the station. “You know, I forgot. My car is over at Frank’s place. Or I guess it’s now Allison’s – hopefully it will stay that way.”

Chapter 13

The next afternoon, I meet Lester outside of the jail. We go through the same signing-in and waiting process as we did the last time we were here. They bring Allison out and she looks exactly the same, like a beautiful girl that hasn’t eaten or slept in a few weeks.

This time I pick up the telephone and motion her to pick hers up. I start with the civilities and then get right into my questions. “Allison, tell me what happened the night that Frank was killed.”

She takes a deep breath and shakes her head. He then straightens up and says, “They’re listening to us.”

“Who’s listening to us, Allison?”

“They know everything,” Allison says softly.

“Tell me what happened, Allison,” I say sternly.

“Shhhh. Don’t say my name. They are going to get you too.”

“Good, that will give me a chance to meet them.” She wasn’t expecting that response and it took her awhile to process it. “Did you kill your husband,” I ask.

“He was having an affair at church. Everybody knows. She was always calling.”

“Did you kill her too?” I learned that you just want to go along with delusional people. It improves the flow of the conversation and isn’t so aggravating.

“She wasn’t there. It was another woman.” She pauses. “She was taller.”

“There was another woman at your house.”

“Yes.”

“Do you realize that you have to answer my questions truthfully else you might not get to go home to your kids?” She changes the focus of her eyes on another object and then closes them for a few seconds. “Why don’t you tell me what happened that night?”

“Did you hear that? It’s time to go.” I didn’t hear anything. Allison replaced the receiver, got up, turned around, and knocked on the door. The same guard as before opened the door and took her back inside.

“She says there was another woman at the house. Has she ever mentioned that before?” I ask Lester while we sit there still wondering why she jumped up so quickly.

“No, the police report doesn’t have anything about another woman. She told the police that he was crying for her to call for help and not to shoot anymore. That he loved her.” Lester said.

“Why wouldn’t she call the police immediately if she just found him laying there after he was shot?” I ask.

“From my experience, the ‘why’ questions aren’t as important as the evidence. I’m still not sure what way to go on this case. I’m going to wait for the doctor’s diagnosis but we’re probably going to plead guilty by reason of insanity. That will allow her to get the treatment she needs. I think the DAs office will agree to a pretty light sentence if we go that way.”

“But there’s just too many pieces that haven’t fit together yet. Hopefully you can wait until I’ve done more research,” I interject.

Chapter 14

Vicki had called during the week and asked if I was serious about running with her and her friends around White Rock Lake.

Heading towards the lake on Northwest Highway, you travel through some seedy parts of the Metroplex. Once you get to the bottom of the hill and turn right on West Lawther, the whole scene changes. You drive past heavily wooded

areas that have nature trails winding through them. Passing under Mockingbird, you come to the start of the nine-mile loop around the lake.

Every size and shape of runner is up this particular morning wearing as little as possible because of the oppressive heat and humidity. The humidity is usually worse in the morning hours and it gradually goes down as the heat increases. I pull into the parking lot and start looking around for Vicki. There are a few other runners standing at the start of the trail so I walk up and join them in some stretches.

Vicki shows up a few minutes late. She has a lime green shorts and a little bright orange jog bra top on. It's not going to be easy keeping my eyes and mind off of her body. She introduces me to two other of her friends; Jill and Monica. They all three look like they could run a marathon. I make an excuse before we start. "I didn't get that much sleep last night. If I start falling behind, just go on without me."

We start off at a reasonable pace. The area around the lake is just beautiful. The sun has only been up for a few hours and it hasn't had the chance to burn off the morning fog from the lake. Waterfowl hunt in the shallow. Even though the trail is crowded with runners going both directions, their voices are muffled and gentle on the ears.

"Man it's humid here." I peel my soaked tee shirt off and put it in a trash can. "It's just a shirt from a race in Denver. I certainly don't need it. My wife says if I bring home another shirt from another race, we're going to start our own tee-shirt business." I said to explain why my big white belly is now sticking out uncovered.

Vicki and her friend's expression changes. I know Vicki knew I was married. I guess her friends didn't know and she really didn't want them to know either. I'm wondering to myself if I said that to scare Vicki away because I really do want her. I contemplate this for the next few miles while I loose more of my body fluids. We go up a hill and run on the dam for awhile. The view of the lake from this vantagepoint is awesome. The view from the dam to the other end of the lake shows how long White Rock Lake really is.

Coming down the other side of the dam I could tell I'm starting to fade. We've been running for almost five miles and I think they keep running faster. My breathing is labored so I haven't been talking. I fall in behind the pack and can't help to notice the back of Vicki's neck with her soaked hair that has come out of her runner's braid. She also has on some great smelling sunscreen that gives her a nice, healthy, scent. I shake my head and sigh at how weak of a man I am.

At seven miles, I'm cooked. Everyone else seems like they are just getting warmed up. I've heard conversations about jobs, boyfriends, vacations, running injuries, races, and volleyball games. These girls can run and talk all day. Coming over the Mockingbird Bridge towards the cars, I'm barely hanging on to conscience. My face must be either bright red or pure white. My shoes are so filled with sweat that I'm making sloshing sounds. I keep on having to say I'm all right. When we get to the cars, I stop and put my head down towards my knees. "I must say, you girls can run." I can barely straighten back up. "This Texas heat really takes a lot out of you."

Vicki comes over with some ice and starts rubbing some on my back. At first it was too much but after the initial shock, it felt great. "You look like you could use some cooling down," she said. I wasn't going to argue. Her friends sponged themselves off and left us in the parking lot.

"What are you going to do now?" Vicki asked.

"Go back to my hotel and take a nap. Until tomorrow. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. Call me if anything comes up. You still have my number don't you?"

Chapter 15

Back at the hotel, I stop by the gift shop on the way up to my room and buy two big bottles of water. Up in the room I drink one bottle rapidly and then laid down for a nap. When I woke up, I had a crushing headache. I took some aspirin and lay back down again with a cold wash cloth on my forehead.

It was in this position that I started thinking about how these events were linked together. Did Jim Mason have something to do with Pastor Barclay's murder? What were these secret meetings about? Who did he meet with? What

has Jacob, my network expert, found out about Jim Mason from his computer? Where was the murder weapon? But what weighed the heaviest on my mind is what was on the disk I made at the Barclay's before the police came and how was I going to get it back?

After lying around for a few more hours, I got up and dialed-up my email account with my laptop. I had a message from Jacob about the contents of Jim Mason's hard drive. Jacob wrote that Jim's computer looked pretty clean. Looks like he had been looking at stock prices during the day and the Green Bay Packer's Web site. The only things suspicious were a few documents in his temporary directory. Jacob had attached these two documents to the email.

Both documents had a generic name and were stored in his temporary directory meaning that Jim never really intended to save them. The first document was a letter to someone named Calvin:

Dear Calvin,

It was really nice to have met you at Charlie's party the other night. If you want to have dinner sometime, call this number and leave a message.

Fondly,

Jim

I got offline and tried the phone number. It was Jim's pager. The second document was Jim's resignation letter from being an elder at Grace Community. It was dated a few months back so he never had submitted it.

These are the kinds of leads I love to track down. Finding Calvin should be pretty easy. I'll have Jacob run a full-text search on Jim's computer and find

every instance of the word “Calvin” no matter where it is stored. Jacob had developed his own “worm” that can search through computer systems and find words no matter what format they were stored in. The word “Calvin” could be stored in a word processing format, database, contact management system, or an email system and Jacob’s program would find it.

Also, who was Charlie and what party was Jim talking about? I wrote back to Jacob asking him to search the drive and also double-check and see if he could determine what chat rooms, if any, Jim had been in. I also wanted him to find out who he uses for an Internet Service Provider (ISP) so we could search through their proxy server and see if anything that would help us had been cached up there.

Jacob must have been online because he responded to my email immediately. We started a “chat” session so we could get near instantaneous responses. He had found some files left over on Jim’s computer from some sites he had visited and Jacob was in the process of verifying his assumptions about what kind of sites those were. He replied in the chat window that it looked like Jim Mason was visiting gay Web sites and chat rooms. This didn’t make any sense. Jim seemed like a manly man. Someone you would never suspect that would struggle in this area. A verse immediately came to my mind: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man”. Even though I don’t struggle with this myself, I understand that it is an extremely powerful temptation for some men. I asked Jacob if he was sure. He replied back that if it wasn’t Jim out on those sites, it was somebody using his computer.

The way Jim had responded when I said something about secret meetings now makes a little more sense. I wonder if his daughter, Vicki, would have any clue about her father. I try to make the connection between Jim being a homosexual and Frank Barclay getting murdered. The first thing that comes to my mind is that Pastor Barclay knew too much and was going to tell somebody or had a profit motive in mind and Jim Mason didn't want to pay. Either way, this case is looking more interesting all the time.

I reply to Jacob to keep on getting as much information as he can about Jim and try to get on to some of those sites and find either a "Calvin" or a "Charlie" here in the Dallas area. I always tell him to do these searches legally and he says he's not breaking any laws jingling virtual door handles and peeking inside.

I dial Mrs. Connery on the second phone line. "I have two tough questions for you Mrs. Connery. First, was Pastor Barclay in need of any money that he might do something stupid for? And second, how well do you know Jim Mason and his life outside his business, family, and church?"

Mrs. Connery took a few moments to think about it. "Well Teddy, I would have to say that Frank was definitely in need of money – more money than what he was getting from the church. But doing something stupid for it? No way. He was as solid as God makes them."

I figured as much but I've learned you have to ask the hard questions in this job. "What about Jim?" I ask.

"Jim is a different story. He's hard to read. Never has been very open. I don't know anything about his personal life really. It's a shame. I've known him all of

these years and I don't even know what his interests and hobbies are. It's a shame. I should know that." She trailed off.

Next I call Vicki. "Tell me this, how has you mom and dad been getting along the last year?" I ask.

Her voice is easy to listen to. "I don't even get any small talk before business? You could tell me how you're feeling, that you had a nice run with us this morning. You know, things like that."

I laugh and tell her that I haven't quit drinking water for the last five hours. "They're getting along the same they always have. I wouldn't call it a perfect marriage but they've been together for so long that they must be doing something right."

"I agree. I know you contacted me because you are concerned for your dad. Do you know any of his friends? You know, not from church but outside of that. Did he hang out anywhere? You know, bars, restaurants?"

"My dad? You have to be kidding. He's so concerned about his reputation that he'd never go into a bar. The only thing that he does is bowl. He's on a league. Has been ever since I can remember."

I wasn't sure how far to press her. I didn't want to scare her and I sure didn't want to "out" her father. "Listen, next time you talk to your mom, ask her if she had noticed anything suspicious the last six months."

"Why? Is there something I should know?" she asked.

"Not at all. You wanted me to get to the bottom of this, right? I just need something more to go on then secret meetings between him and Frank. There

might not be anything. I'm sure you know not to get your mom upset about anything."

"Don't worry about that. I know how to get anything I want out of my mom."

"I'm sure you do Vicki, I'm sure you do."

Chapter 16

I drove back over to Frank's house that evening. I didn't figure those cops would still be hanging around his house at night. I drove past Frank's house a few times to make sure I wasn't being watched. I wasn't sure what I was going to say until I saw who answered the door. If it was the same babysitter, she might have a problem letting me in after she saw the cops drag me out the last time I was over there.

I rang the doorbell and after a minute or so the porch light came on. Sure enough, the same babysitter opened the door. She was around fifteen or sixteen and had that look like she had everything under control but I could tell she was wondering what in the world I was doing back there.

"He there," I said in my nicest voice with a big smile. "I left my disk in the computer in the back room there and I was just wondering if you could get it for me."

She turns backs away from the door and starts to shut it. "Sure," she says and leaves the door open a crack. She's still trying to play like she deals with this

stuff all the time. I could hear the television blaring. She came back to the door and handed me my disk.

“Thank you.” I start to turn and then I turned back. “How are those kids? I’m going to see Mrs. Barclay soon and I’ll tell her.”

“Doing fine. They miss their parents. School’s starting back soon so that will help.”

I wave to her as I turn to walk back to the car. A white car cruises slowly past and my heart starts pounding faster thinking that it might be the police again. The car continues on and I hustle back to my rental car and quickly drive away.

Back at the hotel I analyze the contents of the disk. I had copied all his word processing documents and the cache files from surfing on the Web. Most of the word processing documents were related to his sermons and the research he conducted for them. What interested me were all the cache files he had left from known hacker sites.

I opened a few of the cached files and really couldn’t make much sense out of them. A lot of them are just links to different images that are common when visiting Web sites. There were also some files that looked like they contained hieroglyphics. I was about to give up and send this disk to Jacob for analysis when I opened a file that was a log of a chat session between phreddi and triniT. It looked like it was a follow up to an early chat session or conversation.

triniT: It’s never too late to come to Jesus.

Prheddi: it’s too late for me, I know

TriniT: come on Calvin, it’s not that way. Jesus isn’t giving up on you.

Phreddi: I'm out of here

TriniT: don't leave.

TriniT: I know why you left, I'm sorry

Apparently phreddi left the chat session because triniT used his real name, Calvin. There it is. The common thread between Jim Mason and Pastor Frank Barclay, a gay hacker named Calvin.

I immediately compress the files on the disk and send it to Jacob along with a report about everything that I know so far. I ask him to find out as much as possible about Calvin and we'll go from there. I write that he goes by the handle of phreddi. Jacob is part of the hacker underground so if phreddi is anyone, he'll probably be able to find out real soon. Jacob might even know him since Jacob is always going to those hacker seminars that are held around the country. Jacob goes to those things and picks up some neat surveillance techniques so I pay for it. He learns a lot there and gets to know some really bright people. A lot of security administrators also frequent these seminars to learn about the newest security holes in their networks.

I used to think that a hacker wouldn't want to give away his secrets, much like a magician never tells you how to do the tricks. Not so with hackers. Jacob says that most of the hackers give full-length sessions on some of their latest techniques to exploit network security weaknesses. The hackers are willing to share because if they don't share, how else will anybody ever know how smart they are? Even with all the sophisticated equipment that the F.B.I now has available to investigate network intrusions, the most common way of catching the

perpetrators is word of mouth. The company's network that was compromised isn't going to say anything so it is up to the hacker to proclaim his victory to his peers.

I make a note of the site where the chat between triniT and phreddi took place. It's a Web site named animalz.com. They used an entire black background with a nice looking graphic of a purple and white tiger.

The site is filled with FBI bashing and links to different Web sites that have been hacked. There is a complete FAQ (frequently asked questions) about how to perform different hacks. Usually, once a security hole becomes general knowledge out on these sites, it has already been fixed. I sign on to the chat room and just watch some of the responses. It's mostly teenaged boys responding in vulgarities. Phreddi is not logged on.

I turned off the computer and lay down. My mouth was dry so I opened up my second bottle of water. I haven't been able to stop drinking ever since I landed in Dallas. I took the pillow from underneath the bedspread and planted my face in it.

Chapter 17

I woke up to the phone ringing. It was now dark and I could see the red ringing indicator of the phone on the nightstand. I could see it was just ten o'clock at night. I felt like I had been sleeping for a few days.

“I thought you might want to take a walk along those canals. It’s such a gorgeous night.” Vicki sounded like she wanted some company.

“Oh man, I must have fallen asleep. I thought it was in the middle of the night.” I was still trying to get things going.

“I’m sorry. I had no idea you’d be asleep at ten o’clock on Saturday.”

“No, no, no. Just napping. I guess that run took more out of me than I thought.” I hesitated with my next statement. “Why don’t you come over and we’ll go swimming.”

“That’s an idea. How about if we just go down by the pool. I don’t want to go home and change. I’m just driving back from dinner with some friends and I’ll just come by.”

“Great, just call me when you get here.” I hung up and felt a tinge of guilt and nervousness. I really needed to talk to her about her dad anyway. I can’t help it if she’s pretty and she flirts with me. I’m strong enough not to let it go too far. I would want to talk to her about her dad even if she was fat and ugly; it’s just part of the job.

When she called from the lobby and said, “I’m here” in her nice southern voice, I sounded like a prude schoolboy telling her that I’d be right down. I put on my running shorts and a tee shirt. I also took a towel in case they were closed and we had to sneak in.

She had on denim shorts and a sleeveless sweater. Her wavy, long brown hair was pulled back near the ends with a black and turquoise clip. When she

smiled and I could feel my heart beat faster in my neck and in my eyes, I knew that I was walking into dangerous territory.

We walked together down the stairs towards the pool. She grabbed my arm. “So, you had a hard time keeping up with us young women today huh?” She laughs and looks at me in a challenging manner. “That’s okay, I’m just kidding. You know Chris, the tall blond out there today, usually wins her age group. We’ve been running together for years.” She was talking loudly and I thought I detected a little bit of slurred speech.

We made it down to the pool and by now she’s holding on to my arm like I’m her escort. “Is there anyway we can get a cocktail out here?”

I direct her to sit down on one of the recliners. I sit down in the one next to hers. “I couldn’t drink anything tonight. I’m still so dehydrated, I would probably go into a coma if I drank any alcohol.” I was hoping that she would just drop the subject. I know if we started drinking tonight, things would get out of hand.

I lean back and look up at the sky. Since the Dallas Forth Worth Airport was so close, several planes were in different landing configurations. The start seemed dim. It was still muggy even at this hour of the night. “I’m going to get wet. I’ll be right back.”

I walked the few feet to the side of the pool and stuck my foot in to see how cold it the water was. I heard her approaching me rapidly just in time to feel her hands on my back, shoving me into the water. I bounce around a little bit, acting like she really put one over on me and she just laughs and goes back to sit down in the recliner.

“You know, if I wasn’t such a gentleman, I would get out of this pool, pick you up, and throw you in.”

“Yeah, you talk pretty big. You would have to catch me first.”

She’s right. The last thing I felt like at the time was to run some more after what I went through this morning. “I wouldn’t want you to get your sweater wet. You might not help me with my investigation any more than.”

“I didn’t know I was helping you now.”

I get out of the pool and dry off. Sitting down next to her, I ask, “Did you ever meet a friend of your dad’s named Calvin?”

“Calvin? No, who’s Calvin”

“It’s probably nothing then. I met with your dad yesterday in his office and I just saw a letter addressed to Calvin. I thought he might have been a friend of the family.”

“Have you found out anything else? I mean, is my dad in any danger?”

“To tell you the truth Vicki, I don’t know. Let me ask you another question. Has you dad ever had an affair that you know about?”

Vicki laughs. “Are you kidding? My dad would never cheat on my mom. I’m sure of it.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“I know my dad. My mom lets some things slip. I know he’s had trouble with, you know, what Viagra is supposed to help.”

Since some psychologists think that homosexuality in men is linked to rejection by the father, I ask, "What was your dad's relationship with his father like?"

Vicki laughs and says, "Are you a counselor too? That's great." She stops long enough to reflect and then she says, "I guess it was your typical father-son relationship. Grandpa was pretty demanding but most fathers are. He died when my dad was fifteen. He went into the Army right after high school and never looked back."

The temperature just dropped by at least ten degrees. "Did you feel that?" I ask. All the sudden, a cool front went by and dropped the temperature ten degrees. Look at those trees. The wind just picked up."

Vicki looks at me and then turns on her side so she is facing me. I feel like moving my lounge chair next to hers and kissing her. We continue to look into each other's eyes and I notice she is giving me the "go-ahead" smile. It takes every bit of self-control I have as a man to say, "Well, young lady, I better let you get home so you can get ready for church in the morning."

Vicki snickers a little, continues to look at me, and nods her head like she knows exactly how beautiful she is and how she is breaking down my defenses. She sits up and moves her legs to the side of the chair towards me. "You'll let me know if you find anything out won't you Teddy?" She says in the lowest voice that she has used all night.

We walk through the lobby and out to her car. “You drive carefully tonight, alright?” I say as I’m closing her car door after she got in. She starts the BMW and rolls down the window. “It was good to see you.”

“Good to see you too. Sweet dreams.” I watch her BMW’s red taillights drive off into the night.

Chapter 18

Now that I was wide-awake, I knew it would be a good time to see who was on the chat boards. Late night is usually the best time for hackers and crackers to be active. This is when most system administrators have gone home, leaving their systems vulnerable to intrusion. It’s also when most of the activity goes on in hacker chat rooms.

Most of the sites I visited had the usual, outdated FAQs (frequently asked questions) about different hacks. The chat boards had a bunch of young punks spouting out vulgarities. I noticed that Jacob was online and I started a chat session with him.

He replied that he’d been spending some time trying to find a hacker named Calvin that also might be in the gay community. He got a small lead from a file left on Pastor Barclay’s system from a chat session. Apparently, Pastor Barclay had been frequenting hacker chat rooms sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He

would sign on as triniT, emulating the hacker nomenclature. Once he was engaged, he would try to turn things to the spiritual.

This leftover file had a mention of a group known as the Sons of Destruction. Jacob said that this must be a small, local group since he had never heard of them before. He was spending some time online, gathering information, and emailing different hacker friends he had met either electronically or by attending seminars. None of his friends had heard of the Sons of Destruction either.

I didn't figure the Sons of Destruction were anything worth following so I continued to try to piece the information we had together. First, we had a rogue pastor that was involved to ministries to people outside the mainstream which was causing problems within the church, then a head elder that might have been involved in a homosexual affair, then a murder, a schizophrenic wife confessing, and now a trace to a hacker club.

I notice that it is two o'clock in the morning. I walk over and open the sliding glass door to the balcony. Mrs. Connery had set me up in a room overlooking the lake. I could tell that there wasn't a breeze blowing by the way the lights reflected off the water. It didn't feel much cooler at two o'clock than it did at ten o'clock when Vicki came by. While I was outside, trying to breathe the thick summer air, an idea came to me that was painfully obvious.

I went back in and got on one of the hacker chat rooms and started asking around for phreddi from the Sons of Destruction. I signed on with a handle of "#9", from the Beatles song. I figured these kids would think it was cool. The only

responses I got back were being called a “lamer”. I checked a few other boards with nothing helpful.

I visited a few gay sites and asked around for “phreddi” or Calvin. Still nothing tangible, just some questions about what my name meant. I responded that I’ve gotten my heart broken nine times. I got some sympathy but no good leads.

When I was on a chat board and asked about the Sons of Destruction, I received more attention than I wanted. Several replies cursed me out for being so much of a lamer. And then the funniest thing happened: Whenever I would type a response, all the letters would show up as the letter “f”. My mouse would move around without any problems, I just couldn’t type anything.

I figured the only way around it was to reboot. On second thought, I would just hang up now and reorganize my brain cells with a nice long sleep. I turned off the computer and got undressed. Before crawling in bed, I turned off all the lights and went out on my porch for a few minutes. I was now the middle of the night and I felt like I was the only soul awake.

I went back in to the room, pulled back the covers, and slid into the nice cool sheets. I arranged the big, fluffy pillows to my liking, felt the coolness underneath the pillows, and fell to sleep without another thought going through my head.

Chapter 19

I woke up in a start. I was dreaming that Vicki and I were climbing up the side of this mountain, running away from two big dogs. We would throw rocks and sticks at them but that would just stop them for awhile. The higher we got up the mountain, the less I could breath. Vicki was yelling at me to keep up. I was extremely agitated but had to keep climbing. Vicki was ahead of me and was pulling herself up on this ledge by pulling on a branch of a tree. As she was just about to hoist her leg up on the ledge, the branch broke and she fell backwards.

At first, it looked like she landed on her feet and her body was angled more towards the mountain. But after she landed, her boots couldn't stop the gravity of her being pulled down the hill. It was too late for me to move and on her way down she plowed right into my knees, knocking me down face first into the mountain. It was this collision woke we up and brought me back into the real world of Dallas and the murdered pastor.

I contemplated not running since I was feeling so drained by the heat, this investigation, and all this thinking about Vicki. I literally couldn't get her out of mind. It was like a song that sticks in your head all day. I couldn't think of anything else but her. The way she looked last night in her turquoise jewelry, the sound of her voice, and her perfectly shaped suntanned hands that were made even prettier with fresh salon tips and polish.

After thinking about ten more minutes about Vicki and what I was doing in this position, I decided to go for a short run. A friend of mine used to tell me that anything under three miles are a waste of time. I don't think he ever ran in this Texas heat and humidity.

After getting back from my run, I decided to call my wife and check in. I knew she would be upset but I didn't realize the extent of it.

"Why haven't you called before now? What are you trying to do to me? Give me a nervous breakdown?" She lashed out.

"No honey, nothing like that."

"You don't even care enough to call everyday. I remember you used to call me at least twice a day when you were on the road, just to hear my voice."

"Look what you're doing. Just listen to yourself. And you're wondering why I don't call. I really enjoy getting lambasted just for checking in. Thanks for reminding why I haven't called. I did want to hear your voice, I though." I said, turning the tables around just a little.

"If it was me and I didn't call, you'd be livid."

"You're right, honey, I should have called earlier. I'm sorry." I changed to my sweet tone.

She not quite done. "How do you expect us to survive like this? It seems like you've just given up on us. Is that true?"

"No, it's not true. We've got too much going for us. I'll do better. I promise." We both pause for effect. The first one that speaks loses. "So, how are things?" I ask.

"About the same. Meeting Susan for lunch. Then going to get my hair done. It's with that new stylist. The one I told you about that is Shirley's son. Oh, by the way, Jacob called and wanted me to pass along a message if you called. I told him I hadn't heard from you in a couple of days. Even he seemed shocked.

Anyway, he says that he's been researching it and that he doesn't think you should use your cell phone except to order a pizza."

"Except to order a pizza? I ask.

"That's what he said. He said that cell phones are very insecure and that people might be listening in to your calls."

"That's strange. I know they're not secure. I'm just wondering why he would bring that up now at this point?"

"Beats me. Well anyway Teddy thanks for calling. I love you."

After hanging up, her last words hung around my hotel room like toys suspended from a child's mobile. Why does she always say that? It's like she's wants to wear me out with it. Or take the brute-force method to make me love her. I know she can't be that much in love with me. I sure haven't done anything lately to deserve it. Now I'm down here on assignment and there's sweet, beautiful, Vicki. Well, I don't know if she's sweet. Deep in side, I'm hoping she's not.

I decide to give Jacob a call and see what's up. "What's this about not using my cell phone?" I ask after getting him on the line.

It sounds like he's busy typing away and not really giving me his full attention. "I'm so much faster with a keyboard than I'm with a mouse. I regret the day they ever invented one of those things."

“About the cell phone?”

“Oh yeah, that.” He takes a long gulp of something. “It looks like the Sons of Destruction might be into phone phreaking. You know, tapping and re-routing calls.”

“What does that have to do with anything down here?” I ask, trying to figure out the connection.

It sounds like he is eating something and still trying to type. “I’m just saying, you start messing around with that crowd and you’ll be exposed pretty quick.”

“So you think this Calvin a.k.a. phreddi is in the Sons of Destruction?” I ask.

“Can’t tell yet. Membership in these clubs is very fluid. I haven’t seen any posts by him. Doesn’t mean anything though. He might be laying low are his mom might have taken away his computer.”

I think about this for a minute. “Do you think he’s that young?”

“You don’t have to be that young to live at home with your mom. It’s nice here. She doesn’t hassle me and I stay back here.” He takes another gulp of whatever it is he’s drinking. I bet it’s a Diet Coke. If you put a needle in his veins, you would draw mostly Diet Coke.

“So, what’s the best way to find out about this Calvin character?” I ask.

“The old fashioned way – we meet him in Las Vegas?”

“Las Vegas?” I’m a little startled. “What in the world?”

“Yep, Las Vegas. I’ve never been there.”

“I’m still not following you. Does Calvin live in Las Vegas?”

“The city of sin. Slot machines and dancing girls. I’d like to hack into one of those things. I wonder how hard that would be?”

“Jacob,” I plead. “Come back down to earth. We’ve got work to do.”

“The Black Hat convention is there this year. It will be our chance to meet all the major players. I could even learn a few things that will help us here.”

“Is Calvin going to be there?” I ask hopefully.

“I saw some posts from some of the Sons of Destruction. It sounded like they were going. Of course, you can’t tell for sure if it was just wishful thinking on their part or not.”

I look down at the ground and think about how this would go over with Mrs. Connery as a business expense. Two trips to Las Vegas. Seminar fees to a Black Hat convention. She would probably think it was some type of show.

“When is it?”

“If we’re going, start packing. It starts tonight.”

Chapter 20

Las Vegas had undergone a radical change since I had been here with my wife several years ago. The buildings in Las Vegas now all were high-rises.

While I'm riding down the Strip in the back of a taxi looking at all these multi-billion dollar hotels, I finally figure out that gambling does pay.

The seminar is at the new Mandalay Bay hotel. It's at the far south end of the strip. The Mandalay Bay is supposed to be one of the nicest hotels on the strip. I hope it is for the price. We drive past the LEXOR and then into the Mandalay Bay entrance. The entrance winds around meticulously landscaped gardens and shrubs. The taxi stops in the front where there is a beehive of activity going on.

I get out of the taxi and tell the bellhop that I'm checking in. The lobby has a nice, sweet smell to it. But then a guy with a cigar walks by and ruins it for everybody. It's all coming back to me why I don't really like it here. Las Vegas is probably the only city left in the country that doesn't curtail smoking in public places.

In order to compete with the other hotels on the strip, Mandalay Bay built a 20-acre beach area that my room overlooks. I'm not sure if I'll have time but I would like to go for a dip in the wave pool.

Jacob is supposed to be coming in later. He said that I should wait for him before going down to get registered at the Black Hat seminar. I guess he wants to make sure I don't say something stupid in front of the other attendees. That's good. I'll take a nap until he gets here.

When I woke up, just the last rays of sunlight were coming in through the window. For the first time since I started this investigation, I had slept soundly for more than thirty minutes. My message light wasn't on so I decided to call Jacob's room to see if he had made it in yet.

After a couple rings, he answers the phone sounding like I woke him up. "Just calling to see if you made it yet." I say in my annoying "good mood" voice.

"Man. I was just catching some zzzz's. Give me fifteen and I'll meet you down at the reception. It's in the Blues room".

I walk down to the reception in my shorts and sport shirt. There's not much I could do about looking like a FBI agent. I decided that my front was an author researching computer security and the people that access computers for education and profit.

There are two lovely young women working the registration desk. It never occurred to me that hackers had groupies just like rock stars do. They find my name and already have a nametag waiting for me. I gave Jacob my credit card number yesterday to register both of us. I wonder how a trip to Las Vegas is going to look to Mrs. Connery when I turn in my expenses.

I receive an agenda of the sessions that are going to be held over two days: Hacking the Solaris Kernel, Covering Your Tracks in the Snow, 10 Best Hacks this Year, PBX Switch Witch, and several others on Windows and passwords. There were a few open forums and also some special interest groups, SIGs, for Governments and eTailers.

When I made my way to the open bar, I notice everyone that is standing around talking in groups looks pretty normal. I guess I was expecting a bunch of society's outcasts to attend a seminar like this. I learned later though that some of the attendees to this type of hacker's conference are security administrators

trying to figure out where their systems are vulnerable. Of course, hackers attend these conferences in droves to trade what they have learned for other information that might be valuable to them. If a hacker knows how to access a particular system, this information can be used as currency to gain recognition, respect, more information, and in some clubs, access to the women.

I try to make my way into several different groups but I wasn't embraced right away. Even though I say I'm an author, the reaction I get from most of these kids is one of distrust and caution. The two groups that I tried to start a conversation in fell apart two minutes after I joined them. That's when I spotted a short, red headed kid standing by himself.

I walk up and try to start some small talk. "Nice place. I could stay here for awhile. Everything in this hotel is brand new." I didn't get much reaction so now I have to ask a question to break through. "My name is Teddy. What's your name?" I extend my hand.

He looks past me with his blue eyes, but smiles and hands me his wet, small hand, "Sunyo."

"Sunyo?" I'm a little surprised because he looks more like a Brian or a Danny.

"That's an interesting name. Tell me Sunyo, are you having fun at the conference so far?"

"What I've seen so far. I'm hoping some of my friends will show up soon so we can go exploring," he said.

"Where are you in from?" I ask.

"You sure ask a lot of questions." He says as politely as possible.

“Oh, Sunyo, I’m sorry. I’m an author and I’m writing a book about computer security. I’m here doing research. You’ll have to read it when it comes out.”

“What’s the name of it?” He asks.

“Not really sure yet. I’m still looking for the right story. You know, some famous hacker that wants to tell his story. Are you one of those?”

“What? One of what?” he asks.

“Famous hacker. Are you a famous hacker?” I ask.

“Famous hackers end up in jail,” he said.

“Do you know anyone in jail?”

“Of course. You do this business long enough and you might end up there yourself.”

“Aren’t you afraid you’ll end up there as well?”

“I don’t do anything against the law. It’s not against the law to check to see if a door is locked is it?” I didn’t answer. “Well, is it?” he asked again.

“Good point. What area do you live in Sunyo? I might want to hire you as an advisor to my book. Is that something that would interest you?”

“How much are you paying?”

I had to stop and think. “The way it works is I get an advance from the publisher to do a book. The amount I can pay any advisors depends on how big the advance is. The amount of the advance depends on how good the story is.”

He still looked interested. Well, at least he wasn’t walking away. “How do I know you’re not with the Feds? You look like you might be with the Feds.” He is

starting to get more into his tough-guy dialogue and mannerisms by almost rapping out the words, bobbing his head, and pointing in different directions.

I shrug my shoulders and look as innocent and truthful as possible. "I'm a retired minister working on my second career."

"You were a preacher man? Wow! This gets better all the time." He is really starting to put on a show; sounding tough and worldly. I think that he wants me to believe that he would be a good advisor since he's in with big guys.

He agrees to meet me for lunch the following day to go over my offer to use him as an advisor. I told him I was going to see who else from this conference wanted to do it and this seemed to get him a little more motivated.

After my conversation with Sunyo, I looked up to see Jacob with a bottle of beer standing in a group of people. I walk over and notice that everyone in the group is listening intently to a young man with bleached white hair. He was loudly explaining some type of discovery method:

"You have to use "nmap" to figure what kind of router you got there. After that, leakage occurs, you know the packets, and you can see what's there." The whole group just stood around mesmerized with what whitey was telling them. I'm not sure if it was the content or his passion that kept them attentive.

I listened to this drivel for about five more minutes before wondering off to the bar. I usually don't drink when I'm actually working but I figured that walking around with a beer would relieve some suspicions about me.

I hung around a few more groups that had gathered. It seemed to me that these groups would form around certain experts and just listen to their latest

discoveries. After spending so many nights alone hacking into sites, you could tell the so-called experts were getting a big kick out of all the attention.

Chapter 21

The next morning, Jacob called and said we shouldn't hang out together. He said that he could get better information if everyone didn't think he was hanging around with the FBI agent.

"That's what they said?" I asked.

"Yeah. A couple of times. You need to work harder on that book writing thing. Maybe during some of the sessions you could say something to put these guys at ease."

I promised Jacob that I would try to push my identity harder and also that I wouldn't act like I knew him. One thing he did mention that was encouraging was that the young, redheaded kid I met last night, Sunyo, was one of the Sons of Destruction. Or at least he was going around talking like he was a member.

I started out at a session named "Casing the Joint", which went into different ways to learn about a system before you actually break in. Some of the techniques we learned were fairly simple. For example, the Securities and Exchange Commission has information about all the public companies. The instructor encouraged us to look for acquisitions. His reasoning was that the

company that was acquired probably got their computer network integrated with the purchasing company's network in a rapid and insecure fashion.

We also learned about all the information there is about a company in the Internet's registration database. All of the nodes and administrative contacts can be found there. The administrative contact's phone number and email address is listed. The phone number can be used for the area code and prefix to start a dial-in penetration review, looking for internal modems.

The email addresses of the administrative contacts can be used by hackers to send email into the company they are trying to penetrate, asking certain users to change their passwords to a certain value. "If you got an email from your system guru asking you to change your password to 'Flintstones', don't you think you would do it?"

The instructor pointed out how this seemingly harmless information out in these Internet registration databases can be used for social engineering as well. Posing as the system administrator on the phone to unsuspecting users and having them name off every keystroke they go through to sign on to the system.

After the morning session, I caught up with Sunyo in the hall.

"Hey, I got to talk with my publisher this morning and they are really interested in a book about the hacker underworld." I try to sound as excited and believable as possible.

Sunyo looks around at the other attendees like he is a collaborator. "I'm not sure. I'm afraid that they'll cut me out of it."

"Cut you out of it?" I ask.

“Yeah. The club.”

“Oh I see. But this book isn’t about your club. It’s about hacker clubs in general. The culture. I knew you were the guy I wanted to talk to because you remind me of one of those Black Hat guys. Just some type of aura. Are you teaching any classes?” I think that I might have put it on a little thick. Sometimes more it better though, depending on the personality type you’re dealing with.

“Just the culture? I might be able to do just the culture. It’s unbelievable man. The whole pecking order and all. The initiations and things. Yeah, it’s a different world we’re in alright.” He now was back being the confident, know-it-all kid that was emerging last night.

“Let’s have some lunch and I’ll go over your incentives.”

He looks around again, making sure he’s not going to be scolded, and starts walking with me to the one of the world-famous Las Vegas buffets.

After his fourth trip back for beef tips, rice, and fried chicken, I figured out that he probably wasn’t getting regular meals.

“I’d like to offer you \$400 a month to meet with me a few times for you to advise me on my book. Maybe couple months deal. I won’t use your name anywhere unless you want and then only in a way that increases your marketability. I understand that some firms like to hire guys like you to point out their security holes.”

“Oh yeah. I do that all the time. It’s always strictly on a cash basis though. I’ve done some work for the FBI, CIA, all those guys. It’s always hush hush.”

“Really? Wow. You’re a perfect fit for this. You could really get your name out there.” I could tell he was thinking about what he was going to buy with all that money he was going to make when he was famous. “So, what do you think? Do you want to help me?”

He was a pretty good negotiator at his tender, young age. “Make that \$500 a month and you’ve got yourself a deal. Of course, I’ll need some before we get started.”

“How about \$200 now, and then the rest after a few meetings?” He looks around like we’re being watched and then extends his hand and rubs his thumb and index finger together. I take my wallet out and give him two \$100 dollar bills. “By the way, where do you live?” I ask.

“Dallas”

“How do I get a hold of you after the seminar?”

“You don’t.” He just stops and looks at me defiantly. For a minute I thought that I might have to grab this punk and stuff his head in the salad bar. “Just kidding. Here’s my telephone and email. Listen; give me a call after this thing is over. I don’t want anyone thinking that I’m in with the Feds.”

Chapter 22

I decided to take the rest of the day off after lunch and enjoy the spa at the Mandalay Bay. Mrs. Connery was paying me enough that I could afford a little luxury. I made an appointment for a fifty-minute herbal message.

When I got down to the spa, the check-in girl took my name and room number and said to follow the hall down to the men's side. The entrance to the men's side looked like a typical country club men's locker room with newspapers, televisions, and half-dressed men in all different positions of recompose. The attendant gave me a locker key to wear around my wrist and gave me a tour of the facilities.

We entered what looked like an ancient Roman pool and spa area. On the far end of this huge area, large windows opened up to the garden patio. There was a large marble waterfall in the middle that flowed into the wading pool and hot spas. There were large tropical trees and plants situated throughout.

He showed me the steam room, saunas, and weight room. He pointed out my locker and told me to relax awhile and check with him at the desk when I'm ready for my massage. In my locker I found a high-quality cotton robe and some jelly-filled sandals to change into. My first stop was going to be the steam room.

In the steam room I could barely make out the other person that came in after me. He starts coughing like he was choking on the steam. Several times it sounded like he was about to require medical attention. "Are you alright? Do you want me to notify someone?" I ask.

After a few more coughs and gasps, he manages to say he is all right. That this always happens. That it's like a cleansing process for his lungs. After a while he quits coughing and he just sits there with his head down.

"This is the life," I said to start up a conversation.

"Yeah. I'd rather be here than listening to all those lamers that showed up this year." He said with a scowl.

"What do you mean? At the hackers convention?" I ask.

"Bunch of lamers. I'll tell you what; I don't know where they keep coming from. It used to be we had guys that were interested in the true art of computer access techniques. Now everyone wants a quick and easy way to spray paint a Web site."

I didn't want him to stop sharing so I tried to keep him talking. "You must be an instructor."

"Not this year. I just came because we have some new guys in our club I wanted to introduce around."

"You in a club? Which club?"

"S.O.D.," he says like he really doesn't want me to hear.

"S.O.D.?" Does that stand for something?

"Sons of Destruction. It's just a name. It sounded better when I was younger. It would be too hard to change it now. Well, I've had enough." He gets up and I watch him walk out. He's got short, light brown hair and a medium build.

I figured I would see him around the pool but he wasn't out there when I finished with the steam. After lounging around the pool for awhile, I went up front and let them know I was ready for that massage.

Alex, the masseuse, led me back to a private room and said that I should lay down face first on one of those massage tables with the opening for your face. She wanted me to get comfortable and cover up the lower part of my body in private. She turned down the lights and told me to relax a while and she'd be back in.

After about five minutes, she came back in and it sounded like she was mixing up some chemicals in glass test tubes. I could smell a strong mint odor. She walked up to me and put her hands on my bare back near my shoulder blades. I could feel and smell the aromatic oils she was rubbing into my skin.

She kneaded my back muscles for awhile like you would bread dough. Then she started tracing my spine with her fingers. It felt like she would find a knot in my spine and move it up my back until it dissolved. I couldn't help but make some grunts every now and then because it tickled and hurt at the same time. I just lay there and took it like a man.

After awhile, she started in on my shoulders. Then moved towards the set of muscles that connect your neck and shoulders. "Wow. You really got some bad stuff in there," she said. She then pinched these muscles and right before I screamed, I felt the bad stuff she was talking about slip away along with her fingers.

She put me in this pinch-grip for the next ten minutes. I could feel the pain going from my neck, up to my ears, to my brain and then out my forehead. She said that should do it for now and that I should just lay there for awhile and relax.

After I got up and drank some water from the bottle she left out for me, I felt like my upper body, especially around my neck and shoulders, was ten pounds lighter. I must have had a lot tension built-up from years of airplane rides, traffic jams, idiots, and life in general.

When I woke up from my nap that I slipped up stairs to take, it was already dark. I decided that I should see the sites of Las Vegas while I was here. My first stop was the casino down stairs. I decided to take a twenty-dollar bill and see how long I could last on one of the craps tables.

There are acres and acres of lights, slot machines, game tables, people, waitresses, and attendants in the Mandalay casino. I walked around and looked at some of the newer type slot machines where the lever that you pull had been replaced by a button. I guess it is easier to play one with the button but I noticed that they left some with the pull lever the players that like the feel of it.

Most people at the slot machines were engrossed in putting coins in the machines and taking their chances. I walked by one old man that was standing in front of a machine that was spewing out half-dollars like a mint. The old man was just standing there like it wasn't any big deal. He was just shoveling them into his bucket.

I kept walking past the roulette tables and came to the dollar slot machines. This is where I saw the guy from the sauna lurking around, watching a middle-

aged lady play one of these high-end machines. I watched him for a minute and as soon as she left the machine, he walked up to it and put in three dollars. He pulled the handle and he won the jackpot. He looked at his watch, put in there more quarters, and won again. The attendant came over and gave him a fist full of five hundred-dollar chips.

He went over to a few more machines and put some money in them and didn't win anything. He moved around from machine to machine, not really expecting to win. It looked like he was just trying to spread his dollars evenly between the machines. Just when I was going to go up and start talking to him, he left. I followed him past a few gaming sections but he walked quickly to the cashier's cage and then out of the casino to the hotel lobby.

Something about that whole scene bothered me. It just didn't seem that the member of Sons of Destruction I met in the sauna earlier got that excited after winning two big jackpots in a row. And the way he played the machines afterward was strange. Even the blank look on his face when the cashier peeled off several thousand dollars for his chips bothered me. You would expect most people to show a least a little emotion. Maybe he didn't want to attract attention; I don't know.

I decided to check out some other hotels on the strip so I went outside and caught a taxi. Las Vegas is a taxi driver's heaven. They stay constantly busy and can make up to five hundred dollars a night. My taxi driver left the hotel that is on the far south end of the strip and headed even farther south and then got on the highway. From the highway you can see the back sides of these multi-billion

hotels. It's quite a site to see these gigantic structures where the Sands and other Las Vegas landmarks used to stand.

I tell the driver to drop me off at Treasure Island. I had heard about the pirate show they do outside of the hotel but I had never seen live. As we drive up to the hotel, I notice that the show must be starting soon because of the crowds that line the boardwalk that surrounds the hotel. I gave the driver a ten for a seven-dollar fare and then let myself out.

The pirate show that they do outside of the hotel involves two full-sized sailing vessels with full crew shooting at each other with cannons. The pirate ship gets hit and catches on fire but manages to fire a cannon ball that sinks the British flagged vessel. The crew jumps out into the water and the show is over. I think to myself that it would be a rough way to make a living, especially in the winter.

I briefly go into the Treasure Island casino and look around. I have to admit that most of these casinos look about the same. I play some craps and quickly lose my twenty dollars. I then walk around to the slot machines and watch the players. I'm still thinking about the hacker from the shower that won twice in a row and then left suddenly. It suddenly dawns on me that a slot machine would be a hacker's prime target. Besides ATM machines, slot machines are about the only other target that dispenses large quantities of real cash.

I walk over to a machine that is being serviced. The front is open and I can see all kinds of wires, circuits, and change holders. It doesn't look like it has a personal computer system unit inside. They must be monitored and controlled by a central server somewhere in the building. If you got access to the central server

you could control the slot machines on the floor. I'm just wondering how you could control which ones to pay out and when.

I get in a taxi and start heading back down the strip. This time, we go straight down the strip instead of going around on the highway. There is a lot of pedestrian traffic even though the hotels do everything they can to keep you from leaving the hotel. Some hotels have a train that goes between them but there is not a rail system that connects the entire strip. The millions of lights that made Las Vegas famous have been replaced by JumboTrons that line the Strip in front of each hotel. The hotels use these JumboTrons for advertising and promotion of the stars, shows, and specials they offer.

When I get up to my room, I check to see if Jacob is online. I should have known he would be. I initiate a chat session with him and ask if it would be possible to hack into a casino and manipulate the slot machines. He replied back that it would be possible but they probably don't have the machines hooked up to a network where you could get in from the outside. I asked him what about from the inside and he said that technically it would be easy if you had someone on the inside changing the randomizing algorithm to win more frequently.

Eagle: Have you learned anything else about the Sons of
 Destruction?

Touch : These guys are strange! And I know hackers!

Eagle: Tell me.

Touch: All they can talk about is this guy named Stan. I haven't seen
 him around yet.

Eagle: Might be the guy I met in the sauna. I think he's the founder of the club.

Touch: Probably him. I talked to Sunyo. He doesn't know what to think of you. He'd be a good one to get some information out of. He knows enough and is immature enough to say too much.

Eagle: That's my plan! Any luck on a Calvin?

Touch: Haven't heard anyone mention Calvin.

Eagle: I'm going to try to talk to Sunyo one more time tomorrow and then head back.

Touch: I'm going to stay and see the sites.

Eagle: Remember, we're on business, not vacation.

Touch: Come on boss!

Eagle: Jacob, you can't stay past the seminar and expect to expense it.

Touch: Just kidding boss. I'm heading home right after they finish up. I need to get home and practice some of the neat things I learned this week.

Eagle: Good night Jacob!

Touch: Night boss.

Chapter 23

On the way back from Las Vegas, I decide to stop by Denver and see my wife, Karen. I get to the Denver airport and get my car out of long term parking before I start thinking that I should have called and let her know I was coming home. Calling her now wouldn't help; she would still be mad.

When I came in through the garage, she was just coming out of the laundry room. "You could have called you know," she says with an edge.

"It was a last minute decision. I was flying back from Las Vegas to Dallas and thought I should stop by here for a few days."

She walks past me with an armful of folded clothes. "You don't even respect me enough to call," she says and walks upstairs.

I stay in the kitchen awhile, looking around at the familiar appliances and furniture. I've always liked coming home. I open the refrigerator and get out some chocolate candy. Karen always keeps me stocked up on my favorite snacks. She's really been good to me all of the time we've been married. The problems that we have are my fault; on that point I agree with our pastor and counselor. I'm not really sure why I'm not strong enough to be satisfied with her love only. I'm picturing Vicki, Jim Mason's daughter, in my mind's eye when Karen comes back down.

“How long are you staying? Can you at least tell me that? Or do you want to continue to play this little mind game of yours?” she snips out these last three questions at a pretty good clip.

“Just long enough to see you and get some clothes. I was thinking we could go up to the North Woods Inn tonight for some steak. I have an afternoon flight out tomorrow. I’ll probably be in Dallas one more week – two at the most.”

“Why even bother to come home? Don’t they have washer machines there?”

“Like I said, I came home to see you. Don’t make me regret it.” I didn’t get any response to this. Just a look that said that she was still upset but calming down a little.

I took a long nap on the couch, woke up, and took a shower. I knock softly on the bedroom door and then I go in. “I made some reservations for eight o’clock. How does that sound?”

Karen looks at me a little softer. “Sounds good. We haven’t been there in a while. That prime steak I had there last time was very good.”

I click the door closed behind me and walk back down the stairs. I call Jacob’s house to see if he made it back yet from Las Vegas. I get his answering machine and I leave a message for him to call me at my house in Denver.

A few minutes later the phone rings. It’s Jacob.

“What are you doing back here? I thought you were going back to Dallas?”

“Decided to take a detour. I needed to get back here and see Karen. How’d the last sessions go?”

Jacob sounded a little disappointed. “I guess alright. For some reason the whole time it felt to me like the sessions were the last priority for most of those guys. I felt like something else was going on that was primary. I also felt like an outsider the whole time. I’m not mister congeniality but that’s a tough group to crack.”

“You think you had trouble fitting in. At least they didn’t think you were with the FBI the whole time,” I respond.

“Anyway, it’s good you came back to Denver. I’ve got something you should see.”

“What is it?”

“It’s better if you just came over. Do you remember where my mom lives?”

“Yeah. Over there by Lawry AFB. It’s been a while but I think I can find it. What about my wife? Should I bring her?”

“It won’t be any fun for her, let me put it that way.”

I look up at the ceiling knowing Karen is up stairs getting ready to go out. It wouldn’t be worth it to go over tonight, no matter Jacob’s found. “I’ll be over first thing in the morning.”

I get the typical GenX response. “Don’t come over too early. I usually don’t go to bed until three or four. That’s the best time to be online.”

“Well, you’d better get to bed early tonight. I have a flight back to Dallas at one.” Since I’m the one that handles the paychecks, I use a little of my weight. “I’ll be there at 8:30 – with donuts.”

“Make my plain. And bring the coffee too.”

On the ride over to the North Woods Inn that night, there was tension in the car. Karen was quiet and answered my queries in one or two word answers. I turned on the radio and listened to an oldie's station. I was oblivious as to what the problem with our marriage was but I couldn't help think about how it would be with Vicki sitting over there. She would be smiling and we'd be laughing and holding hands and talking. As it was with Karen, we just drained all the energy out of each other being bitter.

The North Woods Inn is one of those rustic steak houses that have peanut shells all over the floor. They serve some of the best steaks in the country. My rib eye came back medium rare with a nice side of mushrooms. You could almost cut it with a fork. It was cooked perfectly but the whole thing was ruined by Karen's scowl across the table.

I finally got fed up with it and asked her what in the world was the matter.

“Why do you always think it's me? You always blame everything on me.”

“I don't either,” I said.

“You even blamed your affair on me. Everything is not my fault.”

“How many times do we have to go down this path?” I slam down my knife and fork. “I can't go on like this. If you can't get by something that happened years ago, you know you have an out. It says in the Bible that you can get a divorce.”

“You act like it's that simple. You act as if I don't love you.” She takes a small bite of her steak. I resume eating mine. “I don't know what I should do.”

“Well, whatever it is, make your mind up and do it. Like I said, we can’t go on like this.”

“You know if you really loved me, you wouldn’t say things like that. You’d say things like ‘Baby, don’t leave me – I love you’. Instead, you just tell me how hard it is to live with me. You’re the one that’s always sending mixed signals. I don’t know how to react anymore. You come home without warning and you expect me to be all excited and breezy. You just can’t play these games with me anymore. I sometimes wake up and think that I’m going to lose my mind. I really do think that the I’m going to go over the edge with all this fear and anxiety I have about us.”

I put my fork down, close my eyes, tilt my head back and run my fingers through me hair. I take a couple of deep breaths and then open my to look at her. “Baby, I know it’s been a rough time. I wish I had an answer. We’ve just got to find one before this kills us both.”

It really wasn’t much better the rest of the night. She got ready and got in bed while I was checking some email. I didn’t know if I should wake her up to tell her I would be going over to Jacob’s early in the morning and probably going to the airport from there. I reasoned that she’d be up before I left in the morning and I would just tell her then.

The next morning, she was indeed up. I packed up and told her about the call I had with Jacob the day before. I told her it was important to this case and that I

would probably have things wrapped up this week or the next. She gave me the mandatory peck on the lips and I left.

When I got over to Jacob's with the coffee and donuts, his mom answered the door. She looked like she had just gotten in from a night out at the clubs. There was a man laying asleep in the front room. He was just sprawled out on the floor wearing his jeans and cowboy boots. I figured it was some stray cowboy that Jacob's mom met in the bar last night.

His mom took the coffee and donuts and said thanks. She walked into the kitchen and opened the box and started eating. "Man, those are some fresh donuts. I don't know if Jacob is even up yet. He's usually not."

I walk back to his room. I opened the door and see him with his head down on his desk. He's sound asleep. He has an old looking monitor connected to a couple of older PCs. His modem has several cables attached to it that weren't put there by the manufacturer. There is paper scattered everywhere. Even I didn't know better, I would say he's been dumpster diving for logins and passwords. There several pizza boxes and lots of empty Diet Coke cans.

I walk up to Jacob and shook him. He slowly came to understand that he was still alive and that it was time to show me his discovery. He looked worse than I had ever seen him. His long and wavy brown hair was always messed up but not like this. It was puffed out on one side and he had several indentations in his forehead and cheeks from his watch and sleeves. He just sat straight up in his chair with his eyes closed for several minutes. I went into the kitchen and got what was left of the donuts and coffee.

“I just wanted to show you that our boys from Las Vegas are about to get busted. After you gave me Sunyo’s phone number, I looked at a computer in Dallas that says that his line is being tapped by the FBI”

“What computer said that? How’d you get on to it?” I ask.

“It’s better that you don’t know. Anyway, I’m thinking about steering clear of these guys. I don’t want to get messed up with anything like this. I’ve seen it happen that these federals go in for a sweep with a big net and catch everyone around in a 100 mile radius. They eventually let the dolphins go but not after a lot of heart ache and sorrow.”

“Well, we can’t just walk away from this thing. We don’t even know if these hacker guys are in any way related to the murder of Pastor Barclay. We found some left over files from his PC and Jim Mason has something to hide; but I don’t know if we’re even on the right track.”

Jacob takes a deep breath and looks at the ceiling. He crosses one arm in front of him and with his other hand massages his sleepy face. He continues to massage his face while he yawns. “I don’t know man.”

I know he really wants to pursue this but wants me to talk him into it. Maybe even offer him more money. “Let’s just take it a little further. If it turns out that these guys are just a bunch of hackers making money in Las Vegas, we’ll drop it. I’m just not sure that there’s no link between them and the murder.” His expression doesn’t change. “Alright, a two thousand dollar bonus if we find out who murdered Pastor Barclay.” That got his attention.

He now starts rubbing his face with both of his hands. “Three thousand. And if I suspect the FBI has put a clamp on my line, I’m out of here.”

“It’s a deal. What’s the first step?”

Jacob is now starting to wake up after a few donuts and some coffee. “The first thing I’m going to do is find out more about Sunyo and his activities on his computer.”

“How are you going to do that?”

“The easy way. Since the Feds are already monitoring him and collecting information, I’ll just get it from them.”

“You’re not saying that you’re going to break into the FBI’s system so you can see what Sunyo is up to, are you?”

“No boss. I wouldn’t do anything like that.” Jacob answered sarcastically.

“You just remember that I want everything you do to be legal.”

“Okay boss. Just remember, there are different interpretations of what’s legal.”

Chapter 24

Karen didn’t seem to mind that I was heading back to Dallas so soon after getting home. We had had some coffee before I went over to Jacob’s. She just sat there with the entire weight of twenty years of marriage on her mind.

On the airplane back to Dallas, I wondered what I should do about Vicki. I felt like seeing her when I got there. Why am I like this? Why can't the wife of my youth satisfy me desires? Do all men struggle with this? What about Christian men? For goodness sakes, at one time I was a senior pastor at one of the largest churches in the United States. The spiritual leader of thousands. The funny thing is that I always knew I didn't have this one area under control. I always knew it was the weak link in my character. What was I supposed to do? Ask for prayer? From who? The elders? I would have been run of town quicker than I was.

I decided that I was going to let Vicki call me. That way I wouldn't feel as guilty.

It seemed even hotter when I got off the plane in Dallas. I was traveling light and already had my rental car at the airport so I got back to the hotel quickly. The first thing I wanted to do is to call Sunyo and ask if we could get together. I was surprised that I got him on the first try. He was real short with me and said he didn't want to meet. I asked about the deal we had and about the \$200 I had already given him. He said that the deal was off.

Since I didn't have anything to lose, I asked him if he could recommend someone else I could talk to about my research. He hesitated and gave me the name of "phlint". He didn't have his number and quickly hung up.

I figured Sunyo wouldn't give me a reference that had any idea what the Sons of Destruction were up but decided to track him down anyway. I've discovered in

this business that someone that knows someone usually has better information than a total stranger off the street does.

Jacob and I spent the rest of the day trying to locate “phlint” out on the chat boards. Jacob thought he had seen some posts by “phlint” out on a newbie hacker board. Sure enough, Jacob located some posts by “phlint” on a beginner’s board.

This beginner’s board, called “phrack 101”, was the incubator for most hackers in the world. This is where they learn the basics of network security, UNIX, and the latest security holes that they can exploit. The problem was that most security consultants and governmental agencies, including the National Security Agency, also monitored “phrack 101” so the latest security problems were quickly patched before too much damage was caused.

For some reason, the image of Allison Barclay sitting in that jail cell popped into my mind. I felt that maybe I was going down the wrong path investigating these hackers. I felt that it was a long shot to find out anything substantial from this “phlint” character. I needed to decide what my options were and if I should expend any energy and resources trying to meet with this unknown, beginner in the art of hacking.

Jacob, my partner, pulled off his usual magic and found out what phlint’s email address was and from that figured out his true identity. His real name was Steve Knowles and he probably still lived with his parents since Jacob couldn’t find an address for him. I sent him an email explaining I was writing a book about Information Technology and I heard that he was an expert in network security

issues. In the email, I asked if he would be interested in working as a consultant for my book at \$50 an hour. I also included a link to a book publisher to give me a legitimate façade.

I knew most of these guys spent most of their waking hours online but I was pleasantly surprised when he answered my email back within the hour. In his reply, phlint sounded tentative and unsure about my request. I took it as normal caution so I wrote him back that we should meet and then he could decide if he wanted to go through with my proposal.

He agreed to meet me and picked a brewery in Deep Ellum, a restored warehouse district in downtown Dallas. I sat at tall bar table for over an hour passed our scheduled meeting time before phlint showed up. I figured he had been casing the place, making sure I wasn't there with backup.

When phlint first walked up, the first thing that went through my mind was he was too nice to be in this business. He looked like the all-American boy with short strawberry-blond hair and a sweet looking, freckle face. He walked up very timidly and whispered when he spoke.

He sat down and ordered a root beer. "You don't have a bug on you do you man?" He asked. The question sounded rehearsed because it sounded totally out of character for him to be so abrupt. He reached for a cigarette pack, took one out, and lit it. He didn't smoke like nicotine was a long, close friend. His effort to get smoke into his lungs was too labored and thought out. "I mean, it's just too much for me to handle right now, you know, the Feds and all." He looked around again to make sure we looked as suspicious as possible.

I smiled and used my best friend voice. “Don’t worry about that phlint. Relax. I’m just writing a book about computer security. I want to know about the culture; not anyone or anything in particular. I just figured a guy like you who knows all about these things would want to make some extra cash by just talking to me.”

He seemed to ease up a little but was still way too interested in the money. “Did you bring the cash? I need five hundred to start.”

I really didn’t like the way this was heading. First of all, five hundred dollars would be a lot of money to put on an expense report for Mrs. Connery under the category “informant”. I also didn’t know if I was on the right track. “Listen. Half now, half next time we meet. Talk to me an hour each time. That’s \$250 an hour.”

“Okay, let me have it.” I handed him an envelope and he stuffed it in his front jean pocket. I reached in my jacket pocket and took out my portable tape recorder.

“Do you mind if I use this? Or do you prefer me just to take notes?” I ask politely.

“Just take notes,” he requested.

“Let’s get started. I’ve always wanted to know what motivates people to break into computer systems?”

“See, that’s where you people are totally absurd. You don’t have to break into something that isn’t owned by anybody.” He’s settling down a little now. I figure I would make him comfortable allowing him to preach to me the hacker’s creed.

“So, you don’t feel like you’re doing anything wrong? What about the hackers that deface web sites?” I ask.

“See, you can’t lump all hackers together like that. That’s like saying all motorcycle clubs are like the Hell’s Angels. I saw some a motorcycle club that was delivering Christmas presents last year on television.” He really was turning out to be more passionate about hacking than I thought.

I hadn’t heard that analogy before but I know most hackers thought that they were pure of heart and of motive. “So, what do clubs do?”

“We share ideas and techniques. When someone in the club learns something new, he passes it on to the rest of the guys. It’s really harmless. We’ve really gotten a bad rap in the press. Everybody thinks we’re just sitting around plotting how to bring phone systems down or something like that. That isn’t the case.”

“Does you club have phone hackers?”

“Phone phreaks? Sure. That’s a big part of any club. It would be pretty boring without doing some type of phreaking.”

“How do you get into a club?”

“First, you have to just hang out in rooms a lot. Learn as much as you can about systems; you know, NT and UNIX. Go to some meetings.”

“That’s all? It seems like there’s more to it.”

“Well, if you really want to get into a club, you have to bring something. A new site, a new technique, a new hole nobody knows about.”

“Are you in a club?”

His whole face deflates. “Yeah, I’m in club,” he says without excitement.

“What did you bring?”

“Well, I almost was in a club where I brought in a friend of mine that is a Sys Admin. That’s like giving them the keys to your daddy’s Porche.”

“A Sys Admin?”

“Yes, a system administrator in Las Vegas.”

“What club was that?”

“I’m not in that club and let’s not talk about it anymore, okay?”

The minute he said this, I knew it must have been the Sons of Destruction. I didn’t want him to think that I put anything together so I moved on rapidly. “Is there a formal club, like the Boy Scouts, with dues and all that?”

“Nah. It’s just a bunch of guys trying to learn as much as possible. You know, some clubs end up making a whole bunch of money helping companies protect their systems. I’ve worked on some government systems I’m not supposed to talk about. They just pay me cash.”

He’s really getting warmed up. “Well, phlint, that wasn’t so bad was it? Let’s meet again next week. Same time and place?”

“Okay. Call me.” He gets up and heads out the side door. I close out the tab and walk outside into the heat of the day.

The first thing I do when I get into the rental car, after cranking the air conditioning as high as it would go, is to call young, sweet, pretty Vicki. It’s funny because I couldn’t get Vicki’s voice out of my mind. It was like when you get a song on your mind and you hear it all day. Ever since I talked to Vicki on the phone before leaving for Las Vegas, I didn’t stop hearing her voice. I couldn’t

remember a particular thing or phrase she had said. I just made up stuff and played it through in her voice. Her voice wasn't deep; but it was more like a cello than a violin. She weighed every word and formed it perfectly before she let it pass from her thin lips. Her voice had a very pleasing tone and I could listen to it for hours.

I was able to reach Vicki on her car phone. I wanted to just close my eyes while listening to her voice. She was telling me about the real estate she had appraised that morning. I asked if I could take her out to dinner and she said that if I didn't, that I would be in real trouble.

Both of us were getting wrapped up in this tidal wave and neither one of us wanted off. She knew I was married and I knew that I was too. We never even talked about Karen. I didn't want to even think about the rough weekend we had when I was back home in Denver. I couldn't imagine Vicki ever being so cold.

I'm not sure when things changed; it might have even been when I called her from the car. We had just moved into the next phase of our relationship. I really wasn't concerned about being seen with her. We were planning to meet for some more sushi at the restaurant near my hotel. While I was driving back to my hotel, I started thinking that I was wasting way too much of my brain's processing power thinking about Vicki and not enough of it trying to find out who really killed Pastor Barclay.

When I got back to my room, I checked me email to see if I had anything from Jacob. The first message that he had sent me was all about how to install public-

key encryption on my laptop. He said we needed to go into secure mode if we wanted to communicate through email.

Jacob explained to me that I needed to generate a public-key, which he would use to encrypt a message that he was going to send to me. When I received the encrypted message, I would use my private-key to decrypt the message.

He explained the technology behind public-key encryption but I had to read it several times before it made any sense. Apparently, some guy named Martin Hellman came up with a way to use prime numbers to generate these public and private keys. Prime numbers are numbers that can only be divided by itself and 1. The numbers 5 and 7 are prime numbers. When you multiply two prime numbers together, you get a number that can only be divided by the two factors. For example, if you multiply 5 and 7 together you get 35. The number 35 can only be divided by 5, 7, or 1. Finding the prime numbers of 35 is called factoring. Factoring large numbers is a very resource intensive operation, even for computers.

So, the first thing I do is generate a 256-digit number from two prime numbers that I will use as my public-key. Since factoring this 256-digit number to find the prime numbers that make it up would almost be impossible, I use the factors as my private-key.

Jacob encrypts the messages using my public-key and I decipher them using my private-key. It is that simple. After I received my public-key, I let Jacob know and he sent me an email that really concerned me. Jacob said that the group we were targeting as suspects in the murder had bigger problems than an

investigator from Denver that was snooping around. Apparently, Sunyo wasn't the only member of the Sons of Destruction to have a "sniffer" on his system.

Jacob didn't go into details, and that was fine with me. He must have been tapping into some FBI site somewhere because he seemed to know all about their activities involving the Sons of Destruction. He said it looked like they were getting close to moving in on them.

This upset me because I really didn't want them in jail or on bond before I had a chance to discover if they were involved in anyway with the murder. I would rather get to them before they had a chance to erase their tracks.

Jacob also mentioned that one of the attendees of the conference in Las Vegas was indeed an informant. It was one of the young punks with at least six pierces in each ear, one in the nose and eyebrow. He played his part beautifully. He was friendly and admitted his ignorance freely. Too freely I thought at times but the other attendees took him in so they could share the secrets of hacking with him. Little did they know that what they were telling him was being recorded.

I expressed my concern to Jacob that he shouldn't be spying on the FBI like this. That we could all get put into the Federal prison for a long time if he ever got caught. He just said that I shouldn't worry; that he had a friend that was passing him the information. I secretly created a folder on my email system to store all these message from Jacob so if I ever needed them in court, I could at least have some sort of documentation backing up my cries of innocence.

Chapter 25

Part of my standard agreement is that I will give updates once a week to my clients. Since this case was the most complex one I had ever worked on, I needed to write down everything that I've discovered so far. I spent the next few hours writing Mrs. Connery a report. I also thought it would be a good time to present the expenses I've had so far. I found it is better not to surprise anyone with how much a good investigation burns through the cash.

I called Mrs. Connery and asked if it was all right to come over to her house in the morning to go over the case. She said sure, she'd have breakfast waiting. I resisted but she insisted.

After talking to Mrs. Connery, I got in the shower for the second time that day. I was thinking how funny I was acting, taking a shower before going out to eat. I hadn't done that since I was courting Karen. Now here I was, an ex-minister of Jesus Christ, totally knocked-off balance by a woman that is not my wife. I didn't want to think about the sermon Karen and I heard recently about entering in through the narrow gate. That the wide gate is deceptively full of pleasure but destruction waits for you at the end.

Getting out of the shower, I decide that I'm already too far-gone to turn back now. My marriage is already just a shell of what it used to be anyway. No use in just suffering the rest of the time. Life is short. I need to take full advantage of all

the opportunity life offers. And if life offers a chance to spend some time with one of God's most beautiful creations, I'm going to accept it and enjoy.

I splash on some cologne in front of the mirror. I'm glad that I don't have these lights at home. The lines on my face are more pronounced than usual. The skin on my neck is loose and wrinkled. I picture lovely Vicki's face. I wonder what she would think if she saw me in this light? I turn away quickly and finished dressing.

Vicki answered the door in a little wrap around skirt with an open place between it and her blouse where you could see her belly button. Lust flowed through my veins and I just shook my head no.

Vicki frowns at me and asks why I shook my head like that.

"You look nice. Too nice."

"This is a little something that I picked up in the Bahamas last summer. I figured it would be cooler than slacks. Do you want some wine or something before we leave?"

"We'd better get going. The reservations are for eight." We start towards the parking lot.

"Where we heading?"

"Brazilian place in Addison. Have you been there?"

"No. But I've wanted to. I've heard that it is real good."

Entering the restaurant, I notice that every guy in the place turns to look at Vicki. I've been noticing that North Dallas has more beautiful girls per square inch than any place I've been. And they're always made up to the nines.

Brazilian style food is a salad bar with all kinds of different vegetables like yucca plant and then the Brazilian grouchos come to your table with meat on a stake and slice off as much as you want.

We're having a great time. Vicki wants to try everything: all the different beefs, the bacon wrapped chicken, and the lamb. Everything is wonderful and we both get stuffed.

"How did you get so much sun?" Vicki asks.

"Went down to the pool today. I really didn't mean to be down there long. It was just a nice relaxing day."

"I haven't done that in a long time. I used to love to layout. With all that cancer stuff though, I've been pretty careful lately."

"You're right. You don't want to do anything to hurt your beautiful face." I blush and she blushes.

"Teddy. You're not supposed to say things like that. You're a married man!"

"I can't speak the truth?"

We just both drop the subject.

On the way home she's telling me about her on again off again boyfriend.

"He's real nice. A quality person. No skeletons which you can't say about a lot of guys around here. Especially over thirty. It seems like if they're not married by then, there's something wrong."

"What's keeping you two apart?"

"I can't put my finger on it. I've missed many nights of sleep trying to figure it out. Do you want to come up for a minute." She says as I pull up to her building.

My legs start getting a little shaky walking up to her apartment. She is a couple of steps in front of me and I can see her shapely body – her manicured nails as she holds on to the rail, her muscular calves as they come out of the slit in her skirt, her straight posture and long brown hair.

She fumbles with the keys for awhile and unlocks the door. She turns to me and smiles before she walks in. My heart is beating so hard that it is in my ears.

“Do you want anything to drink?”

“Just some water, I’ve been staying dehydrated ever since I got here.”

She sets a glass of wine and a glass of water on the coffee table in front of the couch and sits down. I go over and sit by her. We look at each for about 10 seconds without saying a word and then I lean over and kiss her. We both had chemicals in our mouths that when mixed, formed an explosion. I have never felt anything so nice and yet, so dangerous.

I had to lean back and regroup. “Wow!” I said, massaging my temples, trying to figure out what I was doing there.

“You know, when I said that I didn’t know what was missing between me and my boyfriend. Well, now I know.”

A surge of guilt overtook me. I knew if I didn’t get up right then and there, things would get completely out of control. I got up. “I’ve got to meet Mrs. Connery early in the morning. I’ve got to get going.”

Vicki looked a little surprised. “Gosh. Is it something I did? I’ve never had that effect on anybody.”

I didn't want to end it forever so I smiled charmingly, leaned over, and kissed her warmly on the lips. I continue in my leaving posture. "I've really got to go. I'm afraid if I look at your beauty any longer, I'll never be able to leave."

She gets up and walks me to the door. We look at each other in the eyes. We both hold the look for at least thirty seconds. I'm thinking in my heart how beautiful she is. How beautiful. I turn and walk out the door, down to my car.

On the way home, I'm feeling victorious and self-righteous. I was able to face my strongest weakness and walk away from it. I now knew that I could continue to see Vicki and not be concerned about it going any further than just friends.

The next morning, after a nice long run in the heat, I drive over to Mrs. Connery's. I went through the entire process of being verified by the security guard before he let me through the gates. When I got to the front door, Mrs. Connery answered it like I was her long lost son come home from the war.

"Come on in here, Teddy," she smiles and grabs my arm. "I've got some nice fruit and muffins. Homemade blueberry muffins." She leads to the art room where she has the tray set up.

She made sure I was stocked up with the treats before we both sat down and relaxed. It looked like she had redecorated her art room since the last time I was in. She had fresh cut flowers in several expensive-looking vases around the room. The beauty of the statues and paintings, the breath taking view of the garden, combined with the smell of the fresh-cut flowers and homemade blueberry muffins, made me feel like this was the closest place to heaven that I had been.

I sat there and enjoyed it for awhile before I started in on my briefing. These interim briefings were always hard since all the facts weren't in and any theories you had weren't substantiated. I had to be real careful not to start any wild rumors or discredit anyone inadvertently.

I wanted to go ahead and get right into it. I didn't feel like Mrs. Connery needed for me to sugarcoat anything I was looking into. Also in my standard contract is that I'll find the information but won't reveal my sources or techniques. I knew she would understand. "I found out that Jim Mason, the elder, was having secret meetings with Pastor Barclay shortly before he was murdered. I met with Jim and I discovered he might have been involved in a homosexual relationship." Mrs. Connery didn't respond.

"The guy Jim was involved with is a guy named Calvin," I continued. "I have tracked Calvin to some hacker chat-rooms on the Internet. One of these chat rooms is for a hacker club named Sons of Destruction." I paused and let this sink in.

Mrs. Connery has a questioning look on her face. "I guess that what you mean by a hacker has something to do with computers. I'm not going to learn about computers. They are for somebody much younger. Even so; I don't see how these hackers have any connection with Pastor Barclay's murder," she asked.

I take a deep breath and nod my head. "I'm not sure that they are related. But one thing I found out: Pastor Barclay was out on these chat-rooms, sharing the

Gospel. I found a transcript of a session he was having with somebody named Calvin.”

She looks at me like I’m speaking a foreign language. I immediately lead into the Las Vegas expense report. “I know it’s not a lot to go on but we’ve been investigating this group of hackers. We went out to Las Vegas to see if we could find out anything else. They are definitely involved in some illegal activities. We’re trying to find out more information now. “

“You keep saying we. Is there more than you working on this?”

“I’ve got a computer expert in Denver that I use for the technical side.”

She didn’t dwell on this issue. “Well Teddy, it sounds like you’ve been doing well. I must say that it never entered my mind that you would be investigating – what do you call them – hackers? I think you should widen out your investigation a little bit though. You know Allison is still sitting in that jail.”

I acknowledge what she says and get up to leave.

“Just one more thing, Teddy. I saw you admiring this beautiful room. You know how everything in this room got so beautiful? It was through lots of loving care by the artists and gardeners.”

I had no idea of what she was talking about.

She continued. “People are also very beautiful creations of God. But neglected people – especially neglected wives, aren’t so beautiful. You’d be surprised what a little loving care can do to a woman’s whole being.”

I just continued to look at her like I didn’t have any idea what in the world she was talking about.

“Good bye Teddy. I’ll be praying for you.” She turned and walked down the hall. I let myself out and walked out into the mid-morning sun with something to think about.

Chapter 26

I called phlint from my car to see if he could meet me for lunch. He sounded like I woke him up but said that he’d meet me at a BBQ place down in Deep Elum.

When he walked in, his eyes were blood-shot and he had circle under them. His hair was unkempt and had extremely bad breath. I was hoping that a nice place of BBQ and a root beer would mask his breath.

He seemed more relaxed then the last time we met. We both ordered the combination special with lots of extra spicy sauce. After we sat down, I let him eat awhile before starting in on my questions. On my way over to the restaurant, I decided if nothing panned out today with phlint, I wouldn’t pursue anymore meetings with phlint.

I wanted to make phlint felt as safe and comfortable as possible. That’s when people say things that they wouldn’t normally let slip. “Man, you picked a great

place. This is some of the best BBQ I've ever had," I remarked. He smiled and continued to eat. "Do you come here a lot?"

He pauses and takes a long draft of his root beer. "Yeah, sometimes," he answered like his mind was on other things.

I knew he had been on his computer all night so I wanted to get right into talking about that. "You've been up all night on your computer, haven't you? I've read how you computer guys keep late hours."

He lit up a little. "Yeah, I've been trying to figure out this one site and have been having some problems."

"Trying to figure out what?" I ask.

He sighs like he is about to teach a "newbie" the secret craft of hacking. "The first you do when researching a company is to find out what computers they have on their network. We call it 'footprinting'. After you identify the computers a company has, then you have to find some way to access them. I've been trying to find a 'finger hold' on a system and I can't seem to crack it. If I could do it, I'd have it made."

"Why would you have it made?" I ask.

"Because then I could get in and I could tell everyone about it."

"Everyone?"

"You know, my friends," he says like I'm slow.

"Sunyo's one of your friends, right?"

"Well, I thought he was. He quit talking to me after Alex came along. I guess he has bigger and better things to do."

“Is Alex in the Sons of Destruction?”

He is taken back that I know about this hacker group. “Well, what do you know about them?” He asks.

“I just met them in Las Vegas at a conference. Remember, Sunyo is how I got your name. He recommended you as an expert.”

“It that right? Wow. I guess they do appreciate my skills after all. Wow.”

I knew he wasn't in the club but I thought I would ask to keep the information flowing. “You're in the club right?”

He brightens up. “Is that what Sunyo said? Well, I'm probably not an official member yet. If I can get into this bank, they'll probably let me in.”

“What do you know about Calvin? He's in the club, right?”

He thinks about this awhile. “I've never heard of a Calvin. He might have joined after Alex came. After Alex came, things changed a lot.”

“What does Alex look like? Do you know?”

“Brown hair, you know, he looks like all the rest of us. He's a little older. He's from California.” He says, like I would immediately be able to pick out a person from California. Having brown hair didn't rule out that Alex was the guy I met in the sauna in Las Vegas.

I didn't want to press too hard for information about the Sons of Destruction so I wrapped up the questioning. The rest of the time we just talk about the heat and baseball. I give him a couple hundred dollars and we decide to meet Thursday night at an arts bar where some hackers hang out.

After lunch, I went back to the hotel to check on Jacob and see if he had discovered anything since yesterday. That was one thing about Jacob, he always surprised me with new information.

After I dialed up to my Internet Service Provider (ISP), I noticed that my mail client seemed like it was frozen. I had seen this behavior before when I had a large email file that was downloading to my laptop. I checked my dial-up monitor and nothing was coming across the wire. I decided just to let it run and check back after a short nap.

After my nap, it was still hung-up. I forced a shutdown of the system and tried to get into my email again with the same results. I started thinking about what Jacob said about not using my phone to contact him but picked up my cell phone anyway and gave him a call.

“Hi Jacob. Just a quick question. I can’t seem to get into my email. Do you think that encryption that I have turned on is causing problems?” I ask.

“Are you on your cell phone?” Jacob asks like I’m an idiot.

“Yes. But we’re just talking about email. Come on now, who would want to hear about that?”

“Just hang up and call your ISP. That’s all I can say.” He hung up.

It made me mad that he would treat his boss that way but I filed it under that you have to cut these computer types some slack. They usually don’t operate with the most tact.

I called my ISP support desk and stayed on hold for at least 10 minutes before a support technician got on the line. He said that they were experiencing

system problems and they are still trying to figure out what is actually happening. He said that it looks like they might be victims of a denial-of-service attack that started a few hours ago. The support technician said that they are working on restoring the network and that I should try to sign on in about an hour.

Since I didn't have a connection to the Internet, I decided to update my report for Mrs. Connery. My clients seem to always like to get some sort of formal report back on my investigation. I have it bound nice and pretty delivered via overnight mail – after I get the final payment of course if there is any balance due.

After writing for a few hours, I check back to see if I can get online. I'm still locked out of my email. Vicki had been on my mind all day so I decided to give her a call. She didn't really sound that excited to hear from me.

"I'm doing all right I guess," she says without any of that nice Southern female voice inflection. "I really can't talk now."

"Is something wrong?" I ask.

"No. What could be wrong?"

"You just don't sound like you want to talk."

"I said that I couldn't right now."

"Okay. I'll talk to you later then." I hung up and felt a little stunned. I could already tell that this little interaction was going to bother me all night. What in the world happened to her? Was she thinking that it was futile to be involved with a married man? Was it someone else? Or was it just me? Did she look at me and think I was too old?

I wasn't sure what to do with myself. One minute I was getting somewhere in my investigation and then my main technical resource hangs up on me and then the girl I thought I was falling in love with doesn't want to talk to me.

I decide to go downstairs to a pay phone and call Jacob back. Maybe he would be a little easier on me that way.

"It's me again," I say when Jacob picks up. "I'm calling from a pay phone so don't freak out on me again."

"You understand why I did that don't you? These are some bad dudes you're dealing with down there in Texas. Don't ask me how I know this but the FBI is all over those guys. Every bit that flows over their phone lines is being recorded and analyzed. You stumbled on to a major ring down there."

"You think they're tapping my phone?" I ask.

"Who? The FBI?"

"No. The Sons of Destruction."

"They could be. That's why I don't want you calling anymore. Don't even call me from a pay phone. Use encrypted email. That's the best way."

"I can't. My ISP is being attacked right now. Something about a denial-of-service attack." I said.

"Wow. Haven't you heard? That's happening all over the Internet. Usually just the big portals are being targeted. I wonder if there is any link there. That would be amazing if they are launching these attacks against your provider to keep us from communicating?"

"They can't be that smart. Come on now, Jacob."

“I’m telling you, these guys are bad. I don’t want to mess with them. They scare me. It would be all right getting locked out of email, but these guys sound like they are playing hardball. You know with that pastor being murdered and all.”

“I’m getting less sure if there is a connection there. I feel like I need to regroup.” I said.

“Man, I’ve never heard you say that before. These guys must be getting to you.” Jason replied.

“It’s not that really. I’m just going through some stuff with Karen and all. You know how married guys are, always in trouble with their wives somehow.”

“Yeah, you dudes scare me. I couldn’t handle someone telling me to get off the computer. My mom is bad enough.”

“Anyway, enough about that. What do you think of the situation with my ISP? Do you think the S.O.D. are responsible for the attack?”

“It’s hard to say. I’m not sure what operating system they are using. Also, there are many Denial of Service (Dos) attacks around. There are bandwidth consumption attacks, resource starvation attacks, routing attacks, and different ones like that.”

“Which one would bring down an ISP?” I asked.

“All of them could. There was an attack against an ISP in New York earlier this year that lasted a week and affected 1,000 companies. It was a SYN Flood. In a SYN flood, the attackers will send a packet from their system to the target system; however, the attackers spoof or change the source address to a non-existent system. The target system will then try to send a SYN/ACK

acknowledgement back to the spoofed address. The target system never receives an acknowledge back but continues to wait on one, leaving open a receive connection. The target system eventually has all these receives active and no open resources for legitimate business.”

“Is it hard to do this?”

“Any lamer can get some “point-and-click” tools to pull something like this off. They would probably get caught if they didn’t know what they were doing though. The thing that bothers me is that they found out your ISP in the first place and they are smart enough to shut down your only link to other resources.”

“What should I do? How can I get back on the network?”

“Switch ISP’s.”

“Just like that?” I asked.

“Go to the bookstore and buy one of those magazines that have a CD from one of those one of those install-and-surf companies. Load it up and send me an email. I’ll send you back the encryption we need to communicate securely. I don’t think you’ll have any problems with them after that. Those big ISP’s are more secure from attacks than that local provider you are using.”

After laying around for a couple of hours, trying to figure out my next steps in the investigation and the situation with Vicki, I got up and went to one of those chain bookstores with the coffee bar and couches. Since it was still ninety degrees at 9:30 p.m., it looked like the people without air conditioning in their places were sprawled out on the couches.

I bought a computer magazine that had a plastic seal around it with the Internet CD inside. I was anxious to get back into communication with Jacob so I went back to the room to install it. It was a pretty easy setup. The only thing that I thought about was if I should expense this new service to Mrs. Connery. I sent Jacob an email and waited for a response. Usually, he's online day and night and replies within a few minutes.

While waiting, I went back to some of the hacker chat rooms and Web sites that I had been frequenting. Nothing new; just some young kids out there with their childish ramblings. Still no response from Jacob so I went to bed.

Chapter 27

Being the bad man that I was, Pastor Barclay's murder and Allison Barclay being in jail wasn't on my mind when I woke the next morning and went running. I couldn't get Vicki out of my mind and the conversation we had the day before. I kept on analyzing what she could have meant by not wanting to talk. I realized I hadn't eaten since lunch yesterday with phlint.

When I got back to the run, I walked over and looked at myself in the mirror. My face was run from the run and I was still sweating. "You stupid man," I said

with disgust. "I can't believe you. Look at yourself." I just shook my head and walked over to the phone.

"Hi. Just wondering if it's a better time to talk now," I said with my sweet and confident voice. Even though my mouth was pretty dry, I wanted to get this situation straightened up one way or the other.

"Oh, hi Teddy. I'm just driving out to a new property. Did you go out on a run?"

She sounded like Texas girl I had fallen for. "Yeah. It was hot! I'm still sweating. You been running this week?"

"No, haven't had time. Been pretty at work. The summer is our busiest time of year. Everyone wants to move in the summer."

"You sounded pretty busy yesterday."

"Yesterday was a bad day all around. My mom and dad are talking about divorcing for the first time in 35 years. My appraisal of a couple properties got struck down."

"Sorry to hear about your parents." I said.

"It's been moving that direction for a while. You know what else? I've been getting calls for Michele's Escort Service at my apartment. I ask them what number they dialed and it's one completely different from my number. It's like the phone company's switches are messed up."

"Wow. That's sounds bad. Have you called the Phone Company?"

"I called and they said they would check into it. It's bizarre."

“That is bizarre.” I didn’t know if I should go for it or not. I decide I need to go ahead and take the chance of getting shot down. “Well, I just wanted to touch base. It’s been awhile since I got to see you. When can I take you to dinner?”

“How about tonight?”

My heart leapt for joy. “Sounds good to me. I’ll pick you up at 7:00.”

I walked back to the mirror and did a little victory dance. I pointed at the mirror. “You the man!” I stopped and looked closer. I thought about what I was doing. I thought about my wife, Karen, back home in Denver. I pointed again. “You the stupid man.”

After showering, I dialed-up my new Internet provider to see if Jacob had replied back with my new encryption certificate. Sure enough, I had one message from Jacob. The message didn’t have a title. I had to re-read the message from Jacob several times:

Teddy,

I usually don’t ask you for much. This is an exception. Please get on the next flight out to Denver. I can’t explain now. Don’t email me questions.

Just trust me on this. You must leave as soon as possible. Reply back with your flight information and I’ll meet you at the airport.

-Jacob

My first concern was making it back in time to see Vicki. By looking at the schedules online, it looked like I could just make it back to see Vicki if I only had to stay in Denver a few hours. I replied back that I would be there at 11:00 a.m.

Once I was on the plane heading for Denver, I started trying to figure out what could possibly be the problem with Jacob. I knew from the tone of his email that something bad was happening. I came to the conclusion that the Sons of Destruction must have found him out and they are holding him for ransom. I looked at the in-flight phone and thought that I might call the Denver police and have them meet the plane.

I lifted the receiver from the back of the seat in front of me. I inspected it and almost swiped my credit card before returning it to the cradle. I didn't want to involve the police before I had more information. When we landed, I decided to walk through the jetway and turn directly into the line that is waiting to board. That way, I could stand anonymously and evaluate the situation.

I walked out of the jetbridge with my sunglasses on and into the crowd on my right. I didn't see Jacob. I don't see anything suspicious. I put down my PC case on the floor and continue to look around. Some tapped me on the shoulder. When I turned around, two middle-aged men with suits and sunglasses ask me if I'm Teddy Powell. I ask them who wants to know. They identify themselves as Special Agent Bob Campbell and Detective Stew Bradley – from the FBI

My first thought was that Jacob set me up. He sent me that email and set me up for this. Special Agent Bob Campbell, a bristly redheaded with gray side burns agent, motions for me to step away from the crowd. I look around and no one seems to be watching us.

Special Agent Bob Campbell is all business: "We want you to come down to the office and answer some questions."

About what?" I ask.

About your relationship with Jacob Anderson."

What about Jacob Anderson?"

Let's just go down to the office and we can talk about it. It's a lot more comfortable back at the office," the Special Agent says.

I want a lawyer."

You're not under arrest Teddy. Relax. We just want to ask you some questions," he says. Detective Stew is standing at my side. Their body language shows that they want me to start walking with them. I pick up my case and follow the detective through the crowd. Bob Campbell is walking on my right side, a half step back.

We walk to the curb, right outside of baggage claim. There's a black official looking car parked in the tow-away zone. Detective Stew nods to a policeman that is keeping the cars moving in the pickup zone and opens the back door for me to get in. Both of them get in the front. The car smells brand new. We take off down the long stretch of highway that connects Denver International to the city.

For some reason, I feel like this is my last ride as a free man. I picture the next time I'm being transported in an official government vehicle; I'll have handcuffs on and photographers running next to the car trying to take my picture.

The Detective and Special Officer are quite. Probably thinking of some way to get one over on me. I haven't decided who's going to play the good cop or bad cop. I figure Special Agent Bob Campbell is going to be the good guy. Detective Stew Bradley has been too quite to be the friendly one.

We head west on I-70 towards downtown Denver. A big cloud of brown haze sits between the mountains and us. After about 15 minutes, we arrive at the Federal Building. Detective Stew parks in the underground parking, in space number 13. I'm not a superstitious man but this whole thing is looking pretty bad.

We go through a metal detector. It beeps when my escorts walk through it but the security guard isn't even phased. They are all waiting for me to go through. I place my case on the belt and then step through the detector. The warning goes off. Everyone looks concerned. I step back through, reach into my pocket, put my pager and keys in the container. This time I make it through and everyone looks a little calmer.

We take the elevator up to the 11th floor. There must have been a conference room reserved for us because we walk right into the room without knocking. It's a small conference room that has a large table and only four chairs. There are four pads of paper waiting on the table. There is also a tape recorder in the middle of the table. Detective Stew pulls out the chair he wants me to sit in and motions for me to sit down.

Special Officer Campbell shuts the door and turns on a switch, indicating to the rest of the office that the conference room is occupied. I also think it alerts the audiovisual guys behind the mirrored window that I've just noticed in front of me.

The two FBI guys sit on either side of me. This confirms my suspicions that I'm being videotaped from the mirrored window. I made a conscious effort to not answer any questions before I had some type of legal counsel. I had seen too

many incidents of saying too much to these guys. I just needed answer slowly and thoughtfully any questions asked.

Special Officer Campbell starts off. "Sorry about the way we had to handle this situation. We've found that is always better to talk up here than in a place like an airport. Anyway, do you have any idea why we wanted to talk to you?"

I figured they were going to go right for the confession. If they wanted to play that way, I was willing to go along. "No," is all I said.

Campbell shifts his weight like he needed to take a different approach. "What do you know about the Sons of Destruction?" He's still toying with me.

I figured I better throw some heat right away, just to keep this line of questioning from anything incriminating. "I thought you were going to tell me why you brought me here. Do I need to contact a lawyer?"

Now, Detective Stew Bradley gets involved by waving the palm of his hand in front of me. He also smiles. "No, no, no. It's not like that. The Justice Department brought us in to help out with that spate of attacks against these Internet sites. We just have been monitoring Jacob Hess for awhile and finally brought him in for some questioning. It appears he has been accessing systems illegally. He says he works for you. Is that true?"

I shake my head. "Can you tell me why I'm here? I'm I under arrest? What's with all these questions?"

Detective Stew rubs his face. "You're not under arrest. We just thought you might want to help Jacob out. He's in an awful lot of trouble. We don't think he is

the one carrying out these attacks but his tracks are all over our log files. He could be in serious trouble.”

We all just sat around the table and waited for someone to say give in. I remember an old boss I had when I was going through Dallas Theological Seminary tell me that no matter how the painful the silence is, whoever speaks first, loses.

Detective Stew gave in. “He’s a young kid. With his whole life ahead of him.” He said this like there was something I could do to help.

“Where is he,” I asked.

“He’s home with his mama,” Detective Stew said. “He was with us all day yesterday. We probably know more than you think about what you two are up to.”

I just remained silent. If they wanted to get information out of me, I was going to make them work for it.

Special Agent Campbell leans back in his chair. “Listen. We’re offering Jacob immunity from prosecution if he commits to going through this new “hacker” program the Clinton Administration has implemented. He’ll avoid prosecution, get some good training, and afterward a good job.”

They were convincing me that they were the good guys. I still wasn’t going to say anything. Things were working out just fine with me keeping my mouth shut.

Detective Stew lifts his tall frame out of the chair and walks to the door. “Anyone else want some coffee?” he asks. We both shake our heads no and he walks out of the room. I’ve seen this in too many movies: I’m going to get roughed up a little and the good cop is going to come back in and save me.

Special Agent Campbell gets serious. "Listen Mr. Powell. You have a choice. You can make it easy on us and we'll make it easy on Jacob. You make it hard on us and we'll make it hard on Jacob."

He broke me down. "What is it that you want from me?"

"I'll make it simple for you. I need all the information you have on the Sons of Destruction. Give me that and Jacob is in the hacker program. It's that simple."

"I don't have much. A few ideas. Just last night I was considering changing the course of my investigation. I feel like I might be going down the wrong path."

Detective Stew comes back into the room with a Styrofoam cup of steaming black coffee. He sits down and blows on it to cool it off.

"We're going to need more than that," Campbell says. "We're going to need facts about meetings, physical descriptions, chat room logs, suspicions you have, the different people you are investigating. The good stuff. Write it all down." He pulls out a silver case and takes out a business card. "Email it to me. If it is what I want, Jacob is in the program. Any questions?"

I can't help to think that he won this battle. "No," is all I say.

We sit around the table and listen to Stew slurp down his coffee.

"You live here don't you Powell?" Campbell asks. I nod.

"Do you need a ride home or can your wife pick you up?" Campbell asks.

I glance at my watch. If I could make the 4:10 P.M. flight, I could be back in time for Vicki. "Actually, I need to get back to the airport. Could I get a ride?"

Both agents look at each other. "I'll give you a ride back," Detective Stew volunteers. Agent Campbell must be wanting to get to the bar early today.

Chapter 28

I knew I was off-balance with this Vicki romance but I sure was looking forward to seeing her. While I was sitting on the plane back to Dallas, I tried to think exactly how I came to this state in my marriage and life. It's amazing how clear your mind gets traveling through 30,000 feet in a steel tube; strapped in next to an older lady reading her Bible.

I grew up in a pretty normal family. My parents raised three kids on whatever salary and commission insurance salesmen made. The worst trauma I suffered growing up was seeing my dog get run over by a car one summer morning. It was one of those summer mornings that you get up, eat some cereal, and head out on your new summer bike.

My dog, Midnight, was following me over to Joey's house when a squirrel ran up a tree across the street from us. I turned around just in time to see Midnight end up under some guy's wheels. I'll never forget the smell of fresh cut summer grass and the sight of blood matted fur.

Besides that one incident, I've managed to stay pretty much normal. My parents took us to church most every Sunday. When I was around 10 years old, I walked down the aisle to ask Jesus in my heart. From that day forward, I set my heart on being a preacher. While most kids were watching wrestling or football, I watched the religious channels. I loved to see the different styles of preachers they would have on these shows.

Even though my dad was really keen on it, he let me go to the world famous Dallas Theological Seminary. I met Karen when I was working on my Masters of Theology degree and working part-time as a Youth Minister at a small church. I remember the first time that I met Karen, I couldn't keep my eyes off of her. She was so beautiful.

We dated for a year and she finally agreed to marry me. Her dad wanted us to wait until I got a regular position but assured him I couldn't wait anymore. He understood and gave us his blessing.

We had a few good years together but our marriage was never perfect. I had to spend a lot of time working since I was now working as the associate pastor. We never had that same passion for each other that we had during our courtship. I'm not sure if that was my fault or Karen's.

The first church that asked me to be a senior pastor, Grace Outreach, was a medium-sized church near Las Angeles. We packed up and moved. I told Karen that it would just be a short stint – a year or two at the most. I wouldn't have believed it if someone told me we would be at that same church for 15 years.

Even though I never was involved with another woman at Grace Outreach, this is where I started letting my mind go a little. It was such a different culture than what I was used to; most of the women were pretty, warm, and too affectionate. It was here in California that I was letting down my guard and getting caught up in a luxurious life style.

This is where I was when I got a call in my office that changed my life. The pastoral search committee for Hope Chapel in Denver, one of the largest churches in the country, contacted me about their Senior Pastor position. Apparently, they had been listening to my radio broadcasts and liked what they heard.

That's how we ended up in Denver. After 3 years, I stepped down to avoid a removal from office. Even though I had the position, money, and resources most pastors would envy, I didn't resist temptation when it came my way in the form of a wife that needed counseling.

Sherry and Dan came to me for marriage counseling. We started off on the wrong foot. I didn't see Sherry as a young hurting young woman that God loved the first time she came into my office. I saw her as an object for my selfish gratification. She was with her husband but I could tell things were falling apart fast.

Sherry would call my office and I would talk to her. I only counsel couples but she would arrive in my office by herself saying that her husband just didn't show up. Pretty soon, I looked forward to our weekly sessions. I would amaze her at

my insight into marriage and relationships. I started sharing things about my own marriage. She would give my advice from a woman's perspective.

I can really pinpoint exactly when it went from these easy-going counseling sessions to a tempestuous affair. The sessions were usually on Thursday evenings. Sherry came in on a Thursday that Karen, my wife, was out of town at a convention. Neither one of us was in a big hurry for the session to end. We stayed in my office until 11:00 talking. I walked her to her car. It had been snowing all week. I said goodnight and started for my car. I had only walked a few feet before I felt a snowball hit the back of my head. Snow went down my neck and back. I turned around and there was Sherry gathering up some more snow.

I was shocked. The first thing I could think of to do was to turn around and grab her before she threw another one. I ran towards her while she was bent down trying to get more snow together. As I neared, she hurriedly scraped some snow and threw it underhanded in my face. Just as I had my hands on her arms to prevent any more attacks, I slipped on some ice. I instinctively tried to balance myself with Sharon's arm. She grabbed my other arm to help. We both fell down.

I immediately said I was sorry until I noticed she was just lying there laughing. We both just lay there and laughed. My arm was on top of her. Our eyes met. She was beautiful. I kissed her. First just a peck. Then she got this hungry look in her eyes. I kissed her again. This time she wrapped her arms around me and we kissed hard.

I got up and said goodnight. I couldn't get her off of my mind. I started getting careless. I would call her house from my office and we'd talk. We started meeting at a local hotel that had room service. She would get the room and I would just drive up to the back entrance. This went on for about a year until she finally told her husband she wanted a divorce. Somehow, my name came up. I think he suspected something anyway. She confirmed it was true. He went to one of the elders. I confirmed it was true and stepped down.

Now, here I was, starting the same process again. I don't know if it is my fault or Karen's. If she wanted me to be a good husband, she shouldn't be such a hard woman to live with. What does she expect? Does she expect she can treat me with contempt and I'll come running back to her with my tail between my legs? I stay in shape. I run. Why can't she at least lose 10 pounds? That would be the best thing for our marriage. For her to just relax a little and lose ten pounds.

After landing in Dallas, I wanted to get out of the jetway and into the air-conditioned terminal before calling.

"Hello Vicki? Just got in from Denver. I'm at the airport. I'm on my way."

Chapter 29

I drove the rental car directly to Vicki's apartment in Valley Ranch. The Dallas Cowboys made Valley Ranch famous because that's where their training camp is located. Valley Ranch is where the famous "White House" was where the Cowboys would party on their free time. It is also a section that has more single bleach blondes with implants per square foot than Las Angeles.

I wish I would of have had time to stop by the hotel and freshen up a little. I checked my look in the mirror before getting out of the car. I also checked my breath and then found a peppermint in my pocket and put that in my mouth.

I took a quick survey of the apartments and cars in the lot before heading up the stairs. Being an investigator, I'm always suspicious of being followed or watched. I notice someone sitting in a Jeep smoking a cigarette. He saw that I looked at him and he turned away. He took a drag from his cigarette.

My heart is pumping hard by the time I reach the top of the stairs. I wanted to catch my breath before knocking on the door. I practice silently what I'm going to say. "You look beautiful!" or "Sure have missed you".

She opens the door wearing a thin, clingy, shoulder-less turquoise dress with spaghetti straps. I could see every curve on her young and fit body. We didn't say anything when she opened the door. She just let me look for awhile.

I was finally able to speak. I took her hand, looked into her eyes. "Man, you look good!"

She giggled and gave me a knowing look. "Hi Teddy," she said.

We stood like that for a minute, just looking in each other's eyes. Her eyes were bright and loving. I felt like everything was perfect. That this was how it was

meant to be. Control of my heart, mind, and emotions was being given up to a young, beautiful girl.

She brought me back to reality. “Where’d you want to go. I’m starving. I’d like to get back early tonight since we’re going running tomorrow. Are you coming?” she asked.

I wasn’t sure if I was up for another one of those runs in this humidity. The first time we ran together, I almost didn’t make it. “Just depends how much sleep I get tonight. It’s been a crazy day.”

“How so? I know you just got from the airport.”

“I’ll tell you all about it in the car.”

Walking down the stairs, I noticed that guy still sitting in his Jeep. I’m thinking it’s probably one of Vicki’s ex-boyfriends or husbands. When I’m letting her in to my car, I ask her if that looks like someone she knows. She doesn’t think so. I make a note of the license plate number.

I head down Macaurthar with all the other Valley Ranch beautiful people that are going out on Friday night. I notice that there are more BMW’s and Mercedes’ at the stoplight than American made cars. We turn left on the interstate and head towards Dallas.

“I’ve heard about this great Thai place,” I said.

“Oh, really. What’s the name of it?”

“Thaitanic”.

“Oh, that’s clever. I haven’t heard about it before. I love Thai food though, “ she said.

She turned sideways in her seat so she could look at me better. Then she started playing with the back of my neck. "Tell me about your crazy day," she asks.

"Well, I know I haven't been telling you what's going on. I have a partner that I work with named Jacob. He's a young computer genius. He gets into systems and finds out information for me all the time. I really don't ask how he does. I don't want to know."

"Ok, so," she said.

"Well, it looks like he got caught by the FBI They'll give him probation and sign him up in a special program for hackers if I agree to share what I know so far about the hackers I've been investigating."

"Hackers? You're investigating hackers? How does that fit into it?" she asked.

"One of the guy's that your dad had been in communication with is a hacker. His name is Calvin. He belongs to a club for hackers."

"That's funny. We have a guy that does all of our computer stuff in the office named Calvin," she said.

"Well anyway, my partner got caught by the FBI and they will put him through computer school and hire him in their new Internet Security department if I'll give them a report on my investigation of this club that Calvin is in."

I turn south on Central Expressway. "I figure it's a good choice to give them the report. I haven't really found out anything yet. Don't worry, I'll leave your dad out of it."

“That would be good. You don’t want to add to any problems he’s having. I’ve been talking to my mom. They’re having marital problems. I’m surprised they’ve made it this far. He’s so overbearing.”

“Some people think that women want to be with someone like their dad.” I said.

Vicki tosses her head back and laughs. “I’ve already been down that path. Now I’m looking for someone that is pretty much the opposite of my dad.”

I want to see how I measure up. “What would be opposite of your dad?” I turn on Mockingbird and then right on Greenville. “This place is on Lower Greenville? I’m surprised I haven’t seen it before. Anyway, the opposite of my dad would be someone gentle, compassionate, affectionate.”

I look at her briefly and wonder if she thinks I have those qualities. We get to the restaurant and I give the keys to the valet. Parking around this area is almost impossible to find. Especially on a Friday night in the summer.

I had called ahead for reservations so a nice cozy table is waiting for us. I pull out Vicki’s chair so she can sit down. I sit down across from her. While she talks and laughs, I sit still and just admire how beautiful she is. It’s like we’re in a capsule by ourselves and nothing else in the world matters. The waiter picks up that we’re in a capsule and reaches an opening every now and then to give us some food and drink.

When we got back to her apartment, I knew that if I stepped one foot in side, we would go too far for this point in our relationship. I wasn’t quite sure how I was going to break away.

“Aren’t you coming in?” she asked.

“Listen sweetheart. I’d love to. I got to get that report out and you have to run in the morning.”

I leaned in and gave her a short kiss. She looked puzzled. We kissed again - harder and more passionate. I wasn’t going to be able to put any more gas on the fire and still survive.

“You make it hard to leave. I really should go.” I back down a few stairs. I give her my best smile. “Had a wonderful time tonight Vicki. Hope you did too. I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

She still looked shocked that I was leaving. She didn’t say anything. I heard the door shut when I got down to the bottom of the stairs.

Chapter 30

I woke up the next morning trying to decide if I should drive out to White Rock Lake and run the Vicki or just do my usual loop near the hotel. I decided on the later since I didn’t want to end up having to be carried back to my car by 3 women. When I got back to my room, I noticed that my message light was on. The operator said that I had a package.

I went down to the lobby in my sweaty running gear. I like to get packages. I figured it was a care package from my wife, Karen. The clerk went into the back and came back with a medium-sized box wrapped in common brown parcel paper. My name and address were written in black marker with no return address. I had been mailed from Dallas.

Going up the elevator, I start trying to figure out who knows I'm at the hotel and who would be sending me a package. Especially a package with no return address. For some reason, I started thinking it might be a mail bomb. It usually isn't my nature to be irrational about things like packages.

After getting it up to my room, I set it on the desk and walk around it a few times. I decided to open it and reached in my case for my pocketknife. I was about to start slicing through the tape when another wave of fear sweeps over me. I must be getting old and afraid.

I sit back down on my bed and analyze the situation. Who would be sending me bombs? It's probably nothing. I walked over and shook it gently. Whatever it is, it doesn't feel like cookies from Mrs. Connery.

I walked down to the elevator and then took it down to the lobby. I was about to approach the front desk but turned around. I didn't want them to think that I was crazy. I went back up to my room and decided to call the police from there. I didn't want to call 911 so it took me awhile to find the number for the Irving Police. Once I did, the dispatcher sounded put out that I was calling about a possible mail-bomb.

It was only fifteen minutes until I heard a knock on my door. When I opened it up, there was an uniformed policeman with a black Labrador Retriever. I let them come right in.

“The package is over on the desk. I know it’s probably nothing but for some reason, I just thought it was odd to get it here like this,” I said.

The policeman and the dog walk over to the desk. He points and the black Lab smells the package and then lays down for a few seconds.

“Yep. There’s some gunpowder in that box.” He starts walking towards the door; motioning for me to follow him. “You’ve made some good friends,” he says with a smirk.

I follow the policeman out to the hall. He uses his radio to call for some backup. He then knocks on the doors around my room and tells them they need to evacuate. Since it is Saturday, most of the rooms are vacant. Only one guy comes to the door looking like he had a rough night. He says he’ll be out in a minute.

By now, I could hear the fire trucks siren coming down the street. The policeman tells me to wait down in the lobby. Once I’m in the lobby, all the guests have already started collecting around the front of the hotel. I’m standing there with a policeman and his dog so most people think we have something to do with the drama.

We go out front to have a look around. The police have stopped traffic both ways on Las Colinas Blvd. There is an Irving Bomb Squad truck parked in the middle of the street. There’s some commotion from the service entrance and

then two people, dressed in re-enforced protective suits and masks, make their way to the truck with a large container hanging on a rope. Each man has one end of the rope. They manage to open up the bomb holding tank on their truck and place the container inside.

The crowd started to thin out and Officer Jody Rogers, the Irving Policeman, has me come to his car to answer some questions. He was real interested in why I was in Dallas and what or whom I was investigating. He was surprised I was investigating Pastor Barclay because he had known him personally. Apparently, he sometimes went to Grace Community. He knew all about his murder and his wife being in jail. He wrote down all of my vital statistics and gave me his card. He said he would call if he found out anything about the package and if it was indeed a bomb.

I get back up to my room and I want to call my wife and let her know what just happened to me.

“Hello Hon? How’s it going?”

“Hi. I was started to think you forgot this phone number,” Karen responded.

“Well, you’re right. I should call more. It’s just that with the time difference and all. I don’t want to wake you up.”

“Oh. Is that it? Anyway, when are you coming home?”

“Not sure yet but you’ll never believe what happened. Someone sent me a mail-bomb or something that had gunpowder in it. The police were just here at the hotel to take it away. It didn’t have a return address.”

“Probably a jealous husband.”

“Funny,” I said. “I just thought you might like to know what’s going on here. Hopefully, I’ll wrap it up this week.”

“Take your time. We seem to get along better when you’re not here.”

“Pretty sassy today aren’t you?”

“I’ve got to leave soon. I told Mary I’d go shopping with here today.”

“Okay dear. Good bye.”

“Bye,” she said and then hung up. I listened to the silence on the other end of the line until the off-hook signal came on. I don’t know what she expects from me. I know we’ll never make it her treating me like that. She doesn’t know that I really wouldn’t miss her if she left me.

It wasn’t long after I hung up that Jody Rogers, the Irving Policeman with the dog, called. He said that the package contained a .38 caliber pistol with a couple of rounds fired from it. That’s why it smells like gunpowder. I told him I didn’t have any idea why someone would be sending me a gun – besides to play a trick on me.

Before he hung up, I asked if I could get the pistol back. I told him I wanted to see if it fit in anywhere in my investigation of the murder. He said that I couldn’t get it anytime soon since it had to go through their labs. I hung up and immediately called Lester Cummings, Allison’s lawyer.

“Hey listen. I got a package here at the hotel with no return address. I was freaked out by it and the police came. It turned out to be a .38. Isn’t that what Pastor Barclay was murdered with?”

“Ah, yes. Who’s this again?”

"I'm sorry, Teddy Powell, the investigator," I said.

"That's right, that's right. You got a .38 huh?"

"Well, someone sent one to me. The Irving Police have it now. It could be a big piece of the puzzle. Is there anyway you can get it entered into evidence? Put some paper work together like you lawyers do?"

"Hum. That might be good. Have you seen Mrs. Barclay recently?"

"No. Have you?"

"She's got a hearing coming up next week. She's freaking out everyone over at the jail. The DA wants us to hurry up and decide how we are going to plead. I'm leaning towards insanity. I know I can get her declared."

"Come on Lester. I'm getting close on some things here. I didn't think so until this gun showed up. Give me some more time."

"I'm not sure if we can put it off for any longer. If we plead insanity, she'll be able to move into a better facility."

"That's a good short term solution but what about her kids?" I asked.

"Yeah, that is a problem. Right now I'm stuck with two bad choices."

"Hold on. Give me another week. Do whatever you can to delay. Get sick if you have to."

Chapter 31

I stayed in my room the rest of the day writing up my report for the Mrs. Connery and the FBI I tried to leave as many names off as possible for the FBI version.

My phone rang a couple of times and when I would answer it, nobody would be there. Around 9:00 P.M. Saturday night, my phone rang. This time I could hear some movement on the other end.

Then I heard what sounded like some type of computer synthesized voice. "Leave town," is all I could make out.

"Who is this?" I asked.

"Leave town," I heard again. Shortly after this, it sounded like someone dropped the phone. I could hear hysterical laughing in the background. Then they hung up. I figured it was just a bunch of kids.

They called back in a few minutes. Once I heard that voice start up, I just hung up. Then there was a knock on my door.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"Room Service." I peek out and it was a waiter.

I opened the door. "I didn't order anything."

The dark complicated waiter gave me a look of disbelief. "Are you sure you didn't order this?" He pulls out the ticket. "I have it right here, room 609, Salmon, rice and white wine."

"They probably wrote down the wrong room number," I said.

"Mr. Powell?"

"Yes, that's me. But I didn't order this."

“Okay, okay. I’ll take it back. Thank you.”

My started to ring as I was shutting the door. It was the same pranksters. They were getting more obscene with their little game. I called the front desk and told them to stop all calls for room 609.

The phone rang again fifteen minutes later. The first thing I thought was the manager was calling me to make sure everything was all right. It turns out to be the guy with the computer-synthesized voice. I hang up and call the front desk.

“This is Teddy Powell in 609. I asked that all calls would be held from my room. I just got another call a minute ago.”

“You didn’t get any calls through the switch board Mr. Powell. That call must have come from the property.”

“Are you sure that call didn’t come in from the outside?”

“I’ve been here all night and haven’t received a call for you tonight.”

“And calls from the outside? They would have to come through you?” I asked.

“That’s right.” She said confidently.

I sat on my bed after talking to the operator and thought about it for awhile. It must be some kids that are vacation with their parents that are staying at the hotel. Their parents must be out and they’re calling in orders for room service and making prank calls.

I go to sleep and wake up the next morning to knocking on my door. I look out through the peephole. It’s another waiter with a big platter of food.

I crack the door. “I didn’t order anything.” I said. “Someone is playing a joke on us.”

The waiter is non-pulsed. "We can see the room number when you call. This order came from room 609."

"Well, I didn't order it. Someone has figured out how to trick the system. Tell your manager if anymore orders come in for this room to ignore them." I back my face out of the hall and shut the door. That breakfast did smell pretty good. Maybe I should have kept it.

After getting back from running, the phone rings. It's the synthesized voice. "Did you enjoy your breakfast?"

"Where are your parents?" I asked.

"Did you get the gun?"

"Wait a minute. Who are you?" I asked.

"Leave town or you're next." The voice said and then hung up. It was different from last night. Last night the tone was more of a practical joke. This morning there wasn't any laughing in the background. I sat on the bed and look at my legs. They were shaking. I had been threatened before by cheating husbands. In a murder investigation, I was playing with a whole different segment of the population.

I call back down to the operator. "Did a call just come through the switchboard for room 609?"

"No, Mr. Powell. We've had very few calls come in this morning. You haven't received any."

I need to talk to Jacob about this. He would know the technical setup of a hotel phone system. I get on email and have several emails from him. It looks like he's still in business. The FBI hasn't impounded his computer yet.

I write him an email and encrypt it with his public key. I tell him the situation with the pistol, the phone calls, and the deliveries. He writes me back immediately:

Hi Teddy,

Thanks for coming to Denver. I was really surprised to see those FBI guys show up at the door. It freaked mom out. She has been hysterical since. You need to talk to her and calm her down. She trusts you because you used to be a priest or something like that.

Special Agent Bob Campbell from the FBI came back by yesterday and said that you cooperated with them. He said I wouldn't have to do anything else but just show up for the training classes that start in the fall. He doesn't know where they are yet. I guess the program is still being worked out.

It sounds like the Sons of Destruction have broken into the hotel's PBX system. Usually those systems are pretty easy to phreak. Usually, phreaks break in to PBX systems for the purpose of making long-distance calls, not ordering room service!

It's time to go into secure mode. I was careless and that's how the Feds caught me. I didn't think they were watching me watch them. I'll cover my

tracks from now on. Also, it's time for you to just unplug that phone and only use secure email for communication purposes. They'll never be able to break 128K bit encryption. Also, delete any message you get from me right away. After deleting them, run that utility I wrote that would expunge it off your hard disk forever with no chance for retrieval – even with some of those sophisticated information re-generation utilities that the F.B.I uses.

Jacob

I could tell from the tone of the email that Jacob was scared to death. His emails were usually one or two sentences at the most. In the past, his emails were always too confident and demeaning to the person he sent them to.

After walking down to the pay phones in the lobby, I made a call to phlint, my new contact for the Sons of Destruction. He answered the phone but said he couldn't meet with me. I asked him if there was anyone else that could help and he didn't offer any names. I then called Mrs. Connery. She complained about getting calls for message parlors. The Sons of Destruction must have somehow traced the numbers that I had called and re-routed calls for message parlors to Mrs. Connery and Vicki. It's hard to fight a battle against weapons that you can't see and don't understand.

Mrs. Connery also mentioned that Allison Barclay, the pastor's wife, was planning to offer a guilty plea for a release to the State mental hospital. She thought that this was going to happen on Friday. I told Mrs. Connery that I would have to call her back.

I immediately called her lawyer, Lester Cummings, and asked why he wasn't going to wait.

"The deal the DA is offering is just too good. We plead guilty, and she gets a second-degree murder charge. Ten years, and she'll be out."

"Come on Lester. You know 10 years would just about kill her and the kids. Can't you see that?"

"She confessed, Teddy. After a confession, that doesn't give me a whole of lot of bargaining chips. Anyway, she wants to do it."

"She's not in the position to decide what she wants to do. Put it off a week. I thought you were going to put it off a week?"

"A week isn't going to matter," Lester said.

"It will. Give me a week. I'll make sure Mrs. Connery compensates you for your trouble. Just wait man. Okay?"

"I just don't see how it's going to matter."

"Did you get the pistol? That pistol should have someone else's prints on it. Right? Can't you present that?"

"We're talking about facts of evidence that will be presented at a trial. If we go to a trial, we'll lose for sure."

"Just delay it. I promise I won't ask for more than a week. Not this Monday but next, you'll have a whole different case on your hands or I'll leave you alone. Deal?"

There was a long, uncomfortable silence. He spoke first. "I guess."

From that moment on, my main focus was going to be trying to find Calvin, a.k.a., phreddi. I've tried the flanking strategy; now it was time for the frontal assault. Recognizing I made a mistake in strategy, I planned to pursue Calvin relentlessly until this whole thing comes to a resolution.

Chapter 32

I log into some chat rooms looking for "phreddi" with almost a zero percent chance of success. Most hackers are still sleeping on Sunday mornings. Even a slow investigator like me gets a break and I see that a "phreddi" is in one of the chat rooms.

I use the name of "milehighi" (mile high eye):

- milehighi> hey phreddi, it's been a while
- phreddi> been working – what's up
- milehighi> same
- milehighi> I want to talk to you about a spiritual leader
- phreddi> what ??
- milehighi> you know – the preacher man
- phreddi> I'm not following you – you've been on before ??

- milehighi> a lot – you don't remember ?? we chatted about gays and the church
- phreddi> you've really lost me on that one
- milehighi> let's meet
- phreddi> why don't you get off before you regret it – anyone know who this guy is ? ?
- milehighi> I want to talk about the pastor
- milehighi> don't leave
- milehighi> wait!

At least now he knows he should start looking over his shoulder. Experience has shown me that when someone gets nervous they get stupid. I still could kick myself for wasting time when I should have gone straight for Calvin this whole time. I decided that I'm going to go back to taking pictures of cheating husbands after this case.

I needed to call Mrs. Connery and give her an update but the last time I talked to her, she put her nose in my business about my wife. I guessed she knew about Vicki and me. She shouldn't mind as long as I do what she hired me to do. That part of about neglected wives really got to me. My wife isn't neglected. She's just mean and bitter. She might even be having an affair for all I know. She has a perfect opportunity when I'm traveling.

The first thing I needed to do was to buy some time for Allison Barclay. I wanted to save her from having to plead guilty to second-degree murder. I

figured Mrs. Connery would have some ideas on how we could slow Lester down a little bit.

I caught her just before she left for church. “Hi Teddy. Won’t you join me this morning at church?” I thought about it for a few seconds and surprised myself by saying I would.

I hurriedly jumped in the shower and then get dressed. I grabbed my electric razor so I could shave on the way over there. When I got there, the parking lot was full. I drove around the neighborhood for a few minutes before finally finding a space a few blocks from the church. She was waiting for me at the door.

Mrs. Connery had on a dark blue dress and matching hat. Her gray hair was first braided and then rolled into a bun. “Good morning Teddy,” she said like she really meant it. “Isn’t this a glorious Sunday? She asked without expecting a reply.

We walked through the side door and were ushered to our seats by an elderly gentleman. She leafed through the program like she was looking for something. “There was supposed to be something in here about the Mission Conference in three weeks. A lot of our missionaries are going to be home on furlough.”

I just nodded and listened to the choir sign some traditional hymns. It had been awhile since I had gone to church just to go. The last few times it has been business. I’m sure not attending church with my wife Karen doesn’t help things. Mrs. Connery brings me back to reality. She’s tapping me on the shoulder. I notice that everyone is standing up. “Do you want this hymnal?” she asks.

I stand up and take the hymnal from her. It's hard to sing praises when you feel like you have a hardened and blackened heart. I could barely get the words out. I started to feel dizzy and sat back down. "Are you all right, Teddy?" she asked.

"Oh," I said as rested my head in my hands. I took a few deep breaths. She still had her hand on my shoulder. "I'm not sure," I said. I stayed seated like that for the remainder of the songs. I looked up at Mrs. Connery briefly before putting my head back down.

"Do you want me to find a doctor?" she whispered.

"No," I answered. "Just let me stay like this."

I could feel the air conditioner on the back of my neck. If I could just stay like this for awhile, I was sure I could get past whatever I was going through. Attending a church service without using your sense of site is an interesting experience. With my head down in my hands, I could hear whoever was speaking in the front and then the body movements and reactions of those people I was sitting close to. I imagined that this was a church service being held a thousand years ago.

I started to feel a little less light-headed and was able to sit up in the pew during the sermon. The interim pastor spoke on materialism and getting back to our first love. I had spoken on that same topic a few years back. His words were like a mirror; I didn't like to see what I had become. When the collection plate came around, I put in a \$100 bill for penitence. I sat there with Mrs. Connery the

rest of the service even though I was extremely agitated about something that I couldn't quite put my finger on.

Walking out, Mrs. Connery asked if my wife minded me being gone so much. "She's used to it," I snapped and then felt badly that I was harsh with such a sweet lady.

"You'd be surprised how much phone calls mean to a wife when her husband is traveling. I know that I used to love to get them from my precious Bill when he was out at a well. He'd come home and tell me that I had gotten pretty since he'd been gone."

I just kept silently walking with her to the parking lot. She must have known about Vicki; why else would she be trying to make feel so bad. If she had known the whole story about us, I'm sure she wouldn't have said anything about my wife.

Before she got to her car, I stopped her. "Mrs. Connery. I'm getting closer to finding out who killed Pastor Barclay. It's not his wife. I need you to do everything you can to make sure Lester doesn't allow her to plead guilty."

"Are you certain, Teddy? I know they are offering that she'll be taken care of in an institution. Sometimes, I think that's the best place for her. I'm not sure if she can ever go back to those kids."

"I can only do this investigation. I can't solve all the world's problems."

We were both surprised that I said that. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Connery, it's been a trying week."

“That’s okay. I know you’re doing what I asked you to do. Just keep it up and I’ll make sure Lester holds on until you get through here.”

She turned and walked away. I watched her get into her dark red Cadillac and drive away. I stood there in the parking lot for awhile trying to clear my mind and think about what my next steps should be.

Chapter 33

I needed to get back to the hotel and see what Jacob had been up to. Sure enough, when I got back to my room and logged on, I had several encrypted emails waiting. Apparently, Jacob had taken some pictures at the hacker conference with a hidden camera. He had attached a picture of a young man whom he thought was Calvin.

The picture was a little fuzzy but I remember seeing this guy around at the conference. He stayed in the background and didn’t really talk to anyone. This picture was a profile view that showed Calvin had the light brown hair and a substantial nose. He would have been a nice looking young man except his teeth looked like they were dramatically angled in. He had a medium build with the usual hacker uniform of blue jeans, tee shirt, and tennis shoes.

I briefly got on my online stock brokerage to see how my short-term investments were doing. I had started trading these high-tech stocks with money I could afford to lose. I had been doing very well in the Internet stocks. I was shocked to see that half of my earnings had been wiped out since Monday.

I started to investigate and found out the main reason for the sell off had been the highly publicized accounts of those denial-of-server (DoS) attacks against major Web sites. Apparently, the market is getting afraid of this new digital economy. I had no idea that those attacks would affect the stock market so much.

I wrote Jacob about the stocks and how they were blaming it on the DoS attacks. He immediately wrote me back and asked me where in the world had I been. That those attacks have been making news for a couple of weeks now. He said that the tools to do these types of attacks were readily available on those hacker boards. He said that one such tool, TFN2K (Tribal Flood Network 2K), was probably on a lot of computers and the users didn't even know it was causing problems.

Jacob also said that these attacks could be coming from anywhere in the world. He said he's heard that terrorist groups are learning how to do cyber-terrorism now. The suicide bombs are old-fashioned. Most of those groups are learning to break into computer and cause problems.

Jacob made an interesting observation that 3 of the 4 sites that were targeted had their corporate offices in Dallas. The servers were all over the United States but the decision-makers were all in the Dallas area.

I write Jacob back and ask him to find out all the information he can about this Calvin: Where he lives, where he works, credit history – anything he can find. I also ask him to be careful about not doing anything that will get him in more trouble with the FBI.

He responded quickly that he wasn't going to do anything illegal and that he would try to have some information to me by this afternoon. In the mean time, I unplugged the phones and took a nice Sunday afternoon nap. Every since being a pastor, I always had a nice nap after Sunday dinner. My body expects it.

After waking up, I went down to the lobby and bought a Sunday paper. The headlines were about the recent Internet attacks against some large organizations. One expert was quoted as saying that he thought it was just a bunch of kids playing around. Another analyst said it was a movement by anti-establishment groups that didn't want the Internet to be used for commercial purposes. One thing nobody knew was who was responsible.

I called my wife and went through the same routine of having to answer why I haven't called and then getting the short, one-word, answers to any questions I ask. Whenever I talk with my wife, Karen, I always want to immediately call Vicki for something that I'm lacking in my own marriage. I was glad Vicki wasn't home; it's better not to sound too desperate or needy.

That Sunday evening, I took that picture of Calvin that I had printed on my portable printer, down to that Deep Elum brewery where I had met "phlint". He said hackers hang out there and I was just trying to keep moving forward until I heard back from Jacob. When I got down the brewery, I realized that it was pretty

early for many of the “after midnight” crowd to be out partying. I ordered a raspberry beer that was absolutely delicious. I drank one more before I started to leave the restaurant.

While I was walking to the door, I noticed someone that looked like Calvin sitting at the bar. I went back and sat down at the table I was at before. He seemed to be waiting for someone because he would keep looking over his shoulders.

He had one empty beer glass in front of him and he was drinking from the other. His hair had grown out a little and he looked like he had lost weight but I was pretty sure it was him. His movements were quick and short, like he was nervous or on some type of upper. He had on a pair of shorts, tee shirt, and sandals. He fumbled around nervously with a pack of cigarettes before finally getting one out and lighting it. He would put the cigarette in his mouth, inhale some smoke, and then quickly jerk it out of his mouth like it was hot.

We sat like this for a couple of hours. I had to slow down on the raspberry beers so I could drive home safely. He continued to look around for somebody even though nobody ever came up to him. Around 11:30, he got up and started for the exit.

I hurried after him. When I got outside, I didn't see him. I couldn't tell which direction he went. I started down towards the other clubs. I passed by a young man that had his girlfriend on a leash. When I didn't see him anywhere, I turned and went in the other direction. I turned a corner just in time to see Calvin getting into his car. “Calvin,” I yelled. He looked up. I ran up to his car. We made eye

contact. There was panic in his eyes. He pressed the accelerator all the way to the floor of his Mustang and sped away.

Chapter 34

When I got back to my hotel room, I had a message from Lester Cummings, Allison Barclay's lawyer. Apparently, the District Attorney wouldn't wait any longer and wanted a competency

hearing on Monday. Lester said he had been scrambling all weekend trying to get the psychiatrist

and therapist to agree on the diagnosis.

I called his office phone and got his answering service. She said she would page him and he

would have to call me back. Around 1:00 A.M. Monday morning, Lester called me. He didn't

sound the least bit anxious or tired.

"Mrs. Connery called me this afternoon. I told her what I left on your recorder. We have a

competency hearing tomorrow. It has to be in front of a jury," he said.

"Why the rush? Are we ready for that?"

“They didn’t want to stall anymore. If she’s ruled unable to stand trial, she’ll go to the state hospital in Terrell. They’ll make her take her medications and then she can come back and we can either plead or go to trial.”

“She didn’t do it Lester,” I said.

“They have a confession and I have 30 other cases where pending where they didn’t do it either. Nobody ever does it.”

“I’m her lawyer and I say get a ruling of incompetently and buy some time. It’s better that way.”

“What time tomorrow?”

“Whoever knows at these things. We have to select a jury. Come to Auxiliary Court 2 sometime in the morning. I’m sure the wheels of justice will just be starting to turn around mid-morning.”

I went for a run before calling Vicki the next morning. I figured I would catch her on her way to appraise another piece of real estate.

“I was just thinking about you,” she said when I said good morning. “I just got done talking to my mom. Dad’s real upset about all those Internet attacks. His company hasn’t gotten hit yet but they have been working around the clock there to make sure no one tries anything.”

“I didn’t realize your dad worked in that department.”

“He’s over the entire retail operation which includes the electronic commerce side. The Chief Financial Officer is over all the computer stuff. The entire executive staff is on alert. My mom hasn’t seen my dad much since Thursday. He’s just been home a couple of times to sleep and change.”

“Jacob, the guy that does some research for me, noticed that most of the attacks have been on Dallas-based businesses.”

“So far, they haven’t had any problems though.”

“That’s sounds like a good thing to celebrate. No attacks on your dad’s company. Let’s have dinner tonight.”

“You sure you want to? You looked a little scared about this whole thing the other night.”

“Let’s just say that I’ve been thinking about you and would love to see you tonight.”

“Well, if you put it that way, you’ve got a date.”

Now, all I had to do was make it to the hearing and then find Calvin. I logged on to email and had several messages from Jacob. The first one was from late last night saying he hadn’t found anything more on Jacob. The second message was sent in the middle of the night. Apparently, he had found some credit reports on “Calvin Hill” that he had discovered was probably the guy we were looking for. Calvin Hill’s credit report looked like one that you have right before declaring bankruptcy. He had at least five credit cards at their maximum and had been late paying on them the last few months. His car payment was 2 months late. The report also listed another piece of important information: his last known address.

I printed out the information and headed south to downtown Dallas. Taking 114 to Stemmons Freeway and then getting off on Commerce. I drove past some people protesting against a judge before pulling into the parking garage. Once inside the court building, the bailiff wouldn’t let me into the courtroom. I gave him

my card to give to Lester. A minute later, the bailiff came and escorted me into the courtroom.

Allison was in the front, facing the jurors. She is in her bright orange jail coveralls. I guess Lester didn't want to dress her up. She looked like she had washed her hair and gotten a little sleep last night. I got there just in time to hear the giving the instructions. "We're not here today to decide if this woman is guilty of a crime. As a matter of fact, you're not even going to find out what crime this Allison is suspected of committing. What we're going to ask of you today is to hear some testimony and decide if Allison Barclay is competent to stand trial."

The judge pauses and presses some keys on his laptop. "In most states, the judge decides if a person is competent or not. In the State of Texas, a jury decides if a person is competent to stand trial. This particular case is a little different since the District Attorney wants to show that Allison is competent while her attorney wants to show that she is not."

I looked at the jurors. They looked like a cross-section of the population at large. All different races, social-economic statuses, ages, and genders. I'm sure they would all rather be somewhere else. And six of them were going to decide on the fate of the late pastor's wife.

After a few more instructions by the judge, the Assistant District Attorney, Janet Reed, re-introduces herself. She is smartly dressed in a light blue business suit. Ms. Reed looks like she is around 30 years. Her hair stylist has done a nice job streaking her short light brown hair. She doesn't wear a ring on any finger on her left hand.

“Believe me,” she said. “I don’t want to try anyone that isn’t mentally competent to stand trial. Just the opposite. I believe in our justice system I love to see it work the way the framers of our constitution, our legislators, and governors have designed it to work.” Ms. Reed comes closer to the jurists. “The law of the land in Texas is that you have to be mentally competent to stand trial before a trial can begin. I’m glad that law is there. I certainly don’t want one of my friends or family members to go through a trial, with a possibility of conviction and punishment, if they are not mentally up to it.”

She pauses and walks back to her papers. She picks up a notebook and then looks back at the jury. “But that’s not the case here. Allison is competent to stand trial. She has been interviewed by a world-renowned psychiatrist that says understands fully what is going on. I’m not saying that Allison isn’t mentally ill; that’s not what we’re here today for. Allison is mentally ill. She is taking medication that helps her with schizophrenia. This medicine helps her enough that she’s able to live almost a normal life.”

Lester is just sitting there in his tan polyester suit and brown tie. “The doctor couldn’t make it to this hearing but, if it pleases the court, I would like to play a short video of the doctor revealing his findings.”

The judge nods and the bailiff rolls out the television and VCR so the jury can see it. A much older doctor than I expected appears on the screen. He’s hard to understand and continues to use medical terminology that I’m sure no one on the jury really understands. He concludes at the end that he finds the patient fit to stand trial.

After Ms. Reed rests her case, Lester Cummings plays his own video of another doctor offering a different opinion. He also uses a lot of medical terminology but Lester's doctor is younger and more articulate.

At the close, Lester ends stronger than I expected him to. "You know, this is Allison Barclay, mother a 2 children and a recent widow. This isn't just another disposal human being. Allison was a child once, just like you were. She has dreams and needs. It's just right now, Allison's mind isn't working right. She's sick. She's got an illness. Mental illness is a disease that you can't test for like you can cancer. It doesn't show up on a MRI. It doesn't mean it's not there and causing problems." Lester pauses and walks over to Allison and puts his hand on her shoulder. "The right thing to do here is give her a break. Give her some time to get on some better medication and treatment. She'll get help in the hospital. She'll be safe there. Her kids will be taken care off." Another pause while he walks over to the jury. "That's it. It's all to you to do the right thing."

The jury is allowed to eat lunch before re-convening in the jury room. They come back with their verdict shortly after 1:00 P.M. They think Allison is competent.

The Assistant District Attorney, Ms. Reed, has an informal discussion with Lester while the bailiff escorts Allison back to her cell. From what I heard from their conversation, they want to do the trial as soon as possible. She doesn't know what the hurry is, she was just told to get this one off of the books.

Chapter 35

After leaving the courthouse, I decided to drive by Calvin's last known address. As I'm pulling into Calvin's apartment complex, I saw Calvin in his Mustang pulling out. I pulled over and parked and waited for him to pass. I then pulled in behind him.

He headed north on Central Expressway and then west on LBJ Freeway. I followed him all the way to DFW International Airport. When he entered the parking garage at the airport, I thought that I might lose him. He drove up to nearly the top level before finding a space. Luckily, there was another spot near his. He got out of the car and walked rapidly to the terminal. I followed behind to see where which plane he was meeting or taking.

He walked to the gate for Austin departures, stood in line for a boarding pass, then got on the plane. I asked if I could buy a ticket at the gate. "All it takes is money" the airline employee said. He gave me a boarding pass and I got on the airplane.

Walking down the aisle, I noticed Calvin sitting by the window a few rows back from first-class. We made brief eye contact. His expression didn't change; he didn't recognize me. During the flight, I sat five rows behind him. It looked like he had a cocktail on the flight down to Austin.

After getting off the plane in Austin, I knew that I would lose him if I didn't try to talk to him in the airport. He got off the airplane but I was stuck behind several people that had bags in the overhead bins. It seemed like 5 minutes before the

line moved again. I hurried up the ramp and didn't see Calvin in the departure lounge. I walked fast towards the ground transportation section. I didn't see him anywhere. I went to the rental car section and didn't see him there either. I turned to walk back into the terminal area when I saw him walking out of the men's room.

He was walking right towards me. When he was just a few feet away, I stop and waved him down. "Calvin," is all I got out. His eyes flashed with fear and his hands went up in a protective posture. Then he started running away as fast as he could through the terminal. I watched him running and the people's reaction that he almost ran over. I thought that I might as well run after him since he'd already cleared out a path. He ran through the rental car lot. I saw him stop and turn to see if I was behind him. I had anticipated his turning and had ducked down behind a car so he didn't see me. I could watch him through the car window. It looked like he was trying to catch his breath by resting between some rental cars. Then I lost sight of him. I figured he was now sitting between the cars.

I stayed low and started walking towards the cars I thought he was behind. When I came around the corner and found him sitting there, he thought he had had it.

He put his hands up in front of his face. "Don't shoot! Don't shoot! We've got the money! Don't shoot!"

I stood there in silence for what to him must have seemed like an eternity. He slowly lowered his hands and peeked out. He was hoping against hope that I wasn't still there.

"We've got your money," he said again. He just looked down at the ground, not wanting to see the reality of the situation.

"Calvin, I'm Teddy Powell. I'd like to ask you some questions about Pastor Barclay," I said.

Calvin continued to look at the ground. It took awhile for what I said to register. He looked up at me. "You're not with the Mafia?"

"I'm a Private Investigator working on a murder case," I said.

He was still shaken. "You scared the hell out of me." He got up off the ground and brushed his pants off.

"I'm sorry about that. I just wanted to ask you a few questions about Pastor Barclay."

"I don't know him," he said and started walking away.

I followed back towards the terminal building. "You chatted with him on the Internet".

"What did you say his name was again?" He asked, stopping for a second.

"Pastor Barclay."

"Doesn't ring a bell. I'm sorry." He turned and started walking as if he couldn't add any more information.

I ran up to him. "I know more than you think I do, Calvin." He turned and looked at me with a surprised look on his face. "You're a member of the Sons of Destruction, aren't you?"

"The what? Man, I'm telling you, you've got the wrong guy." I followed him into the terminal building and into the men's room. He went into a stall and latched the door.

"Calvin, I know you're a hacker. I saw you in Las Vegas, remember?" He was silent. A guy in a suit washing his hands looks up at me.

"Come on Calvin, I'm just trying to get a mother back with her family here. Do you know who killed her husband?" The guy in the suit picks up his brief case and hurries out without looking up.

Calvin finally speaks up. "I've got a cell phone in here. If you don't quit bothering me, I'll call airport security."

"I just want to know if you have any information that will help."

"I'm warning you. If you don't leave in 3 seconds. Here I go."

I can't do my job in jail so I start walking towards the exit. "That's all right, I'm leaving." I said lightly so he knows I'm a distance away. Out in the terminal area, I see a crowded snack bar that would be a good place to blend in. I find a seat so I can watch the men's room. In a few minutes, I see Calvin come out. He looked around to see if I was clear of the area. He then walked over and got on a pay phone. After a few minutes, he hung up and walked towards the rental cars.

I walk out to the curb and get in a taxi. I tell the driver to go to where the rentals are and wait there. He keeps the meter running for what seems like 30

minutes before Calvin comes out and gets in a Ford Taurus. I tell the driver to follow him but not too closely.

I shook my head and made a little laughing sound. One of my friends was right; police officials are just bullies with a badge. I turn and look for the taxi that gave me a ride downtown. Sure enough, he drives up beside me and I get in and head for the airport.

. . . . Took out part about him getting arrested and put it in Chapter 45. . .

Chapter 36

On the taxi ride back to the new Bergstrom Airport, my cell phone rang. When I answered it, it was someone using that same computer-generated voice from the hotel room pranks. "Back off or you're going to get hurt," is all I heard. I then heard a strange electronic pitch and my phone went dead. I turned the power off and back on several times but never could get dial tone.

I figured it must be one of Calvin's buddies that haven't figured out yet that he has been arrested. Calvin probably had called his hacker friends from the airport and told them I was still following him. From what I could deduce from the scene at the airport, me or the FBI is as dangerous as the people are he owes money to.

When I got to the airport, I walked over to the pay phone and dialed customer service for my cell phone service. What they said really surprised me. The agent said my service had been de-activated per customer request. She said that she couldn't turn it back on without another service contract. I explained the situation but she said I would have to go into one of their branch centers and talk to a representative there.

I hang up and dial Vicki's cell phone. A recording came on that the number had been disconnected. I tried her home phone and got the same message. Just for a test, I try Mrs. Connery's number. It had been disconnected as well. Apparently, every number I had called with my cell phone had been disconnected. I tried my wife. "Oh, hey honey, I was just, um, calling to see how you were doing?"

"Hi Teddy," Karen says nicely. "I was just getting back from the club. We won our doubles match against Shirley and Diane."

"That's wonderful. Well, I'm down in Austin. Trying to get this thing wrapped up this week."

"So you might be home this weekend?"

"No promises. You know I don't like to be held to something that I can't control."

"Don't get upset. I was just asking."

"I'm sorry, hon. Getting a little frustrated here. My cell phone has been turned off."

"From not paying the bill?"

“It’s a long story. Anyway, just called to see how you were doing.”

“Doing well here, don’t worry about me.”

“Ok babe, I love you.”

“Love you too.”

I guess they didn’t have access to Denver’s phone company. I call up Jacob at his mother’s house. I tell him that Calvin has been arrested but is now unreachable. I told him that it was the same agents that he talked to in Denver.

“Why don’t you offer them some information? Information is the digital currency of the ‘net you know,” he said.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“You know, how you did it last time for me. You gave them that report you had been working on. That’s information. They traded you. Now give them more information and they’ll give you something.”

“I don’t have anything other than I know he’s scared as hell about owing money to someone. He thought I was going to blow his head off in the airport parking lot. When he found out I wasn’t after any money, his whole attitude changed,” I said.

“See, that’s some information they could use. I also have some they might find interesting.”

“Like what?”

“I’ve got some log files from their activities the last couple of weeks. I’ve been watching every keystroke they’ve done.”

“Wow! I thought you were going to quit that. Isn’t that how you got in trouble in the first place? I’d have to tell them that I don’t know where these came from so you don’t get back in trouble.”

“You’re right. Don’t say how you got them.”

“I know what we can do. Why don’t you summarize the keystrokes and send me an executive summary of what these guys were doing. That would be better than just the keystrokes.”

“That’s a lot of work.”

“It would be better for those FBI that way. I’m not sure they’re real technical. And besides, it pays the same.”

“I’ll try to work on it some tonight.”

I hang up from Jacob and call Lester Cummings, Allison Barclay’s lawyer. “My main subject just got arrested by the FBI. I think he was involved somehow with the murder. Can you get some type of court order to allow me to question him?”

“This is turning out to be a bigger case than what I was led to believe,” Lester says like he’s thinking out loud.

“Come on Lester, you’ve got to help me out here a little. Stop the trial. Say you’ve got new evidence.”

“Do I have new evidence? We’ll have to turn it over to the District Attorney’s Office if we do. What is the new evidence?”

“I just know he’s involved somehow. That’s why I need to talk to him. Now would be a perfect time. I bet you he’s scared to death. He’ll probably confess if he thinks he’ll get off easier.”

“I can’t go to the District Attorney and say that a private investigator thinks there might be some evidence if we could just get someone to confess to a crime. You’ll have to get me more than that. And time is running out. They are petitioning the court to start jury selection on Monday.”

I decide that I need to take out the two cards I got from my visit to FBI headquarters in Denver and give the agents a call. I didn’t feel like I had anything to loose at this point.

“Hello Agent Campbell. Teddy Powell. Jacob’s friend. Listen, I have some information about the activities of the Sons of Destruction that you might be interested in.”

“What kind of information?”

“Information that you might find useful. All I need to do is question Calvin about some non-related issues. They involve a late pastor and his wife.”

“Useful information is vague. Can you be more specific?”

“Information about their activities. How about if I give you a little taste tonight and see what you think?”

“Don’t waste my time Powell.”

“Is it a deal then?”

“Like I said, don’t waste my time.”

Chapter 37

I flew back from Austin and landed at Dallas Love Field. When walking off the plane, I noticed that the jet ways at this airport were air-conditioned. The terminal area was bustling with travelers making mostly regional trips from this Dallas hub. While DFW Airport had an international feeling, Dallas Love Field was a true microcosm of Texas. A few ranchers with big, suntanned hands and western-style sport coats were waiting by the Jet Bridge for their arrival. Several Hispanic families were waiting to board the departing flight.

It wasn't until I started walking towards the exit that my heart sank. My car was at DFW! I stopped for a second and just rubbed my forehead and thought about how foolish I was. I decided to use my cell phone to call Vicki.

“Hi sweetheart. I've got a proposal for you.”

Vicki sounded excited about the idea of picking me up and having a nice dinner. She said that she was pretty close to Love Field and would be out front in thirty minutes. I walked out into the stifling July evening to wait for her. I watched the cars come and go. Every other car that stopped to pick someone up was a BMW.

For the last couple of days, my obsession with Vicki had faded somewhat with my focus on the case. When before my thinking was clouded with thoughts of her, now it seemed like I might be able to live without her if that was my fate. I started to regret calling her when she pulled up.

She got out of the car and walked right up to me and gave me a kiss on the lips. It was like I was hit with a cattle prod. I stood there a second with all of my

senses at an acute level of sensitivity. I tasted the lipstick she had left on my lips and could smell her wonderful perfume. I had to grab hold of a rail to balance myself.

“Wow,” I said. “That was some kiss.”

She just stood there smiling in her white silk blouse and peach colored skirt. Her long brown hair was done up in a bun but most of the sidepieces had fallen out hours ago. She had an excitement and energy about her that I hadn't felt for years.

When we were pulling out of the airport, she looked like at me like I was the greatest man that she had ever known. Her eyes were so full of excitement and hope for the future that I started to get a pain in my stomach.

“What's the matter?” She asked.

“What do you mean?” I said with a smile, trying to cover intermittent pain I was getting in my stomach.

“You looked like something just hurt you.” The excitement was starting to fade from her eyes.

“I think my ulcer might be acting up. You know us old guys. We're falling apart.”

We drove on towards Interstate 35. The pain kept rolling in and then leaving. “You'd better just drop me off at my car,” I said. “I'm sorry about this, letting you down and all. Letting us down, I mean.”

By now she was totally deflated. “I didn't know you were sick,” she said quietly. We drove to the airport without saying another word. I just leaned back

and closed my eyes. The rolling pain in my stomach subsided but I just wanted to get back to the hotel. I told her I was sorry when she stopped by my car.

Somehow, I knew she was thinking that this was a sign that she shouldn't be seeing an older, married man. I watched as she drove out of the parking garage and into the hot, July dusk.

The first thing I did when I got back to the hotel was to check my email. I figured Jacob had already sent me some of the log file summaries that I asked him to write. I also figured that the summaries would be way too technical and not easy to understand.

Sure enough, I had several summaries in my inbox. And true to fashion, they were far more technical and detailed than would be good to turn over to the FBI. I knew that I was going to have to write the summaries if they were going to be any use to exchange for access to Calvin. I sent Calvin an email requesting some help interpreting the documents he had sent me.

I got an almost instantaneous response back. After a few more jumbled emails, I said I was going to call him. I brought my laptop down to the lobby and used a pay phone to call.

"In one sentence or paragraph, what do these log files say about what the Sons of Destruction are doing?" I asked.

"It's not that simple. It looks like they target major universities and commercial sites and try different passwords to get on the systems. In most cases, they are unsuccessful."

“Is there anything in those log files that stand out? I mean, we have to give these FBI guys something more than that, don’t we?”

“There are some interesting entries in the log files from a few weeks ago. It looks like they were uploading some software to five different computers at Texas Tech University.”

“What do you think they were uploading?”

“No telling. But what is interesting is that Texas Tech is where those distributed Denial-of-Service attacks originated. You remember, the attacks on the major news outlet and those giant e-tailers.”

“So how does uploading something to Texas Tech’s computers have anything to do with these attacks?”

“To carry out a distributed attack, you have to upload code to “zombie” computers to participate in the attack. Then you coordinate the attacks from a master console.”

“Why would they be doing these attacks? Do you have any idea?” I asked.

“Usually, it’s all about control and social acceptance. The problem is, these guys are already in with the hacker community,” Jacob answered.

I was thinking out loud. “What other reasons would they attack these sites? What do they need?”

“You said that Calvin was scared to death about owing someone money. I guess they need money,” Jacob said matter-of-factly.

It was as if the veil over my eyes was finally uncovered. I couldn’t believe that I had missed it for this long.

“Did you ever hear that Johnson Media was attacked?” I asked.

“No, I don’t think they were. Not as far as I remember.”

Chapter 38

I couldn’t sleep that well and didn’t know if I could handle running in the heat when the sun finally came up. I went out anyway and felt better when I got back in. I discovered a long time ago that a nice run is equivalent to a nap.

After cooling down, I called Jim Mason, Vicki’s father and the elder of Grace Community. His secretary was very cool towards me when she found out who I was. She must have remembered me from my last visit.

She said that Mr. Mason would be in meetings all day and would I like to leave a message. I told her that this was a very urgent matter and needed his attention right away. She said she would try her best to have him call me when he could.

I waited until after 10:00 before leaving the hotel and driving downtown to his office. When the secretary recognized me, her pleasant smile turned to a frown. “May I help you?” she asked with a thread of ice in her words.

I smiled warmly. “Hello, I’m Teddy Powell. Here to Jim.”

“Mr. Mason is in a meeting. I’ll tell him you stopped by,” she said and then turned back to her computer.

“Okay, I’ll wait,” I told her.

She looked up angrily. "I'm not going to tell him this time. I'll just call security if you don't leave."

I sat down on the leather couch in the waiting area and asked if she had the current Wall Street Journal. By this time, her face and neck had red blotches on them. She started looking for someone else she could use for re-enforcement. She banged a few drawers shut and then I could hear whispering something in her telephone headset.

I knew it wasn't going to take long for Jim Mason to come barreling out into the waiting area to confront me. I expected this and had exactly what I was going to say rehearsed in my mind. When he came out, his face was more red and blotched than his secretary's was.

"Hi Jim. Sorry for the inconvenience. I have some information that is directly related to the security of your company's Web site."

"I don't appreciate you causing a scene every time you need to talk to me." He shook his finger in my face.

"They captured Calvin from the Sons of Destruction. I need to discuss those events with you." I noticed that the secretary was eavesdropping. Jim's demeanor changed from anger to confusion and then back to anger again.

"What does that have to do with me?"

I looked back at the secretary. "Do you want me to go over it here?"

Jim looked around and said for me to follow him back to his office. Once inside, he sat behind his desk. He didn't offer me a seat so I just sat down across from him. "Why didn't you tell me you were being blackmailed?" I asked.

Jim's eyes flashed and then he caught himself. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said slowly and deeply.

"I've got logs of emails between you and Calvin. Calvin is in custody right now. He's told me all about it," I said. Stretching the truth a little.

Jim changes position in his chair. "What would you do? The young people these days have no respect for authority. You can't stop them. They're a bunch of undisciplined and unprincipled heathen. I'd like to teach them a few things." I let him get it out of his system.

"How'd you get involved?" I asked.

"Good question. I get an email saying that if I don't drop off \$50,000 at a restaurant down in Deep Elum, my company's Web site will be targeted for attacks. At first I didn't respond. I just thought it was a bunch of kids. You know, like it was the new high-tech way to harass people." He paused for a long time and rubbed his entire face.

"Did you get more threats?" I asked.

"This went on for a couple of months. Then I received one that said I was a month late and now I was up to \$100K. The email said that if I contacted the police, that they would "bother" my family. Shortly after that email, our Web site was down for a few hours. The system administrator brought it down because he thought that we were being attacked."

"And then, did you pay the money?"

“I looked at the cost of our site going down compared to paying these guys not to attack and decided that it was more cost effective to pay up. I didn’t want to get my family involved in this.”

“So, you haven’t told anyone?”

“Not the police. I was hoping they would just go away. It sounds like they got caught. Serves them right.”

“How’d Pastor Barclay get involved?” I asked.

Jim’s eyes dart to the computer and then back to mine. Then he makes a look like I’ve said something totally ridiculous. “Pastor Barclay? He’s not involved. Never was.”

“I saw his personal belongings. He had several books on hackers. He also had several online chat sessions with Calvin, a.k.a. prheddi.”

Jim looked genuinely shocked. “That’s amazing. I honestly don’t know how he could have possibly gotten involved.” He pauses for a few seconds. “Wait a minute. As you know, Pastor Barclay’s position at Grace was being re-evaluated. He came over to the house one night for a meeting. I think I had received that email threatening my family. It was a mistake but I shared it with the pastor. He said that he would pray about it but that’s the last time we talked about it. A month later his wife shot him to death.”

“I guess that’s why I’m here. I don’t think his wife shot him. I’m trying to prove that someone from the Sons of Destruction killed Pastor Barclay. You’re saying that he wasn’t involved with them though. Right?”

“Not to my knowledge. You have to believe me. To my knowledge, the pastor didn’t even know these guys. I just told him about it that one time.”

Chapter 39

Use for the first time he goes to the FBI Building

The pieces were starting to come together but I still needed some hard evidence to get Allison Barclay released from custody. I knew the best thing for me to do was to drive back to the hotel and put all my thoughts on paper. When I got in my room, the message light was blinking. It was Vicki just checking on me.

I really didn’t need any distractions so I didn’t call her back. What I needed the most was to talk with Calvin. I was sure he knew something about Pastor Barclay. But Jim Mason said that he wasn’t involved. What Jim telling me the truth?

I called both FBI agents I had cards for and got their voice mail. I left messages on both systems that I had some very useful information on the recent attacks and that I needed to talk with Calvin. I figured I better call the Allison’s lawyer, Lester Cummings, just to make sure I had a legal representative close at hand if the FBI guys tried any strong-arm tactics.

“Lester, it’s Teddy. Listen, my main suspect is in FBI custody. I need to talk with him. I know he knows all about the Barclay murder. I want to trade some information about a hacker ring to the FBI for access to Calvin. Do you want to help?”

“Allison’s trial date is set for next month. There’s a good chance she’s going to be committed to the state hospital before then. The Feds have their own rules. I can’t help you.”

“Can’t you do some type of legal maneuvering, just to get access to a witness that’s in Federal custody. I can’t believe that this is the first time that the State of Texas needed access to a Federal witness.”

“No, it’s not the first time. The judge in this case isn’t going to issue a subpoena for your guy based on some private investigator’s ideas. Do you have any evidence that this guy was involved in the murder?”

“That’s just it. I don’t. There is just too much circumstantial evidence that point to someone from his hacker club. Can you just be ready in case I need some advice?”

“I’m not sure how much help I can be. Good luck.”

I felt better after talking to Lester because now I was operating with more information, even though he wasn’t much help otherwise. I knew what I had to do and I hoped that I wasn’t going to get thrown in jail again.

I had figured that one of the FBI boys would call me back soon because of the media attention these Internet attacks were generating. Several companies were coming out with press releases stating they had the solution to prevent these kinds of attacks. There also were many companies and individuals that were looking to catch the attackers for the fame and fortune that the hacker’s scalp would bring. The phone rang exactly at one o’clock.

It was Special Agent Bob Campbell. He wanted me to come down to the Federal Building downtown Dallas and show them what I had. I asked him about Calvin and he said that I should be downtown before two o'clock.

The sunlight reflected off the tall buildings onto the freeway as I neared the Commerce Street exit. It was so hot that my tires felt like they were melting on the pavement. I pulled up to the Federal Building and noticed that it had large concrete dividers set up in front so you couldn't park there with a bomb.

The walk from parking lot to the building was like walking through a steam bath. When I got into the building, I was sweating profusely. The guards at the metal detector probably thought I was nervous and was trying to get something past them. I didn't bring my laptop since I wasn't sure if these FBI guys would confiscate it for evidence. I took my folder of papers from the conveyor belt and walked to the elevators.

The building had that official bureaucracy look and smell to it. All of the doorways had square plaques that were labeled with acronyms and numbers. I was told to come up to the fifth floor. Once there, I had to check in with a guy that was wearing a black combat suit with a pistol holster under his left arm. I sat there with him in the reception area until Bob Campbell came out.

He came through a door that was as thick as a vault. Bob shook my hand and then led me back to the door. The guard in the black suite activated a switch and the door clicked open. We walked back to what I believed was an interrogation room. He sat me down. This time, there was no foreplay.

“Let’s see what you got,” Special Agent Bob demanded. He didn’t even look me in the eyes.

“Where’s Calvin?”

“Listen, if you want to play hard ball, we’ll play hard ball.” This time he did look me right in the eye.

“I just need to talk to him is all.”

“I said don’t waste my time. Why do you want to talk to him?”

“He might have some information about an investigation I’m doing.”

“Let’s see what you got,” he said while he reached over for my folder.

I show him some of the keystroke logs with commentary that Jacob put together. “My source says that these show them planting some “zombie” code on those Texas Tech University computers. The ones that might have been involved in some of those attacks on those Web sites last week.”

He tries to act like he’s not that impressed and that this won’t help him at all.

“How do we know these came from one of our boys from Sons of Destruction?”

“Don’t ask me, I’m not the guru.”

“Who is?”

“My consultant that I plan on keeping for myself.”

Special Agent Bob gets on the speakerphone. “Tell him we’ll be down in a few.” I had no idea that he was talking to. He hangs up and turns towards me.

“I’ll need more of these. Just like this,” he says pointing to the logs I brought in.

He then gets up and says it's time to go. We go back through the vault to the elevator. He uses a special passkey to select the second floor. The second floor is the holding area for people that are being tried in the Federal Court system. We are buzzed through three vault like doors. We then stop at a glass-enclosed guard's area. We're buzzed through to a cellblock. We stop in front of a cell and the agent motions to the guard to open the door. The door clicks open.

"Ten minutes," Special Agent Bob says and then walks back to the guard's area. Calvin is sitting on the bunk. All that is in the cell is a toilet, sink, and bed. He looks like he hasn't slept in a few days. He still had on the same clothes since I saw him in Austin.

I wanted to get right to the heart of the matter. "Jim Mason from Metroplex Media told me you were extorting money from him. He also said you had a connection with the late pastor Frank Barclay."

He didn't show any reaction. "Well, what do you say?" I pushed.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said, like he was bored.

"Listen, punk. I've got some evidence of someone planting zombie code on the computers that were involved in those attacks last week. I can either turn that over to these guys or you can talk to me."

His eyes darted around and I could tell he was thinking it over. I remained silent while he thought it over.

"Pastor Frank was a good guy. We met in a chat room. He was always out there debating with punks about Christianity. You wouldn't believe the stuff these

guys would say to him. Real vulgar things. Pastor Frank just kept on mixing it up with them. We started having some private chats. He was a real good listener.

“I knew he was a straight-shooter. I mean, I saw him on television and all. He talked me in to praying with him about receiving Jesus in my heart. After that, I would call him and stuff like that.”

I just sat there and listened. I was hoping he would get it all out before the FBI guy came back.

“I told him what we were doing for money. He said I should quit and turn myself in. He said he could help me. That’s when I went to Alex. I told Alex that I was going to turn myself in. I told him about the pastor and that he would help us. Alex went crazy. He said that you can’t trust a preacher like that. That every preacher he had ever known was a liar and hypocrite. Alex worried constantly that the preacher was going to turn us in. That’s why he shot him.”

My jaw dropped open. I mouthed the word several times before it came out with sound. “What? Alex shot the pastor? Wow!” I was stunned and excited all at once. I felt like jumping up and doing a few cheers that I finally got to the bottom of this thing. For so many weeks I felt like I wasn’t getting anywhere.

“Will you testify to this?” I asked.

“Shooting him has bothered me since it happened. I didn’t do it nor could have I stopped it. I don’t mind taking some computer time and money from some big corporation. But killing a pastor? That’s worse than killing a cop.”

“Will you testify then?” I ask again.

“I don’t know how this whole thing is going to go down. I you can promise me I’ll walk out of here if I testify about the shooting, I’ll do it.”

“You don’t understand Calvin, I can’t promise anything. Besides, you’re not in trouble because of the murder. You’re in trouble for taking many from those big corporations.”

“What about the witness protection program? I’m going to need protection from the Mafia.” It was then the door clicked open and Special Agent Bob opened the door the rest of the way.

“Ten minutes is up. Let’s go,” he commanded.

Little did I know that this was going to be the last time that I ever got to talk with Calvin. After the interview, I told Special Agent Bob that Calvin had information that would get a woman out of jail that’s there on a murder charge. He ignored what I was saying and escorted me back to the waiting area. He said that he was after one thing and one thing only: Alex Jones.

On the way back to the hotel, I called Mrs. Connery. I told her I had some news that I would like to tell her in person. She said that I should plan on having dinner at her house around seven o’clock.

I then called Lester Cummings with the news. He was less than thrilled that I was still meddling in his case and discouraged digging up any new information.

“Will he testify under oath that this other guy pulled the trigger? If you don’t have that, there’s no new evidence. The justice system doesn’t work on rumors and jail house accusations.”

“Isn’t there anyway to subpoena Calvin to get him to testify?”

“You’re putting me in a bad position here. The Feds have him right now. They can really slow things up as far as a subpoena. Think in terms of a sequential process. He goes through the Federal system first. What ever is left of Calvin, the State of Texas will get that. We might be able to do something on appeal. Of course, if you could get someone else to testify. That would be the best thing.”

Chapter 40

I was relieved that the guard at Mrs. Connery’s didn’t search my car again. I winded my way through the grounds and pulled up near the front. Her freshly washed and waxed Cadillac was sitting outside.

Jaunita, her maid answered the door. She said for me to follow her back to the kitchen; that Mrs. Connery was cooking. When we got to the kitchen, Mrs. Connery was bending over a big kettle of hot grease, dipping out fried shrimp.

“I love it fried, Teddy.” She said when she saw me come in. “I know it’s not good for the arteries but I figure I don’t have much longer left anyway.”

I told her I loved fried shrimp as well.

“I fried up a big stack of potatoes as well. I didn’t want to turn the oven on in this heat,” she said. She put the last of the shrimp on a bed of fries and motioned for me to follow her to the dining room. The table was set for two with china,

crystal goblets, flowers, and ribbons. “I don’t know what those society ladies would say about this but I like my china and my French fries.”

After sitting down and saying grace, I notice that the ketchup is in a china gravy boat. I reach for it and start to tell Mrs. Connery the latest developments in the case. “I think I’ve found out who killed the pastor,” I said. The expression on Mrs. Connery’s face didn’t change. She didn’t miss a bite. “There’s a young man in FBI custody that said that a guy in his computer hacker club killed him because he knew too much.” Still, no reaction from Mrs. Connery.

Finally, after several more shrimp, Mrs. Connery asked me a question. “How can you be sure he’s not lying?”

Her question took me by surprise. Her response was not what I expected. I thought she would be ecstatic to finally have someone tell her that there was another possible suspect besides the pastor’s wife. “Is any thing for certain, Mrs. Connery?”

“God’s promises,” she said quickly and easily.

“Well, I mean besides that. I thought you would be thrilled to have additional information like this.”

“I’m sorry Teddy. I’ve been in contact with Lester. He called me before you came over. He says that you’re going down the wrong path and it’s not really helping Allison that much. I don’t know what to believe anymore.”

“You want Allison out right? Isn’t that why I’m here? Well, she didn’t shoot her husband. Give me the time and resources I need and I’ll prove it.” We both take a few more pieces of shrimp before resuming the conversation.

“Allison is not doing well,” she said. “I don’t know where they got the psychiatrist that said she could stand trial. I’ve heard that she’s not taking her medicine and is really hallucinating. She talks about her kids a lot but doesn’t respond appropriately to the people that are trying to help her get back home.”

“It’s a difficult situation, I know.” I put my hand on her hand.

“Teddy, I’m going to pray for her right now. Will you join me?”

I nodded my head and Mrs. Connery started praying. The whole time she was praying, I thought that God was looking down and seeing that I was unworthy to have my prayers answered. I hoped that He was still listening to Mrs. Connery.

After finishing dinner off with some key-lime pie, we retired to the art room. The sun was just setting. Mrs. Connery went over to the piano and played a few hymns. I leaned backed and relaxed on the antique furniture. After Mrs. Connery finished, I got up and started for the door.

“Mrs. Connery, you have to trust me on this. Make sure Lester keeps helping me on this. I’ve got a witness that says Allison didn’t do it. I’m going to try to get another one. If I do, Lester is going to have to do some work to get the case against Allison dropped.”

Since I was looking her right in her bright blue eyes, she agreed to keep Lester in line by paying him some more retainer. “Isn’t it funny how money and not compassion decides so many things in this world?” She asked while escorting me out of her house. Just when I thought I had escaped before she said anything about my wife or Vicki, she stopped me just as I stepped off of the porch.

“How’s that bride of yours?” She asked softly.

I stopped and waited a second before turning back towards her. “She’s staying busy. She gets along pretty well without me.”

“Well, that’s what she wants you to think. Independence is not the way God intended for a man and wife. A woman only misses a husband if she is sure he’s coming back. Otherwise, all they do is make contingency plans. Try to re-assure her that you love her. I’ll bet you see a difference.”

“It might be too late for that, Mrs. Connery.” I turn and walked towards my car. She came after me.

“You would be surprised how resilient love can be. Make a commitment to love your wife unconditionally and with all your strength and see what her reaction is. Of course, it will take some time; but she’ll come around.”

My hand was on the door handle. She had to know she was making me feel uncomfortable. “Okay, Mrs. Connery, thanks for the advice. I need to leave now. Bye.” I got into the rental car and drove away without looking at her again.

I decided to stop by the bar in Deep Elum to see if I saw Sunyo or phlint. I was going to see if they knew anything about Alex and the pastor. When I arrived, the scene was just developing. Very few people were in the bar at 9:00. I waited until 10:00 and never saw them so I decided to go back to the hotel.

In the morning, I gave Sunyo a call. His line had been disconnected. I really did not have much hope in getting another witness besides Calvin. I needed to work out a way that the FBI would allow Calvin to give a deposition about the murder. Since we had such good luck giving the FBI those logs for access to

Calvin the first time, I called Special Agent Bob and left a message for him to call me.

I put my finishing touches on the final report that I was going to hand over to Mrs. Connery. Even though Allison was still being held as a suspect in this case, I didn't see any developments that would change what had been discovered about the Sons of Destruction and their activities.

Around 11:00, the Special Agent called me back. "I need Calvin to give a disposition about what he knows about a murder I'm investigating. How can I go about getting that done?" I asked the agent.

"I don't have time for Calvin anymore," the agent said harshly. "I need his buddy, Alex. I need something that will stick in court. I need him on the scene of the crime."

"That's going to be hard to do since the crime takes place over the wire," I remind him.

"Well, that's what I need. If you can't help, don't waste my time."

I couldn't think of anything so I thanked him and hung-up. I decided to write Jacob an encrypted email to see how he was doing and tell him the latest developments. I sent the email off and went for a run out in the mid-morning sun and humidity.

When I came back, there was a new email from Jacob. The tone of his email was that he thought that the job was over now that Calvin told me what had happened to Pastor Barclay. He said that he needed to give his mom some money for the rent and utilities.

The issue ***** Changing gears here *****

Chapter 41

Jacob sent an email back asking for me to call him from a pay phone. When I got down to the lobby, I dialed his number.

“You have any ideas of how we can get the FBI anymore information about the Sons of Destruction? It seems like that’s the only way that we’re going to get close to Calvin is to get him arrested.” I asked.

“It seems like they should have the technology and expertise to catch the bad guys. They caught me, you know.”

“I know, but you weren’t really trying to hide, were you?”

“Hell no. I was surprised when they knocked on the door. My mom is still shaken up. I learned a lesson there.”

“Yeah. You know that Chinese saying – first the test, then the lesson. The guys from the FBI are at the end of the talent and technology though. I think Special Agent Bob is having trouble getting resources to monitor the Sons of Destruction. His department seems to think that it is some other hacker group that is responsible for the attacks.”

“It’s hard to tell. They get a lot of veiled references out on the hacker chat rooms. My money’s on the SOD.”

“I’m about ready to wrap this investigation up. I’ve lost 10 pounds running in this heat. I need to get up in those Colorado hills and go camping. My hide is shriveling up. We need to strategize on some way to get these guys arrested and talking about Pastor Barclay.”

“How do you propose we get this done. I need some money now,” Jacob said.

“I’ll talk to Mrs. Connery and get some more retainer. Believe me, you’ll be pleased when we get the final payment.”

“I’ll be happy just getting my mom off my back. She’s always complaining that they are going to evict us out of the house if I don’t get off that computer and get to work.”

“I’ll get you some more money. Don’t worry. How can we get these guys? Is there any way we can set up some type of ‘sting’ operation and trap them? I mean, make them think that they are extorting some major Web site and catch them in the act?”

“You mean set some type of trap?” Jason asked.

“Yeah. I mean the Special Agent would really be impressed if we could do something like that. Catch them in the act.”

“That’s harder than you think. Computer security measures are all reactive. You wait on the attacker and then adjust.”

“What about if turned that around? Somehow luring them in to doing something that they think is an opening in the system. Just give them enough to think they are doing it by themselves but they are really being led down a path we want to take them.”

“It sounds good but almost impossible to implement,” Jacob said.

I know Jacob. I knew he would take this as a challenge. I would say that Jacob would be in the top 5 percent of the current Internet intelligence and current on the latest system vulnerabilities. I found him by calling the support line when I first got my Internet account. I talked to other technicians that worked there but Jacob was so far above the other guys that I only called support when I knew he would be working. When I started doing more investigations that required the Internet, I would ask Jacob question on how to find, let’s say, a credit report on a particular individual. He would come back with credit reports from every reporting agency that listed the target. I started paying him a \$100 every time he would get me the reports. After awhile, he quit working as a support technician and started working exclusively for me.

“I bet you can think of something. Some type of game. Come on. You can put together some type of game that they think is real. Virtual reality and all that stuff. Now is your chance to use V.R. and make some money. You up for it?”

“I don’t know man. It’s not that easy. Let me think about it.”

“Okay. I’ll write tomorrow. Take care.”

With that request out there, I knew he would mull it over for a few hours and then surprise me with a prototype. At least I was hoping he would.

I needed access to Calvin and I knew the only way to get it would be to help get them caught. I called up Special Agent Bob from the FBI.

“Can you get some equipment and computers to help snag these guys?”

Chapter 42

Once Jacob came down from Denver, the plan started falling into place. The Special Agent was able to get us a nice UNIX based system. He also managed to get several other computers for tracking information that flowed over different Points-Of-Presence and some neat wireless laptops that we hook up to the Internet from anywhere in the United States.

Bob was still a little skeptical that we could really help him track these guys down. He was the only FBI agent left that was still pursuing the Sons of Destruction for these attacks. Another hacker group from New York had been receiving all the attention from the FBI. Apparently, a local news station was interviewing a known hacker/security expert from this hacker club. The hacker went on to say that no company is safe from these types of attacks and that he could bring down the entire Internet in 30 minutes if he wanted to.

All ten members of his club were arrested and their computer equipment had been confiscated and was being reviewed by the FBI labs to find any log files left over from the previous attacks. One of the confiscated computers had some evidence of being part of the attacks so the investigation was now just centered on these characters. The national press had moved on to the presidential campaigns and the attacks faded from memory.

Of course, there were still the analysts that were saying that the whole Internet economy was overdone and it was like a bubble about to burst. That attacks like the ones a few weeks ago against these major portals proved that the whole digital architecture was flawed and destined to be like the hula-hoop.

I didn't believe it. I also felt that Jim Mason was telling me the truth when he told me about being threatened by the Sons of Destruction if he didn't pay some type of "protection" money. I also didn't believe the attacks were over.

The best case scenario that we could come up with was to find out the next sites that were being targeted and then try to prevent them from doing any harm but still catch them in the act of illegal activities.

One other problem was that we had lost track of Calvin's and Alex's whereabouts. Bob said that they had staked out both of their apartments but never did see any activity from either location. But I knew they were still out there and I knew that they could shed some light on the Pastor's murder.

Traditionally, to find out where hackers were working from, Jacob said he would need to put a "packet sniffer" on computer that the hackers were connected to. That way, he could follow the trace of the packets and it would pinpoint what Internet Service Provider (ISP) that was serving their requests. Once we knew the ISP, we could find out account information, phone numbers being used, and activity status and times. We would then have to work with the ISP to trace the calls to the hackers.

I had another more low-tech plan that I wanted to use to find them. I told Jacob to go ahead with the technical search while I tried to formulate a plan that would get them out in the open so I could get this case wrapped-up.

We had set up operations in the Dallas Federal Building. Bob gave us access to the equipment Jacob needed but wouldn't let us have hall passes to the men's room. We had to get him to escort us every time we walked down the hall. He also grew tired of Jacob's request for more line taps and traces.

I was working at the Government Issue desk that Bob let me sit at when Jacob said something that caught us both by surprise.

"They're at it again. I just saw on this news site that Vtech's site has been attacked. They are saying that Vtech is losing one million dollars every hour it is down."

We both ran over to Jacob's computer.

"Where'd you see that?" Bob asked.

"Right there under breaking news. I just was checking a stock I follow and I noticed it."

Bob was excited. "I knew those boys in New York weren't the ones. I bet we're about to get some attention from the top of the FBI." He walked away in deep thought.

"We need to get down to Austin and try to find out more information. I'd like to find out if anyone approached them for money before attacking."

Bob came back in the room talking on his cell phone. "It says it on the news site that Vtech has been attacked." He lifts the phone from his lips to address us.

“It’s pretty bad when we are getting national security information from a search site.” He resumes his conversation with the party on the phone. “I don’t know yet. We’re checking into on our end. If it’s our guys, we’ll know about soon.”

Jacob laughed nervously and said that he shouldn’t be so sure. I looked at Jacob and nodded my encouragement. I knew it was a stretch to say that we were anywhere near these guys. We still didn’t know where they were operating. All we could do for now is wait for them to show up and then try to get some type of lead to follow.

Bob hung the phone. “I need to get down to Austin soon. I’m going to Vtech to see if anyone will talk. I’m sure there are reporters everywhere at Vtech as well. I might be able to pick up on some gossip.” I said.

Bob didn’t waste anytime. “I can get us down there in quick. It’s two and a half hours from here if we leave now before rush hour.” Bob was already getting his jacket on and checking for his keys.

We headed south down Interstate 35 going averaging around 85 miles an hour. We were in an unmarked black Lincoln Towncar. Bob would tailgate drivers in the passing lane until they pulled off or we could get around them somehow. We passed a highway patrol with a radar gun and I noticed that he caught up with us but then fell back. He must have seen something on the license plate that clued him in that it was an FBI vehicle.

The scenery didn’t change much after we got out of the southern part of Dallas County. Mostly interstate highway with farms and ranches on either side. For the last hour or so, I had my eyes closed. Bob’s fast driving wore me out. I

was surprised that we didn't get shot the way we would maneuver into small openings without signaling.

The car's GPS system gave us precise guidance to Vtech's headquarters. The guard at the gate wouldn't let us in as visitors. That's when Bob showed the guard his badge. The look on the guard's face flattened out. He just looked at the badge like he wasn't sure what to do. He went back into the guard booth and raised the gate.

There were several people from the press at the front reception desk. Several local news affiliates had cameras and reports on the scene. The receptionist looked like she might have been a temporary replacement. She was having trouble keeping up with the calls that were coming in and looked like she was about to give up several times and just unplug her headset. There were five reports hovering around her asking if she has heard when the press conference was going to be. She just ignored them and kept on trying to field as many calls as she could.

Bob and I just observed the scene. I pulled out an official looking "Press" pass and put it on my coat. I walked around and tried to eavesdrop on any conversation or phone call that I could hear. I heard one guy say something about a false alarm. Shortly after my walk around, a young businesswoman came out and announced that the press was free to file into the briefing center for a press conference in 30 minutes.

We all pushed our way into a small conference room that was set up as a press room with the American flag and the Vtech logo displayed behind the

speaker's podium. Several of the news agencies placed setup microphones on the podium and the cameramen lined up neatly in the back. The room got hot and stuffy fast. One of the sound technician walked over the thermostat, popped off the metal cover, and turned the air conditioner on with a screwdriver. There was a big sign of relief from the press corp.

Right after that, several men with suits and stern faces walked into the room. The best looking one of the bunch walked to the podium and introduced himself.

"I'm Larry Stevens, the Senior Vice President of Technology. I would like to thank you for coming to this press conference." Larry continued to read the prepared script.

"Right after noon, our network monitoring system gave us an alert that something wasn't right with part of our network. It was initially diagnosed as a Denial-of-Service attack. We proceeded to bring several of our servers off-line in order to re-route some of this traffic so it would not interfere with our commerce system. These steps are merely cautionary and it is part of Vtech's operating procedure to bring these servers off-line when alerts like this go off in our system.

"After further analysis though, we found that the problem was with a new software patch that had been applied to one of our routers. The network management system wrongly made us believe that our site was being attacked. Things are all back online now. Good afternoon."

He stepped from the podium and walked through the reporters that were asking questions and putting tape recorders in his face. The speaker and the

other men with him left the room and used a key card to get back into the safe area of the building.

There was a buzz in the pressroom. Most of the reporters were trying to get the company's emblem in the background while they wrapped their news stories. All the reporters seemed extremely disappointed that there weren't any attacks. Bob sighed beside me.

Bob signed beside me. "Well, I guess that's that. I hope you enjoyed the scenery on the way down."

"Now that you mention it, I was too busy thinking we were going to wreck to really enjoy anything." I said.

"You're kidding me! That was mild. You should see me when I really need to get there. Like that time we were after this mail-bomber. I had dent marks and scraps from cars that we side-swiped on the way to that gig."

We started to walk out of the building along with the other reporters. "You know, I would like to check on something when we get into the car." Bob just shrugged his shoulders like it really didn't matter what a small time investigator would have to check on.

Once in the car, Bob started the engine and turned on the air conditioning. "Don't go anywhere yet. Give me a minute to see if this fancy computer you got us is any good."

The computer was instant-on, I didn't have to wait for a 5-minute boot process. The browser connected to the Web right away and I accessed Vtech's

site. I looked under the company profile section for the names of the Vtech executives. I found the name I was looking for and called Vtech's main number.

"Greg Meyers please. This is Teddy Powell." I got passed to a secretary named Kitty that said she could take a message. "Kitty, this is Teddy Powell. Greg Meyers would really like to talk to me if you would tell him I'm the line." She continued to resist. "Kitty, I'll tell you what. Give him this message and when he calls, I send you some flowers, okay? Put on the message that Teddy Powell knows that he is having to pay to keep his Web site up and that I have a solution for that problem. Thanks Kitty. Give him this number and I promise a nice bouquet.

After I hung up, I motioned for Bob that he could leave now. "What was all that about? Who's Greg Meyers?" He asked.

"Greg Meyers is the Chief Financial Officer for Vtech. I figure if they are going to approach anyone for some Web site insurance premiums, it would be the CFO."

"Web site insurance premiums?"

"My theory is that these attacks aren't your social hackers just out for a good time and some bragging rights. They are targeting sites that have some money and that would have exposure if they were down. Then they are more or less telling the owners of these sites that if they don't want to be attacked, give them some type of compensation, or insurance."

Bob pulls onto Interstate 35 North. He's more relaxed now and just moving with the flow of traffic. "How'd you ever get that theory?" He asked.

“I’ve just been following these guys and everything makes sense if you look at it through that theory. Look at the activities and the sites that have been targeted. Most of them are in or near Texas. That makes me believe that they need some other type of access besides electronic to carry out their plans. So in order to get paid, they have to get cash from the companies that are paying these premiums. You can’t just ask them to send cash in the mail so there must be some type of drop plan established that they can easily use to pick up the cash.

“That’s some theory,” Bob said without a lot of confidence. We continued north towards Dallas when my phone rang right outside of Waco.

“This is Greg Meyers returning your call.”

I nudge Bob so he’ll listen. “Oh, hi Greg. I’m Teddy Powell. I work as an investigator. I’ll cut right to the chase. I know what is happened today on your Web site and I think I can help. We’ve been tracking these guys for awhile and we’re moving in?”

“What are talking about?” He asked.

“I understand Greg, that you might not want to talk over the phone. We’re about an hour away. How about if we turn around and come down for a face to face?”

“I still don’t know who you are or what you’re talking about.”

“Come on Greg, we’ve been following these guys. We know what they are up to. If you want some help, meet with me.”

“I don’t know you from Adam. How’d you get my name?”

“I’m an investigator. I find people for a living.”

“What kind of investigator?”

“Most high-tech related. I work in a lot of different capacities. Just give me 15 minutes of your time and I’m sure you won’t regret it.”

“Are you some type of reporter? Is that what I’m hearing?”

“No, Greg. Like I said, I’m an investigator that has been investigating a computer-related crimes.”

“I guess I can do 15 minutes. I need to get home soon though. Where did you say you were?”

I motion to Bob to start turning around. “We’re just now turning around near Waco. We’ll be there in less than an hour.”

Bob sees a utility vehicle crossover that we were too far past to make but he jams on the brakes and slides a little past it. He then floors it and we spin around and start heading South again. This time he really does have the accelerator down and is driving dangerously. We are weaving in out of cars for the next hour before we finally get back to Vtech. The same guard is at the gate and he just waves us through.

The temporary receptionist is gone from the front desk so I dial Greg with my cell phone. Greg comes out and leads us to one of the outer conference rooms. He silently motions for us to sit down. Greg looks to be around 45 years old with graying hair and glasses. He is wearing a collared sport shirt that reveals tanned arms. I figure he spends some time on the golf course.

Greg starts tapping on the desk with his pen. “Now what do you guys have?” he asked.

“We really don’t have anything Greg,” I respond. “As I mentioned on the phone, I’m investigating some computer hackers and I have suspicion to believe that they have targeted Vtech in an extortion scheme.”

“What makes you think that?” I mean, as we told the press, the computer problems we had weren’t results of attacks. The system outage was a result of some new software that controls on of our main routers.”

“Has anyone from the Sons of Destruction contacted you? Asked for any money?”

Greg didn’t immediately respond. The question just lingered unanswered. I glance at Special Agent Bob. He’s looking at Greg.

“Who’s this with you?” Greg asked, pointing at Bob.

Special Agent Bob flashes his badge and then takes out his fancy cardholder and slides one of his cards over to Greg. “I’m Special Agent Bob Campbell with the FBI. I’m assigned to the Computer Crimes Division. We’ve been trying to get to the bottom of the recent attacks on several popular Internet sites.”

Greg is taken aback. “I’m not sure why you guys are here. Like I said, it was a problem with a router. The media somehow found out we were down and started a frenzy this morning.”

“You didn’t answer the question, Greg. Has anyone from the Sons of Destruction contacted you?” Special Agent Bob asked. Bob’s tone was more adversarial and I felt uncomfortable being so direct. I could tell Greg was thinking it through.

“Anything I say is off the record, is that understood?”

We both shake our heads.

“I’m not saying anyone has. But let’s just say someone from this gang had contacted us. What would that have to do with you two? And what could you do about it?”

Greg sounded frustrated. He seemed like the typical company man that would rather be out on the golf course than dealing with the new cyber outlaws.

“Well, if we could catch them in the act, we could make sure they wouldn’t do it to anymore companies,” I said. I looked over at Bob to make sure that I went with the FBI organization’s line. “Of course, we’ll need your company’s cooperation to catch these guys.”

“What do you mean?” Greg asked.

Just before I answered, Bob interrupted. “It means that we’ll have to collect evidence that a crime has taken place. That could be line-taps, network monitoring, recording devices worn on your person. All that neat stuff like you see in the movies.”

“How confidential is all this? I mean, you really can’t expect any company to want to work with you guys, can you? I mean, if it ever got out that Vtech’s systems weren’t secure, we’d go out of business.”

Bob field the question. “The press wouldn’t know anything. I can’t promise you that someone some time won’t find a file that is in the public domain. I can promise you that it is against the Bureau’s policy to disclose any on-going investigations to the public. Usually in cases like this, it’s the insiders that leak the stories, not the Feds.”

“We did a get a call last week. This guy named “Freddie” left several messages for me to call him. Of course, I get calls all the time from salesmen. I just ignored it. I guess they found my System Administrator and started calling him and threatening to attack our systems if we didn’t pay them \$50,000 a week. The System Administrator didn’t know what to do so he passed it to me. After checking with my internal staff, I basically told this “Freddie” character to buzz off. I put it out of my mind until this morning when we started getting hit with a Denial-of-Service attack. It started around 9:00, one of our busiest times.”

“So you were attacked.” I said, making sure Bob knew I was right.

“Yes. When my people couldn’t give me a definitive answer when our systems would be back up, I emailed Freddie and said he had a deal. We had an emergency executive staff meeting and I got the authorization for \$200,000. This is either for 4-weeks of no attacks or for finding a solution to our vulnerability.

“Right after I emailed and said I had the money, the attacks stopped. It took us awhile to re-configure our routers since we were trying to re-route the network traffic to other resources. I delivered the cash to a men’s restroom in the back of a pizza place on 6th Street. I put it in the towel dispenser. I just took half of the \$50,000 they wanted. I said that I wanted to make sure that the attacks didn’t continue. I told them the next \$25,000 would be delivered in two days.”

I genuinely felt compassion for Greg. “So, you have to drop off another \$25,000 on Wednesday? Man, you’re in a tough position, Greg. But this can be a short-term situation if you work with us. One of my guys is putting together a plan. Just sit tight and we’ll in touch.”

I could tell Bob thought I was over-stepping my authority. “You said you emailed him? What email address did you use?” Bob asked. I knew that Bob asked this question because emails were easy to trace.

“It’s just one of those free email addresses. I’m sure he uses a different one everytime.”

“It’s still worth looking into. I’ll get one of my guys on it.” Bob paused a while and the whole room grew silent.

“Okay, just so we’re on the same page, we’ll have to set up a recorder on your phone. Don’t tell anyone about it. Not even your secretary or wife. I’ll get some equipment over here tomorrow. In the meantime, just relax. Go home to the family. Don’t worry about these guys. They’re harmless.”

Pastor Barclay immediately came to my mind. I wondered just how harmless these guys really were.

Chapter 43

Special Agent Bob was immediately in his element. On the way to the car, he talked to several different people within the FBI, setting up surveillance equipment and getting resources from the Austin area for backup. Since the

government had the New York hackers in custody and the press releases came out that Vtech wasn't actually a target of attacks, he ran into considerable resistance from his Bureau.

We sat in Vtech's parking lot for an additional hour while he sorted the logistics of this on-going investigation. The plan was to meet in the Austin Federal Building in the morning to brief the new guys on the plan.

When I called Jacob, he said that it would be better for him to stay in Dallas. Jacob said that he was getting the network and the UNIX system just the way he wanted it. I asked him what that meant and he just gave a vague answer.

I called my hotel room in Las Colinas to check messages and I had received one from Vicki. I had been bothered about my thoughts about her for awhile. I knew that I couldn't just deny that I really felt a strong attraction for her. The last time we saw each other, my nerves caused severe stomach cramps. I either had to follow my heart and start over again with someone and try not to make the same mistakes or I had to break it off with her completely and try to rebuild the marriage I was now in.

But, that could wait. The first thing I needed was a shower and some sleep. We stopped by a discount store and bought some underwear and shaving supplies. I bought a cheap pair of running shoes and some shorts as well. If I was going to be sharp, I needed a run in the morning. We found a funky motel just on Congress, south of downtown Austin. The desk clerk said that the best running around was around Town Lake, just a few blocks away.

The desk clerk was right. When I woke up, I headed towards downtown and ran down the Congress Avenue's embankment to the runner's path on the banks of the lake. I was surprised to see so many people on the trail that early in the morning. I came across a bronze statue of Stevie Ray Vaughn, the late blues guitarist. He was dressed in a cape and western-styled hat. His had rested on his guitar, which rested with its base on the ground. Behind the statue, the artist had created a bronze shadow that reflected Stevie playing the guitar.

Past the statue, the path around the lake was lined with trees teeming with birds that were just waking up. Waterfowl floated in the water; threatened only by the kayaks rowing past. It didn't seem as humid as Dallas and I really enjoyed the loop.

Back at the motel, Special Agent Bob was already standing outside by his car when I ran up with sweat dripping from every pore. I told him to give me 15 minutes and I'd be right out. I knew I wouldn't even stop sweating for at least 20 minutes but he looked like he was in a hurry so I went in and took a cold shower.

Once in the car, Bob was all business again. Several technicians from Dallas were en-route from Dallas and the plan was to meet them at the Austin Federal Building. I called Jacob and didn't get an answer. I was wondering what time he had made it bed, if at all, last night.

During the meeting, the plan was to record any calls Greg Meyers received at Vtech or his personal residence. A packet sniffer was going to be set up on the main Vtech routers to monitor and record the data that flowed over to and from

their systems. The system administrators wouldn't like this intrusion but it would give them something to talk about at their monthly Nerd community meetings.

It was agreed that only 3 of us would go into Vtech. Bob and me would go in along with Phil, the telephone technician. While at Vtech, I wanted to meet privately with the head of network security and come to agreement on a strategy. I was expecting resistance here and I got it.

Once out at Vtech, Greg wanted me to work with his head network person, Justin. Greg called Justin on his speakerphone and asked him to come to his office. I could tell that Justin though he was a prima donna by the way he sounded irritated that he had to quit whatever he was doing.

Justin walked into Greg's office and he immediately reminded me of how Jacob looks after he's been up for a couple of days working on a computer problem. Justin could have used some sleep, a shower, and a change of clothes. Better yet, a whole new wardrobe. His brown pants that had fit well 5 years ago were now too short. His pockets were spread open from weight gain. His light blue doctor's shirt was frayed and wrinkled. When he walked in to the office and saw all of us sitting there, he didn't know what to do. So he just stood there awkwardly until Greg told him to take a seat.

Greg told Justin that he wanted him to work with me on the network issues. Justin just looked up at the ceiling and blinked a few times like he was trying to process a request that didn't make any sense. I figured once we got alone together, that I could fill him in on the details.

Justin and me went to a separate conference room. I found out that with these technical types it is better to get the issues on the table up front. “Justin, we need your help to catch these hackers that are attacking your site. The problem isn’t going to go away. As you know, network security is always going to be reactive and defensive.”

Justin’s eye lit up behind his glasses like that’s the first thing he’s heard that made any sense yet.

“I want you to talk with one of my guys about what you two can do together to get these guys. That’s going to be the interesting part for you Jacob. The bad news is that the FBI needs evidence that a crime is taking place so they’re going to have to put some sniffers on your system.”

Justin’s face immediately tightened. “No way. We can’t have anything like that. You know the overhead in a diagnostic tool like that. We can only run one for a short time before the whole network is effected.”

“Justin, I’m telling you, it’s going to happen unless you and Jacob can come up with a better way to get the evidence the FBI needs to prosecute this case.”

He raised his eyes towards the ceiling again and made some guttural breathing sounds. The meeting ended after I gave him Jacob’s number. I asked for one of his business cards and he dug in his 3-inch thick wallet for 5 minutes before finding a card from one of his colleagues. He crossed out the name and number and put his down. I knew he was already deep in thought on this problem by the blank stare that he had on his face when I left him standing in the

conference room. I looked backed while I was walking down the hall and he was still standing in the same place.

Back in Greg's office, Phil, the phone guy from the FBI, had already replaced Greg's phone with a single-line radio phone that could be recorded and trace for the communications van that Phil brought down from Dallas.

We were slowing setting up the trap. We were going to need intelligent execution from our small team to pull off this operation. On the way back to the motel that evening in Bob's FBI issued Crown Victoria, I felt a long way from the initial reason I was called to Dallas and thought about Allison Barclay for the first time in awhile.

Chapter 44

That night, I finally got to talk with Jacob. He was up at the Federal Building in Dallas working on his high-powered UNIX computer.

"This thing is great! I can access any system I know of at high-speed. I'd like to get one of these for the house."

"Where have you been? I've been trying to call you all day." I immediately knew I sounded like I was micro-managing him and the line was silent.

"You must have been sleeping right? How do you like Dallas?"

“It’s hot,” is all he said.

“Did Jacob from Vtech call you?”

“Nope.”

“Well, you need to call him the first thing in the morning. He’s the system administrator for Vtech. He’s the nerdy, technical type. He’s got responsibility for the entire network at Vtech.” I gave him Jacob’s phone number and email address.

“I want you two formulate and implement that strategy you’ve been working on these past few days. Have you come up with anything yet?”

“I got a prototype thing going here.” I knew Jacob had been working on how to catch these guys since he got down to Dallas.

“Anything you can show me?”

“You can’t see it,” he said annoyingly.

“Well, what does it do? This system of yours?”

“It’s similar to a Virtual Reality system for hackers. They think they broke into the real system. It has all the systems that should be there, but they aren’t really just instances of systems on this UNIX computer in Dallas.”

“So, if I hear you right, the hackers would actually break into a system that they though was real but it’s really a fake?”

“That’s basically right but it’s a lot more complicated than that. It’s not just one system – it’s the whole network is fake.”

“How do you get them in the “fake” system?”

“That’s something we’ll have to work out with the guy from Vtech. Hell, I don’t even know if this will work. I’ve just been messing around with servers that register different computer names and addresses on the Internet. The prototype works for me. It will be fun to see if it works with real hackers.”

I was getting way past my knowledge-level about computers and also was wondering if I was on the right track. This investigation had taken a turn away from the facts and was leading towards a cyber-battle between the FBI, Vtech, and Jacob’s Virtual Reality network. Sitting in the motel that night, my confidence was at an all time low. I was hired by a rich widow to find out who killed the pastor from her church. A few loose pieces of circumstantial evidence pointed to a hacker named Calvin or “freddie”.

While I was involved with some groups that were getting closer to exposing a group of hackers, I was unsure if our actions against these hackers would ever translate in any tangible benefits to Mrs. Connery, Allison Barclay, and the rest of her family. I was tired of this case, tired of the heat, and ready for the next case. I also knew there would have to be a change in my marriage soon. Neither one of us were going to be able to endure the love-less marriage that our had evolved into.

I felt like I was in a pretty good position with what could be my true love waiting for me in Dallas. I only wished that it wasn’t going to be so hard to make the changes that both my wife, Karen, and me would eventually benefit from. It would be hard at first when I told her I met someone else but she would be better off in the long run. She needed someone to love her and spend more time with

her than I could. I also knew that she needed someone she could trust and I had already proved to her that I wasn't trustworthy. I surely wouldn't surprise her if I told her that I was leaving.

After I wrapped this investigation up, I was planning to get a fresh start on everything. Vicki proved to me that I was a worthwhile man; capable of giving and receiving love. Karen had been so unforgiving about a weakness that she had crippled our love and marriage. We both needed out. The more I thought about it, the more anxious I was to get this job wrapped up. I needed to call Mrs. Connery and tell her that I only had a week left than I had to go on to another job.

The next morning, I got up and took a jog around Town Lake again. This time, the sky was gray with fog and mist at the surface. The view across the lake was obscured by fog. Since it was cooler, it was probably the best day I had running in Texas that summer. I got back to the room and Bob was waiting for me again at the car.

"Greg called. He said they called with instructions on the drop. It's the same place. At the pizza place on 6th. We got it on tape. We traced it to a cell phone from an Atlanta area code. The Atlanta Phone Company didn't show that this number was active."

"Smart kids," I said.

"Too smart for their own good. We can get one of them at the pizza place when they pick up the money. I could get him on extortion. I really need some evidence that a computer crime was committed for it to be worth our efforts here though. How are you guys coming with the system? I mean, I need some hard

evidence that they are breaking in and causing damage. Damage with some real dollars. The problem we've had with previous cases is the evidence has been too complex and the juries don't understand it. And if they don't understand the evidence, they can't understand the damage these guys can do."

I really didn't want to think about how much evidence there is from breaking into a site that you thought was the real one. I was going to leave that to the authorities and the lawyers. "I think that Jacob and Justin and setting up a pretty elaborate trap that they can use to track all the illegal activities. I think your Bureau will have more than enough to put these guys away."

Chapter 45

The next payment was due from Vtech so the plan was to watch the pizza place on 6th Street. If anyone showed up, they would be arrested and then we would camp-out at Vtech headquarters until we heard back from one of the Sons of Destruction.

It was just a short drive from our motel over the river to Sixth Street. Special Agent Bob was coordinating several other FBI agents from his dark blue Crown Vic. We were parked in front of a tattoo parlor and across from a sex-shop. We could see the pizza joint but we weren't close enough to scare anyone away. I

noticed several other official looking cars with sun-glassed men in them parked up and down the street. Bob got a call that the possible suspect was entering the pizza joint.

The suspect crossed Congress Avenue and slowed down before opening the door to one of those store-window pizza places. He glances around quickly before entering. I make a note of the pizza place: Flying Armadillo.

I got a good look at the suspect just before he went inside. Several agents got out of their cars and started walking towards the Flying Armadillo. They walked back and forth by the entrance several times before the suspect came out with a pizza box.

It doesn't take the suspect long to come back out with a large pizza box. He starts to cross the street. Just then, a black car come out of nowhere and stops right next him. Two men jump out of the car with guns drawn. Another black car pulls up behind them and more men get out with guns.

They have Calvin face down in the street. A man that looks like the FBI guy from Denver, Special Agent Bob Campbell, puts the pizza box in the first car's trunk. By this time a crowd is circled around. A City of Austin police officer has stopped and is urging people to move on. The second agent from the Denver office, Stew Bradley, lifts Calvin up and puts him in the back of the first black car.

I hesitated at first but followed Bob as he ran up to the circle of officers with the suspect on his face on the ground. The stood him up and searched his pockets. Inside they found a black-billfold. One officer looks through the billfold and reads the driver's license: Calvin St. John.

I immediately wanted to question him. I walked up to him. "Did you know Pastor Frank Barclay?" Calvin shook his head no. Immediately, a sun-glassed agent comes up to me and wants to know who I am. I guess since I didn't have the official sunglasses on, he didn't think that I should be there. Bob called him off but they took Calvin away before I got the chance to ask him anymore questions.

In the Bob's car on the way to Vtech, I explained to Bob that I really needed some time with Calvin. I needed to wrap up this murder investigation and needed to know if the Sons of Destruction had anything to do with it. I positioned Jacob's services as a trade for access to Calvin. I didn't know if it would work or if I needed to get a lawyer involved.

During the drive, I explained to Bob that Jacob developed the Virtual Reality network to help him out and that he should be able to take full credit for catching the hackers. I mentioned that Jacob worked for me and that he only developed the system because I asked him to. That my primary focus wasn't on catching the hackers but resolving this murder case.

I also explained to Bob what little I knew about how our two computer experts were going to catch the hackers. Apparently, Justin and Jacob had developed a plan to lure the hackers into the system by leaving some openings in the system. Jacob said that he had been monitoring the hacker's movement around the system in the past few days. He said it looked like they were going through the openings he had left for them and it looked like the hackers had loaded some utility programs onto the system. One of the utilities they had loaded on Vtech's

systems was a password-file decryption program. It would read the system's password file, which is encrypted, and passes it through several popular filters to reveal the more powerful system access codes.

Justin said he was concerned about a program that they loaded on to his system named "ladybug". He had run some diagnostics on it but still couldn't tell what it was. They were working on getting "ladybug" moved over to Jacob's virtual-network when we showed up in Greg's office that morning.

Greg's shirt was wrinkled and his bangs were down on his forehead. He either hadn't gone home from work last night or he had had a rough morning.

He sighed when we all walked in. "Well, I guess this is it. We're either going to get the press out here again or catch the bad guys. Who knows, maybe we'll do both."

"Any more calls?" Bob looked at his phone-man before he looked at Greg.

Greg and the phone-man shook their heads.

"I guess we just sit tight. Is the system ready? I mean, is Justin and Jacob ready?"

I could tell Bob didn't want to get into a technical discussion of what they were up to. He didn't really understand how this Virtual Reality network was really going to work or even what it was supposed to be doing.

"I talked to Jacob this morning. He's standing by in Dallas. He said the first test of his system will be today when they get online."

"That's promising," Greg interjected.

I dial the Dallas FBI office with Greg's speakerphone. We also got Justin on the line as well.

"Okay guys, let's keep this line open. If you have to go down the hall or whatever, let us know so we won't think the connection was dropped." Bob could really handle the official agent part.

"Justin, have you seen them on yet this morning?" I asked.

There was a long period of silence before he answered unintelligibly.

"Was that a yes?" I asked.

Same response.

"I guess that was a yes," I said, looking around the room for agreement.

"What were they doing? Could you tell?"

I could barely understand what Justin was saying he talked so slow. It was as if he was thinking about something else and only uttered words with any spare cycles that his mind had. "They figured out 'root' password," is all he said.

"That's bad isn't it Jacob?"

Jacob came on the speakerphone loud and clear. "It couldn't be worse. The 'root' user has access to everything."

"Well, let's just watch them and see what they are going to do," I said.

Everyone in Greg's office was silent for awhile until I brought up watching the Texas Ranger's game last night on television. That started some interaction between everyone but Justin and Jacob. I knew baseball was a subject that Jacob wasn't interested and I was almost positive that Justin wouldn't be a baseball fan either.

Greg kept on checking his email and looking at his watch. The FBI's phone guy kept on taking electronic gear out of his big black case to inspect it. Special Agent Bob continued to walk down the hall for fresh coffee. Whenever he got back with a fresh cup, he would check to make sure Jacob and Justin were still on the line. I just sat in my chair and I looked at this cast of characters and our situation and wondered how I ever got so far off track in this investigation. The waiting reminded me of trout fishing in Colorado when I was a boy. I would wait for hours on end to see a little nimble on my fishing pole.

We didn't know if the Sons of Destruction had missed Calvin yet or not. We also didn't know if they had put together some type of plan where Calvin would call when he retrieved the money. We just had to keep an eye on the system and try to document the hacker's movements through the system.

Three hours after Calvin was arrested at the pizza place, Jacob made the first noise that sounded like he saw something on the system.

"What was that, Justin?" I asked.

"Someone just logged on as 'root'", Justin said.

Everyone in the room sat up. "Just keep an eye on him," Greg said.

"He's looking through some of the file systems. It's like he put something somewhere and can't find it. There he goes. He's going to another system. Or should I say he thinks he's going to another system."

Jacob came on the line, real excited. "He's in the system! I can see him. He's going through the file systems. He just now logged on to a one of our 'Virtual' computers."

Jacob continued to provide us with commentary on what happened. “There he goes. He’s disabling the security system. He thinks that he’s on the real system. This is a trip.”

The hacker finally did manage to bring down the system but not the one he thought. Jacob was completely sure he had an audit trail and system logs that showed that the hacker had intended to cause disruption.

On the way back to Dallas that evening, I discussed with Bob how I’d like to question Calvin so I could wrap up my investigation. He said that they were moving Calvin to the Dallas Federal Prison since he couldn’t make bail. That he’d see what he could do to get me in to see him. While I didn’t like the way he didn’t commit, I was too tired to argue. I just drove back to the hotel after picking up my car at the federal building and crashed.

Chapter 46

After my morning run, I called Special Agent Bob. He didn’t sound like he really wanted to help me. I figured I’d have to give Lester, Allison’s lawyer one more shot at being helpful during this investigation. “Lester, it’s Teddy. Listen, my main suspect is in FBI custody. I need to talk with him. I know he knows all about

the Barclay murder. I want to trade some information about a hacker ring to the FBI for access to Calvin. Do you want to help?”

“Allison’s trial date is set for next month. There’s a good chance she’s going to be committed to the state hospital before then. The Feds have their own rules. I can’t help you.”

“Can’t you do some type of legal maneuvering, just to get access to a witness that’s in Federal custody. I can’t believe that this is the first time that the State of Texas needed access to a Federal witness.”

“No, it’s not the first time. The judge in this case isn’t going to issue a subpoena for your guy based on some private investigator’s ideas. Do you have any evidence that this guy was involved in the murder?”

“That’s just it. I don’t. There is just too much circumstantial evidence that point to someone from his hacker club. Can you just be ready in case I need some advice?”

“I’m not sure how much help I can be. Good luck.”

I felt better after talking to Lester because now I was operating with more information, even though he wasn’t much help otherwise. I knew what I had to do and I hoped that I wasn’t going to get thrown in jail again.

He came through a door that was as thick as a vault. Bob shook my hand and then led me back to the door. The guard in the black suite activated a switch and the door clicked open. We walked back to what I believed was an interrogation room. He sat me down. This time, there was no foreplay.

“Let’s see what you got,” Special Agent Bob demanded. He didn’t even look me in the eyes.

“Where’s Calvin?”

“Listen, if you want to play hard ball, we’ll play hard ball.” This time he did look me right in the eye.

“I just need to talk to him is all.”

“I said don’t waste my time. Why do you want to talk to him?”

“He might have some information about an investigation I’m doing.”

“Let’s see what you got,” he said while he reached over for my folder.

I show him some of the keystroke logs with commentary that Jacob put together. “My source says that these show them planting some “zombie” code on those Texas Tech University computers. The ones that might have been involved in some of those attacks on those Web sites last week.”

He tries to act like he’s not that impressed and that this won’t help him at all.

“How do we know these came from one of our boys from Sons of Destruction?”

“Don’t ask me, I’m not the guru.”

“Who is?”

“My consultant that I plan on keeping for myself.”

Special Agent Bob gets on the speakerphone. “Tell him we’ll be down in a few.” I had no idea who he was talking to. He hangs up and turns towards me.

“I’ll need more of these. Just like this,” he says pointing to the logs I brought in.

He then gets up and says it's time to go. We go back through the vault to the elevator. He uses a special passkey to select the second floor. The second floor is the holding area for people that are being tried in the Federal Court system. We are buzzed through three vault like doors. We then stop at a glass-enclosed guard's area. We're buzzed through to a cellblock. We stop in front of a cell and the agent motions to the guard to open the door. The door clicks open.

"Ten minutes," Special Agent Bob says and then walks back to the guard's area. Calvin is sitting on the bunk. All that is in the cell is a toilet, sink, and bed. He looks like he hasn't slept in a few days. He still had on the same clothes since I saw him in Austin.

I wanted to get right to the heart of the matter. "Jim Mason from Metroplex Media told me you were extorting money from him. He also said you had a connection with the late pastor Frank Barclay."

He didn't show any reaction. "Well, what do you say?" I pushed.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said, like he was bored.

"Listen, punk. I've got some evidence of someone planting zombie code on the computers that were involved in those attacks last week. I can either turn that over to these guys or you can talk to me."

His eyes darted around and I could tell he was thinking it over. I remained silent while he thought it over.

"Pastor Frank was a good guy. We met in a chat room. He was always out there debating with punks about Christianity. You wouldn't believe the stuff these

guys would say to him. Real vulgar things. Pastor Frank just kept on mixing it up with them. We started having some private chats. He was a real good listener.

“I knew he was a straight-shooter. I mean, I saw him on television and all. He talked me in to praying with him about receiving Jesus in my heart. After that, I would call him and stuff like that.”

I just sat there and listened. I was hoping he would get it all out before the FBI guy came back.

“I told him what we were doing for money. He said I should quit and turn myself in. He said he could help me. That’s when I went to Alex. I told Alex that I was going to turn myself in. I told him about the pastor and that he would help us. Alex went crazy. He said that you can’t trust a preacher like that. That every preacher he had ever known was a liar and hypocrite. Alex worried constantly that the preacher was going to turn us in. That’s why he shot him.”

My jaw dropped open. I mouthed the word several times before it came out with sound. “What? Alex shot the pastor? Wow!” I was stunned and excited all at once. I felt like jumping up and doing a few cheers that I finally got to the bottom of this thing. For so many weeks I felt like I wasn’t getting anywhere.

“Will you testify to this?” I asked.

“Shooting him has bothered me since it happened. I didn’t do it nor could have I stopped it. I don’t mind taking some computer time and money from some big corporation. But killing a pastor? That’s worse than killing a cop.”

“Will you testify then?” I ask again.

“I don’t know how this whole thing is going to go down. I you can promise me I’ll walk out of here if I testify about the shooting, I’ll do it.”

“You don’t understand Calvin, I can’t promise anything. Besides, you’re not in trouble because of the murder. You’re in trouble for taking many from those big corporations.”

“What about the witness protection program? I’m going to need protection from the Mafia.” It was then the door clicked open and Special Agent Bob opened the door the rest of the way.

“Ten minutes is up. Let’s go,” he commanded.

Little did I know that this was going to be the last time that I ever got to talk with Calvin. After the interview, I told Special Agent Bob that Calvin had information that would get a woman out of jail that’s there on a murder charge. He ignored what I was saying and escorted me back to the waiting area. He said that he was after one thing and one thing only: Alex Jones.

On the way back to the hotel, I called Mrs. Connery. I told her I had some news that I would like to tell her in person. She said that I should plan on having dinner at her house around seven o’clock.

Chapter 47

Wrapping up this investigation should have brought me more satisfaction than what it did. I knew my marriage was dying and I had been living a lie for too long. Karen and I had been slowly growing apart; even before the affair. I would have liked it better if she would have just given up and moved on. It would have been better for both of us.

Now I had a chance to start over with a woman that seemed to really care about me. The chemistry was there. Back when I was counseling men in my church, I would tell them that the pain relief they were looking for wasn't in a woman's arms. That it was really a trap. Now I could understand what those men couldn't express; that they knew it was wrong but were powerless to stop it.

On my way over to Mrs. Connery's that evening, I was extremely relaxed. I was so slumped down in the driver's seat that I needed to adjust the rear-view mirror. I had the same attitude when I got up to the guard gate. I pulled up, lower in the seat than usual. I looked at the guard and slowly waved. I thought that if he wants to search me again, that's fine. He just opened the gate and waved me through.

Once inside, we sat in the formal dining room. Mrs. Connery had a dress on. I had on my polo shirt and slacks. It was just us two at a long, formally set table. The maid brought us each course as we ate.

"Teddy, I'm really proud of you. I knew you would find out the truth. I've been praying for you," Mrs. Connery remarked.

I yawned. Maybe I was getting too relaxed. Or maybe the fatigue was finally setting. “I couldn’t have done it without your support. I’ll get a complete copy of the investigation to you next week. I’ll send it from Denver along with the rest of the expenses.”

“That will be fine, Teddy. Tell me. How is, let’s see, Karen doing? I’m sure she misses you.”

“I wouldn’t say she misses me. By the way, I’m going to have some expenses for Jacob as well. You know he’s been helping me.”

“Why would you say she doesn’t miss you? I mean, a husband doesn’t have to be on a trip for a woman to miss her husband. Or should I say, the husband that she thought she was married to.”

“We’re probably going to get a divorce.” I wanted to just get it out on the nice dining room table.

“Teddy. Don’t say such things. That’s the last thing you need. You’re a Christian man aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“And she’s a Christian woman?”

“Yes.”

“Well, God can change your hearts towards each other. But he can’t if you resist Him. You can go on and fall in love with another woman but let me tell you, there will be trouble in that as well. You might as well just work out your problems with the wife you have now because the next wife will give you twice as much trouble.”

“I don’t plan on getting married again. Anytime soon that is.”

“Just remember it’s the little things that count the most. Open her door. Smile when you see her. Treat her like you’re on your first date. Try that for a few months and see what happens.”

“That sounds too easy. Anyway Mrs. Connery, I really enjoyed meeting you and working for you. You are a quality woman. I need to get going. I’m beat.”

We walked slowly to the door. She held my hand as we walked down the hall. She was being quite so I looked over at her. She had her eyes squinted shut and her mouth was moving. I think she was praying for me.

The next morning, I gave Vicki a call. I asked her if we could meet. That we needed to talk about some things. I drove over to her apartment and parked outside. My stomach was in knots and started aching. I looked up at her apartment and remembered what Mrs. Connery said. I drove back to the hotel and packed my bags. I went to the airport, returned the rental car, and took the shuttle to the terminal. Once inside, I went to the gift shop and bought Karen a \$250 turquoise bracelet.