

FROM THE AUTHOR OF *DANGEROUS DNA*



THE MORAL MAFIA



DAN REYNOLDS



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1

THREE MEN ENTERED THE THIRD FLOOR CONFERENCE room of Chicago's old Farm Credit Building on 42nd Street. The modern glass and steel décor did not fit with the rest of the building's marble floors and hand carved oak architecture, yet the technology-laden accoutrements made it grand in its own way. Such technology did not come cheap, but Tony Constantino had financial resources available to few men anywhere. No one knew his net worth. He preferred it that way. Two weeks ago, the *Chicago Tribune* had estimated his assets in excess of fifty million dollars. The article was neither flattering nor accurate, but Constantino smiled when he had read it.

Close, he had mused, they're only two billion off the mark.

The don took his customary position at the head of the table, facing the room's entrance. Constantino never sat with his back to a door. Leaning firmly against his seatback cushion, he exuded the air of a confident man, a man who was perfectly content with life.

Constantino was a devout Catholic, a family man adored by friends and feared by business associates.

For all his wealth, Tony Constantino lived in a modest home. He purchased a new car once every three or four years. If he had a weakness for spending, it was on technology. In sharp contrast to his father, a man who ran the family for thirty-five years, Constantino owned a host of high-tech gadgets. He found that dabbling in technology stocks was far more exciting than running the family's gambling casinos and brothels. His participation in the drug cartel was anything but glamorous, and it was becoming more dangerous every year. But this was the hand life had dealt him, and he gladly accepted it as his destiny.

The second man, a gargantuan figure known as John Henry, went straight to the bar and poured a drink. He then walked to Constantino, who was fondling a remote control, and handed him a Grappa, imported from the family's business in Sicily. Taking a small sip, Constantino savored his favorite brandy.

"Mmm, thank you John Henry." He reached in his breast pocket for a Cohiba Cuban cigar. "It's time to prepare for our meeting, gentlemen."

John Henry rolled his sweaty sleeves down around his thick arms. He put on the sport coat he had removed in the sweltering downtown heat. The third man, Mario Manetti, fumbled with something in his right hip pocket, and then he patted it and nodded. He reached to his opposite side to find his cell and called Mike Sloan, who was waiting outside for Constantino's guests to arrive. He spoke softly to Sloan as Constantino studied the conference room's bright and cheery surroundings.

Through the high-tech windows to his left, Constantino could see a row of stately old buildings reflecting the early evening sun. Through the glass in front of him, he could see Trina Mandolfo, his niece and secretary, and farther back, several cubicles that formed a path to his elite corner office.

Constantino clicked the remote, and every image beyond the glass disappeared from view under an opaque film of liquid crystal.

2 A few canister lights illuminated automatically, but the room was

transformed from eye-squinting brightness to near darkness. The display panels of three computers in the back of the room shone brightly from a distance. So did the numeral three above the elevator, which Constantino had installed for private use. It took a few seconds for the three men to adjust to the darkness. Shadows fell everywhere except on Constantino, whose figure seemed to radiate an eerie yellow glow under the incandescents. John Henry and Mario Manetti took positions near the room's entrance. Constantino raised the remote control once more and, like magic, an eighteen-inch swath of glass became clear at the top-most portion of the opaque gray windows. Light gushed in from the early evening sky.

"Perfect," Constantino said checking his watch with a brief smile, "The stage is set. Mike will be escorting our guests up here any minute. Are there any questions regarding this evening's meeting?"

Manetti's fingers tugged his thick black mustache and then he patted his pocket once more. Calmly, he answered, "Just one, Tony, is there any chance Mr. Lang will cooperate?"

The remaining glint of contentment drained from Constantino's eyes and they narrowed until they were slits. The corners of his mouth turned down and his grasp on the remote control tightened.

"None, the fool has already leaked the information to his shareholders. He should have kept it quiet until the project was further along. Anyway, we can easily discredit him; convince everyone that the memory chip was just a hoax. It shouldn't be too difficult, considering the improbability that such a technology even exists."

"What about his researcher?"

"Napierilla? He's a weak man. He has four children—he'll cooperate." Constantino changed the subject, "How is your mother, Mario?"

Manetti sighed as he leaned his shoulder against the closed door. "I saw her early this morning, Tony. She's doing much better. She asked me to thank you for the roses."

"She's a wonderful woman, Mario. No man could ask for a better mother."

Manetti tugged at his lapels, straightening his suit coat. “She still has some numbness on her left side, but the doctor thinks she’ll make a full recovery.”

“I’ve arranged for maid service for the next few months. A woman recovering from a stroke shouldn’t be doing housework.”

Mario’s eyes softened. “You are too kind to us, Tony.”

“Nonsense, you’re family—and family is everything.”

Constantino reached in his right pocket and produced an intricately engraved gold lighter. As he lit his cigar, there was a light knock on the door. John Henry opened it to face a gawking man who was no doubt, William Lang. John Henry shrugged off his stare. From where Lang stood, the conference room’s door jam blocked a good portion of John Henry’s forehead from view.

Jesus, how big is this guy?

Mike Sloan had escorted William Lang and his researcher, Keith Napierilla to the conference room. He stepped from the hallway in front of Lang, who hadn’t moved, and waved his arm motioning Lang and Napierilla to move to the conference table. Lang made no attempt to hide his rudeness, and continued staring at John Henry. It was as though his eyes were powerless to do anything else. For the second time, Sloan motioned their guests toward the table. Lang still had his neck craned, looking up at John Henry, but he began to inch his way toward Constantino.

Constantino managed a weak smile, “Hello Bill, good to see you.”

“Ahh—same here, Tony.” Impeccably dressed as always, Lang extended a perfectly manicured hand to Constantino, who remained seated. They shook hands briefly. Constantino’s voice took on a playful quality and he said, “I can see you are in awe of John Henry’s dimensions. Just wait until you sit down—it’s like looking up at a skyscraper.”

Skyscraper nothing! He looks like Frankenstein’s monster.

Lang swapped glances with Constantino, then John Henry, then Manetti, and again with John Henry. He never connected with Sloan’s eyes before he was again transfixed on the man whose head was almost as flat as it was thick.

“Yes, he’s a big man,” said Lang, “probably played basketball in high school—right, Mr. Henry?”

The behemoth seemed to find no humor in the remark. He replied in a stoic voice, “It’s John Henry.”

Still unable to retract his stare, Lang answered, “Right, thanks for correcting me, John Henry.”

“Gentlemen, please have a seat,” Constantino said. Watching Lang closely, he glanced at the fourth man, Sloan. “Mike, will you tell Trina she can leave for the evening?” Sloan disappeared and closed the opaque glass door behind him. Constantino raised his glass, offering his guests a drink. “What will you have from the bar, Bill?”

“Do you have any scotch?”

“John Henry, please get Mr. Lang a scotch. What about you Mr. Napierilla?”

The pale, boney figure was studying his surroundings with great curiosity, “Water is fine, thank you.”

Lang’s attention finally drifted to Constantino. “It’s good to be in this neighborhood again, Tony, I love the charm of these old buildings.”

“There are a few for sale, Bill. I could make some inquiries if you’re ready to escape the grueling gridlock of Oak Brook’s rush hour traffic.”

“You couldn’t tear me away from the ‘hustle and bustle,’ Tony. Besides, we already have the perfect research facility. But enough of that, I’ve only got a few minutes and you said this was important.”

“It is, Bill. I don’t want Simmons’ memory chip to go into production.”

Lang turned an ear toward Constantino as though he wasn’t certain he had heard correctly, “Excuse me?”

“You heard me, Bill. I want you to turn over the prototypes and all the design data you have on them. Mario will pick everything up around noon tomorrow.”

“Wait a minute—hold on! I’ve already told the board—and our shareholders.”

“A mistake you will have to rectify, Bill.”

Lang leaned forward, unconsciously straightening the tie below his stiffly pressed collar.

There must be a misunderstanding of some kind. Surely he can't be serious? Not after all the trouble he went through to steal the design? For God's sake, he had Simmons killed for it.

Lang's face was drawn, "Is someone on to us?"

"Not at all, Bill."

"Then why do you want to stop production? We stand to make millions, even billions on these chips."

John Henry set a bottle of water in front of Napierilla, and a scotch in front of Lang. Sloan re-entered the room and took a seat at the far corner of the table. Lang glanced up through the smoky gray hue at John Henry, and then at Manetti and Sloan, and thought the situation looked a little clearer now. *I've heard rumors of Constantino's goons, they mean to intimidate us.*

Coolly, Constantino answered the question, "I have a personal use for the chips, Bill. I want them back."

Lang's sapphire-blue eyes possessed the same disbelief his voice now projected. "I can't do that, Tony. Besides, they can't possibly do you any good. We haven't completed the algorithm for compressing, storing, and reconstructing data. The chips are useless in this state."

"Not to me, Bill, I have a use for them exactly as they are."

Lang's face betrayed his disdain for the comment, as he strained to think of what possible use Constantino could have for the memory chips.

Andrew Simmons, a professor and research scientist at the University of Chicago, had developed two tiny memory chips that use complex mathematical algorithms to create thousands of terabytes of virtual memory. The problem was that the data then had to be compressed and stored on a hard disk before powering off the computer or all the data was lost. Lang knew the chip threatened to make obsolete every current design for memory chips, and bankrupt any company that did not license the new technology. But there was still work to be done.

There can't be a useful purpose for the chips in this state, Lang thought.

"Let's talk about this a little, Tony."

"There is nothing to discuss."

"If it's about money—"

"I could buy your company many times over; it's not about money."

"But we had an agreement."

Constantino didn't appear to comprehend Lang's predicament, "Listen Bill, I feel bad about this. I'll comp you two hundred thousand for your trouble."

"I don't want your compensation, Tony. I want the chips. I can't give them up, I—I'll lose all credibility with the board and our shareholders."

"Make up a story, Bill. Tell them it was all an elaborate hoax. You aren't out any money."

Only my reputation, Lang thought, imagining the worst at next Tuesday's board meeting.

Lang was silent for a moment, and then his eyes filled with rage. He pounded the table with his fist. "WE HAD A DEAL!"

Manetti and John Henry stood behind Lang. They moved a little closer. Keith Napierilla stiffened. Lang was unaware of their current proximity.

"I can't do it, Tony, I WON'T DO IT!"

"So you're refusing to give them back to me?"

"You're damn right! My company's future is riding on these memory chips. It's just too late to give them up now, for any reason!"

Tony leaned back in his swivel chair, "I guess you're right, Bill—I suppose it is too late." He shifted his glance to Mario Manetti and nodded. Lang saw the gesture and shuddered.

The gangly, but astute Napierilla had been fidgeting throughout the conversation. It was as though he had sensed the impending trouble that Lang was too ignorant or preoccupied to see. Pale and sweating, Napierilla watched his employer intensely.

“I’ve got to go,” Lang said curtly. He began to stand, but didn’t rise two inches from the chair before John Henry’s massive hand shoved his shoulder down. Napierilla went rigid and squeezed his water bottle so tight it overflowed onto the conference table. Like a surgeon, Manetti skillfully withdrew his chosen instrument from his jacket’s side pocket. He placed the long barrel expertly behind the chair, below Lang’s right shoulder blade and angled the line of trajectory to his heart. He squeezed the trigger. Napierilla convulsed at the shrill metallic sound of the muffled gunshot. No one outside of the room would have heard it. Napierilla stared at the man with the thick mustache and watched him withdraw the weapon. A waft of smoke drifted from the silencer that he used to stifle the deadly blow. Napierilla was paralyzed with fear as Lang’s body slumped forward. So afraid was Napierilla that he didn’t even twitch when Lang’s forehead smashed against the table. Without moving a muscle Napierilla’s eyes ticked like a second hand, moving from the table to the man who gave the nod.

Constantino’s voice was calm, almost soothing, “I understand you have four children, Mr. Napierilla?”

“Please, p-please don’t hurt them,” he stuttered.

“I have no intention of harming your children, Keith. May I call you Keith?”

Pale, fearful, and unable to speak, Napierilla nodded.

“I want you to return the prototypes and research to us tomorrow.” Constantino pointed at Manetti who was unscrewing something from the barrel of his gun. He continued, “Mario will meet you in front of your building at noon. While you are at it, pack any personal belongings you want to keep and bring them with you. From now on, you work for me. All your needs financial and otherwise will be taken care of. Mike—show our new employee to his office. And, Keith, welcome to the family.”

2

THE KITCHEN DOOR FLUNG OPEN AND BOUNCED BACK from the door stop. Two figures carrying luggage pushed through the doorway laughing heartily. They turned to face a large table packed with children. Before Jim O'Brien could set his suitcase down, the screaming was well underway.

"Daddy's home!" six-year-old Molly shrieked. Eight-year-old Danny asked, "Did you bring us a present?"

"Hi, kids!" Jim said, "No presents, but I did buy a treat for later."

The hulking figure at Jim's side had a huge grin on his face. "I gotta tell ya, Peg, if you had seen that flight attendant from Kansas City making the moves on your husband, you'd be in divorce court tomorrow!"

Peg O'Brien got up from the dinner table and Scott Troia gave her his customary bear hug. She could smell the beer on his breath.

"Is that right? Perhaps I need to hear this story!" Peg gave Jim a playful frown while she waited for a response.

Jim's cheeks reddened a bit. "It was nothing, Peg—a flight attendant was flirting a little bit, that's all."

"And did you flirt back?"

"Of course not, I know better than to face the wrath of your cast iron skillet!" Jim smiled as he mimicked Peg hitting him on the head with a frying pan, then he grabbed her and pulled her close. "You know there's only one girl for me." He gave her a tender kiss and the youngest children giggled.

Scott gave the couple a look of admiration, "Well, Jim, it doesn't look like I'm going to get you into trouble tonight. I guess I might as well go home."

"Not so fast, Scott—who was this flight attendant anyway?"

"The prettiest blond I've ever seen, Peg, and the funniest thing, too. Jim told her he was married, but she just kept hinting that she was going to be at the Shelton Club tonight." Peg's eyes grew a little more serious now. "You mean she kept flirting even after Jim told her he was married?"

"Yup. Jim finally told her he wanted to go home and spend some time with his eleven children. You should have seen the look on her face!"

Peg's features softened again, "We see that look a lot, don't we, Jim?"

"Yes we do, Peg."

"Anyway, you don't have to worry about Jim. He's about the most devoted family man I've ever known."

"Don't go christening him for sainthood, Scott. Fidelity is supposed to be the norm in a marriage, but the nerve of that woman. What's happened to the morals of the people in this country?"

Jim spoke up, "Okay you two, let's not discuss morality any further. Scott and I have already worn out the topic, and it just gets everyone upset. I'm home, and it's time to enjoy the evening. What's for dinner?"

"There's a whiskey steak warming in the oven."

Scott laughed, "You shouldn't mix all that beer with the hard stuff, Jim."

"Very funny—care to join us?"

“No, but thanks. Joan probably has my dinner ready too. Maybe we’ll have beer battered fish!”

Jim and Peg laughed. Jim shook his head side-to-side in mock disgust, and pointed his thumb over his shoulder, “Two days of Scott’s corny jokes, Peg. Thank God I’m home.” Scott grinned. He prided himself on telling simple jokes. Jim considered it his best friend’s most endearing quality.

Scott addressed the kitchen table, stuffed as it was with kids. “Now your dad has had plenty of time to rest the past few days, so you kids make sure to keep him up late tonight. You know how he loves to play games.” The children laughed and began to chatter about what games they could play. When he heard Danny mention “Candy Land,” Scott gave Jim a sideways glance and started for the back door. “My work here is done.”

“Thanks for driving, Scott. See you in the morning.”

Ten minutes later, Peg noticed that Jim seemed more preoccupied than usual. His eyes hovered over his dinner plate with an absent gaze.

“Jim? Jim, are you listening to me? We have to be at the church by four o’clock tomorrow.” His eyes remained on his untouched meal.

“No problem, Peg, I’ll leave the office by two.” Within seconds of Jim’s comment, Peg was again engaged in a half dozen conversations at once. Without missing a beat she quipped at Molly, “Use a fork—not your fingers,” then turned her attention to her oldest daughter, Erin, “Did you resolve the problem with the flowers?”

“Yes, but they want to charge us additional for the substitution.”

“Don’t worry. Your father will straighten things out with the florist, won’t you dear?—Jim? Yoo hoo? Are you with us? Is something wrong?”

Jim returned from his daydream, “Sorry honey, I was just thinking about work. Hacker activity is way up, and we’ve received a new project from the FBI, a big one. They’re under a lot of pressure to catch these guys—fast. I’m already understaffed, and Steve Wakeman just left for vacation. With the rehearsal dinner tomorrow, and the wedding Friday, I don’t feel like I’m accomplishing much for our clients.”

“Why don’t you go to the office for a while tonight, Jim. Maybe you can catch up a bit.”

“No, that’s alright—I’ll put in double duty next week. I’ll get caught up eventually.”

As if the small amount of attention he’d just received had a healing power, Jim suddenly felt much better. He forked a reddish piece of steak into his mouth, and chewed slowly savoring the sweet whiskey glaze. He listened to snippets of simultaneous conversations around the ten-foot-long picnic-style kitchen table. Erin and her mother were once again knee deep discussing the details of her wedding; Colleen was trying to convince Megan that they should swap groomsmen because hers was too tall. Jim sensed there was more to this story, perhaps something to do with the boy being cute. Morgan, Shauna, and Eileen were talking about volleyball—all three were accomplished athletes. The little ones, Danny, Katie, and Molly, were talking for the sake of joining in the merriment, or just to make noise—Jim wasn’t sure. Kelly was at a movie with her fiancé, Kevin—a reminder of the next O’Brien wedding, which is set to occur in October, eleven months from now. Jim looked around the table and thought, what a wonderful sense of humor God must have. Nine girls! The good Lord had blessed Jim and Peg O’Brien with nine girls—and two boys.

The weddings alone will break me, Jim thought daydreaming again. I wonder if we’ll ever be able to retire.

The recurring thought brought a look of concern to Jim’s face, but did little to detract from his good looks. Jim appeared a good ten years younger than his age of forty-six. He was of average height and build. His dark hair was tinted red, and became lighter in the summer months. His emerald green eyes were set in a handsomely chiseled face. His demeanor was confident, and friendly, but Jim often appeared to be deep in thought. He was an intelligent man who found solace in solving problems of any kind. He owned a small but profitable computer consulting firm based in Omaha, Nebraska. His client geography had sprouted tentacles and now extended to both coasts as news of his expertise in computer forensics and Internet security spread. He had many more opportunities to expand his

business than he could take advantage of, mostly due to difficulties in locating the high caliber of technical staff he demanded. The search for new talent consistently limited his efforts. Jim didn't complain much, but when he did it was always the same thing. "Why are most applicants either helpless geeks or prima donnas? Why is it so hard to find good people?"

Tonight, as typical of most evenings, Jim planned to retire to his recliner and reach for his notebook computer. Whenever he was home, he spent countless hours researching the latest internet threats or attempting to hack through the security measures of mock internet sites provided by industry organizations for that express purpose. These mock sites were responsible for Jim's recent notoriety in the field. The top minds in the security industry developed these sites using the latest ideas and technology, and Jim could invade them effortlessly. Jim's evenings were usually split between playing games with the children and honing his technical abilities. Playing games with the kids allowed Jim to know each of them intimately, to teach them problem solving skills, and to keep up with what was happening in their lives. Jim conducted his more serious work and research in the study.

"Who's on dishes?" Peg called. No one answered. "Guess I'll just have to check the chart! Let's see, Shauna—you're washing, Megan—you're drying, Danny—you sweep the floor. Now let's get going!" The O'Brien family owned a dishwasher, but it never seemed quite big enough to accommodate the evening's dishes. Unless a few of the children were missing at dinner, at least a handful of dishes were washed in the sink.

Jim sat down in his recliner. The leather was cold and made him shudder. November was typically chilly in Omaha, but tonight, the autumn temperature was unseasonably brisk. It was the second day of the month and pitch dark well before six o'clock. Just six weeks earlier it was still twilight by nine pm. The early darkness didn't yet seem natural to him. His internal clock said it was time to go for a walk, but Jim didn't like to walk in the dark—too dangerous these days—even in a suburban Omaha neighborhood.

The O'Brien's weren't wealthy, but Jim made a handsome income. Both he and Peg were very frugal. Jim's friends often joked about how far they could stretch a dollar. The O'Brien children had most of the same amenities as children from smaller families. However, most of their purchases, especially apparel, lacked popular name brand labels. Jim always claimed, "*Clothes are necessary—brands are frivolous.*" At the start of each school year, Peg would shop for school clothes at discount stores. Except for the labels, even a keen eye would find the quality indistinguishable from clothes purchased from upscale department stores. On those shopping occasions, the front door would fly open and the kids would parade around the house and model their new wardrobe for Jim. This meant changing into all their outfits as well as dress and athletic shoes. Peg rarely failed to purchase twenty-two pairs of shoes for the same price her fashion conscious neighbors paid for three pairs of their designer brands.

The telephone rang. Jim could hear one of the children call for their mother. He got up from his chair and started in the direction of his bedroom to get a sweater. Faintly, he could hear Peg say, "Oh dear God!" He doubled back and headed for the kitchen. Peg had a beautiful complexion with naturally pale skin and auburn hair. She wasn't the slender girl he originally married, but she had a pleasing, even sensuously full figure. Meeting her for the first time, no one would guess she had borne eleven children. At this very moment, Jim thought she looked older than at any time he could remember. However, it was not her physical age that sapped some of her youth tonight—there was emotional pain, stress, and even fear in her expression.

"What's wrong, Peg?"

"That was the police."

"What did they want?"

"Tom has been arrested."

* * *

Attempts at conversation were futile between Jim and Peg on the way to the police station. Recently, any topic involving their oldest son usually put them at odds with each other. *The evening started off so well*, Jim thought, *I hadn't even realized Tom was absent from the dinner table... or did I?* Tom was seventeen and going through a rebellious phase. Funny, it didn't seem that his other children experienced the severity in mood swings, or general disposition at his age. *Was it because he was a boy?* Jim wondered, *Will little Danny be like this too—a disappointment—a black sheep?* Then Jim wondered whether he was responsible for the way Tom had turned out. It was the start of a very frustrating evening.

At the station, Officer Joan Sheppard escorted Jim and Peg to her desk. She was a short and stocky woman, pretty, but not beautiful. Jim couldn't help feeling Officer Sheppard could take care of herself in a scrap. She had nearly finished reviewing a long list of laws Tom violated just a few short hours ago.

“—fortunately, the damage to these cars is mostly limited to the bezels surrounding the stereo systems. I don't know what the owners will do, but you should be prepared for any one of them to press charges.”

“Maybe that's what the boy needs ma'am,” Jim said just a little too quickly, “maybe we should consider letting them press charges.”

“Jim is upset, Officer Sheppard,” Peg said apologetically, as she shot him a look that told him his comment was cruel. “Tom isn't a bad boy—he has a conscience. I'm certain he'll want to make restitution.”

Jim couldn't look at Peg—he didn't believe a word she was saying, but he added, “Tom has had a difficult time the past few years. We need to help him get past some issues.” In reality, some old suspicions were welling in Jim's mind. He kept them in check.

Officer Sheppard was exceptionally perceptive. “This is Tom's first offense, and he has been very cooperative.”

Manipulative, Jim thought.

“If you are willing to pay for the damages and can assure me that you will get your boy some counseling, I will do the best I can to avoid any legal charges. No guarantees, of course.”

“Can we put a little scare into him?” Jim asked.

“What do you mean, Mr. O’Brien?”

Even as Jim answered Sheppard’s question, her penetrating eyes said she fully understood his intent.

“Too often kids screw up, and their parents get them off the hook. Tom committed some deplorable acts tonight. If we fix the problem too easily, the lesson learned will have little value. We should make this as painful as possible for him; make him feel fortunate he is not going to jail. In fact, let’s make him beg a little—make him swear he’ll never do it again.”

“That’s horrible!” Peg said, disgusted at the thought. “That’s not very Christian of you.”

“But it is, honey—it’s the *MOST* Christian thing we can do. We’ve got to make certain this does not happen again, ever! For his sake and the sake of others, we’ve got to teach him a lesson!”

Officer Sheppard ignored Peg’s frown and nodded as she picked up the telephone and said, “Bring in the O’Brien boy.”

Moments later, a uniformed officer escorted the boy into Joan Sheppard’s small, stark office. In a cold voice she said, “Have a seat next to your father, Tom.” Looking more embarrassed than ashamed, he chose to sit by his mother instead. Officer Sheppard didn’t notice. She appeared to be searching for something in his file. She hesitated a moment, scribbled a few notes, and then closed his file and folded her hands on her cold gray desk.

There was a long and unnatural silence. Jim lost the uneasy look he had just minutes ago. He tried not to be obvious as he watched his son for any sign of remorse. He saw none. Except for his slender build, Tom looked a lot like his father. His thick dark hair had the same unmistakable reddish tint that was a trait of all the O’Brien children. He was dressed in his usual attire—baggy cargo jeans that would certainly fall to the floor without a belt. His flannel shirt was untucked, and unbuttoned, revealing a white *wife beater* t-shirt. Jim deplored the slang name Tom used to describe the shirt style.

Finally, Sheppard broke the silence, “I have some questions for you, Tom. Do you realize the serious nature of your actions this evening?” He started to answer, but she cut him off. “Do you have

no respect for the property of others? Do you have any idea how much trouble you are in? Just what were you thinking?”

Tom winced when he swallowed, as though his throat was dry. He appeared to be having difficulty responding to the question. “I don’t know—I guess I wasn’t thinking.”

“Judging by the quantity of car stereos you’ve stolen and the list of charges against you, I would say that’s pretty obvious. Why did you steal them?”

“We just wanted to make a little money, that’s all.”

“Who is *we*?” Jim asked.

“Matt and me.”

“Anyone else?”

Tom avoided his father’s eyes, “No.”

Officer Sheppard leaned back in her chair and gave Tom a sharp look. “I don’t suppose you’ve given any thought to getting a legal job?”

“Yeah, I’ve thought about it, but I don’t want an eight-dollar-an-hour job working in some fast-food restaurant.”

“Why not?” Sheppard asked. “Lots of kids your age work in fast-food restaurants. In fact, many college kids pay their way through school by working in fast-food restaurants.”

Sheppard’s eyes widened briefly and Jim knew why. She probably noticed how Tom leaned forward with clenched fists as though he was going to blurt something out. But instead, he suppressed his outburst and leaned back in his chair and frowned. “I don’t plan to go to college.”

Jim scowled, and Officer Sheppard raised her eyebrows, “Why not?”

“I can make just as much money learning a trade.”

“I don’t mean to argue with you, Tom, but that’s just not true. The right college degree would allow you to make a much higher income than the average tradesperson. What kind of trade did you have in mind?”

Anything that doesn’t involve my company. Jim thought.

Tom squirmed under his father’s gaze.

“I don’t know—something in construction, I guess.”

“There is nothing wrong with learning a trade, Tom, but if your goal is to make a good living, you really should consider going to college.” Tom was silent as he gazed across the room. It seemed evident that the subject of college was a sore spot between the boy and his father. Officer Sheppard changed the subject. “Well, regardless of what you decide to do about your education, stealing is just plain wrong—wouldn’t you agree?”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

Officer Sheppard leaned over her desk. “Listen carefully, Tom. As a result of the probable charges against you, you could be sent to a juvenile detention center for a period of six months to a year.”

Tom’s eyes grew large as though he was gripped with fear at the thought of such a punishment. “What if I return everything and pay for any damages—would I still have to go?”

“Regardless of the punishment Tom, you’ll be required to make full restitution to the people you wronged. In addition, these people are going to be mad as hell. You stole from them—damaged their personal property. There is no doubt they’ll want to press charges.”

“Dad, can’t we get a lawyer to take care of this?”

“I don’t know if I want to, son.”

Tom’s features hardened. “What—what do you mean?”

“Well, you *did* the crime didn’t you? I think you should accept whatever punishment you have coming to you.”

“You mean you want me to go to jail?”

“It’s not that I want you to go jail. But I feel people earn things, both good and bad. In this case, I think you should take whatever punishment you’ve *earned*.”

Tears filled Tom’s eyes, and he struggled to speak. “Look, Dad, I’m really sorry. This whole thing was stupid. I can’t believe what we did, but you have to help me. I’ll never do anything like this again—I swear!”

Officer Sheppard stood up and walked to the window. Jim sensed that she was going to add a touch of drama. It was difficult to refrain from smiling. This was exactly the scenario he’d hoped they could stage for Tom.

Somehow, Tom needs to be taught a lesson, but is it working? Is he learning a lesson? Is he contrite, or just sorry he got caught? Jim suspected the latter, but couldn't be certain. He knew Tom was frightened, but he was still unable to detect any genuine remorse.

"This is your first offense, Tom," Sheppard said as she gazed through the window. "I don't know if I can keep you out of the detention center or not, but if I can, I'll want some strict assurances from you. Will you give them to me?"

"Wha-what kind of assurances?"

"Your parents shall not be required to pay for any of the damaged vehicles. You will get a job and pay for the damages on your own. In addition, you will contact and apologize to each of the victims. Even if you avoid sentencing to a detention center, you will most likely be placed on probation for a minimum of one year. I cannot guarantee there will not be other conditions or punishments, but you can count on those I've already mentioned. If I go to bat for you, do I have your word you will do whatever we require of you?"

Tom answered quickly, "Yes, I'll do anything you want."

"Alright then, it's agreed. You will be released into your parent's custody tonight. Mr. O'Brien, I'll call you tomorrow to update you on my conversation with the county attorney. I'll have details as to how we should proceed."

Jim stood up, "Officer Sheppard, I cannot tell you how grateful I am for your help."

"You are welcome Mr. O'Brien. You and your wife seem like good people." She shot a look at Tom, "But I do have some genuine concerns about the path your son is currently taking. I suspect he needs some additional guidance to get through the adolescent phase of his life. You need to keep a very close eye on him. Please don't let us see him back here again."

Jim caught his son's gaze, "He won't be back, Officer Sheppard—I won't let him come back."

The ride home was painful for everyone. No one spoke for several minutes. Finally, Peg tried to relieve the tension in her typical, disarming way. "Thank goodness for Officer Sheppard. Another officer may have made it much more difficult for us."

“I knew we’d get off,” said Tom.

Jim glowered, his voice sounded cynical. “What do you mean by that?”

“Well, I have friends who have done worse and never got into trouble.”

Peg tilted her head back and closed her eyes as if expecting the worst.

Jim’s knuckles turned white as he gripped the steering wheel. “That’s the problem, Tom. You shouldn’t have friends that do those things—PERIOD!”

“What I meant is, I know of people who have done worse.”

“Let me ask you, Tom, do you enjoy tarnishing the family name? Do you like being a two-bit criminal?”

“Hey, I’m not a criminal. I just made a mistake—that’s all!”

“You just made a mistake, huh? Well, I’ve got to hand it to you son, that’s the worst politically correct crap I’ve ever heard! The prison system is full of people who just made mistakes, and if you don’t watch it, you’ll be one of them. Every time you get into trouble you say the same thing... ‘I made a mistake’. Well, this mistake is going to cost you plenty! Consider yourself grounded!”

“For how long?”

“UNTIL I SAY OTHERWISE!”

Tom knew better than to irritate his father any further. He could work on his mother for a reduced sentence later. He folded his arms and stared out the car window.

3

MIRANDA PETERS' INTENSITY IMPRESSED JIM. IN THE three-week period since she joined Jim's company, he noted that when she was researching fraudulent web sites, or e-mail schemes, she often scrunched up her face, giving it an ominous, almost menacing quality that marred her otherwise beautiful features. Such was the case this Thursday morning. Miranda was deeply engaged in her work. She was somewhat startled when Jim spoke, "Good morning Miranda. How is our rising star this morning?"

"Oh! Good morning Jim. I didn't notice you come in."

"Yes, you seem to be deep in thought—anything I can help you with?"

Her eyes lost their intensity, and she smiled in a relaxed way that restored her remarkable beauty. Miranda wore a white silk blouse and upscale designer blue jeans that drew constant stares from the male employees at Computer Forensic Consultants, Inc.

"Maybe there is. I broke the codes on the password protection scheme and restored some missing data on the computer the FBI

left us yesterday, but there is something I just can't figure out. There is no hint that this computer has ever been a host to a web site of any kind, no less a fraudulent one. There are no links, no software—no traces of anything out-of-the-ordinary. The FBI told me that this was without doubt, the same computer Tony Constantino used to defraud American Express, but I'm coming up dry. I can't find a single trace of anything suspicious. There's an old AOL account, but it looks like it was used only for personal correspondence, and there are no e-mails later than June. This computer looks clean."

Jim thought that there was an abundance of concern in Miranda's chestnut eyes. She did not wear much make-up, nor did her striking features require it. Her dark brown hair was slightly longer than shoulder length. It had an intense sheen which reflected the light in any setting. Her eyebrows and eyelashes were naturally dark too; a perfect match for her eyes. Her high cheekbones and full lips lent a movie star quality to her appearance.

Jim felt grateful to have a problem he stood a chance of resolving. His luck in working out his son's problems had been dismal. "Give me about a half hour to make some calls, and I'll give you a hand with it. I always welcome a challenge."

Jim smiled warmly and continued to his office, but Miranda's assessment gave him an uneasy feeling about the case. She seemed overly perplexed by the lack of information that materialized from her efforts on the project. Jim liked the fact that she had such high standards for herself, and there was no doubt that she was one of his most intelligent troubleshooters. In three short weeks she had successfully resolved four fraud cases, and identified the source of multiple viruses and worms that would certainly lead to arrests for the FBI. She inherited one of the projects from Steve Wakeman, one of Jim's best troubleshooters, who finally threw his hands up in despair and proclaimed a pass code could not be deciphered. Jim was anxious for Steve to return from vacation so he could give him the news that Miranda had solved the case and maybe rub it in a little.

Word of Miranda's achievements quickly spread throughout Jim's office and the FBI's regional office in Kansas City. She had

quickly resolved every assignment he had given her so far, until now. Jim knew he had a winner when he interviewed Miranda last June. She was a graduate of Harvard with a degree in Computer Forensics. Miranda was the first employee Jim ever hired with a formal education geared toward computer crime. He was certain her abilities would elevate his company's performance to a whole new level.

Jim slipped into the chair behind his desk and went through his agenda for the week. He couldn't stop thinking about Tom's arrest. He finally pressed the phone's speaker button, followed by the top-left speed dial button. A few seconds later, Jim's youngest child, Molly answered the phone, "Hellooo?"

"Hi sweetheart, is Mommy home?"

"Know what Daddy? Mommy's taking us to the Henry Doorie Zoo!"

Jim laughed at her pronunciation of the Henry Doorly Zoo. "Isn't it a little cold to go to the zoo?"

"We're going inside to see the fishes!"

"Ahhh—you're going to the aquarium—sounds like fun."

"Yeah, and they got sharks too!"

"I'm glad honey. I hope you have a great time. Is Mommy home?"

Almost immediately Peg answered, "Hello?"

"Hi, it's me—I just wanted to apologize for last night. I know I was pretty negative, but I want you to understand why."

"Okay, why?"

Jim sensed Peg's challenging tone and spoke in a soft voice. "I've been observing Tom much more closely than in the past. I think he's using drugs."

"We've had this conversation before—what makes you such an expert at reading the signs?"

"You don't have to be an expert to notice his glassy eyes or his slurred speech. He used to talk to us when he came home at night. Now he avoids us completely and disappears into his bedroom."

"He probably doesn't want to have any more discussions about going to work for your company."

Jim ignored the comment, “It just doesn’t make sense, Peg. He’s stealing car stereos when he could make a decent hourly wage here while he learns the business. Does that make any sense to you?”

“That’s what this is all about, isn’t it? You are upset that he doesn’t want to carry on the family business.”

Jim frowned. *Jesus, how did I get put on the defensive end of this conversation?*

“Not at all, Peg, but until recently he had a genuine interest in doing just that. The boy is a computer whiz, he has real talent. He could go toe-to-toe with half of my staff. Why the sudden interest in learning a trade? Something has changed. I think he is taking drugs and needs to keep himself at arms length to avoid getting caught.”

Peg’s voice turned sour, “You’re reaching for something that isn’t there.”

“No, Peg, I’m being brutally honest. His grades have taken a nose dive, and two nights ago, I could swear his eyes were rolling up into his eyelids.”

“Why are you always ready to believe the worst about your son?”

“Peg, we’ve discussed this before—I know you’ve seen his glossy eyed look, and you certainly can’t miss his slurred speech.”

“He said he was swimming at Lifetime Fitness—his eyes were red from the chlorine in the pool and he was very tired. You really need to stop looking for the bad in him.”

“NO ONE IS LOOKING FOR THE BAD IN ANYONE! I haven’t mentioned these things in weeks, but I can’t ignore it. It’s getting worse—something has changed. I think he’s moved on to harder drugs!”

“That’s ridiculous!”

Its like talking to a brick wall, Jim thought. “You’ve got to open your eyes to this, Peg!”

“You just can’t stop picking on your son.”

“THAT’S NOT TRUE—NOT TRUE AT ALL! Why can’t you believe for a moment that one of your children may have a problem! What makes us so perfect?”

“We have raised good kids, and Tom is as good as any of them!”

“Do your other children steal car stereos? Don’t you see how it all fits? He can’t work if he’s stoned, and he needs to steal to support his habit. Peg? Peg?”

Jim closed his eyes as he hung up the phone. When he opened them, he was staring at Miranda in the doorway. She was holding a stack of diagnostic reports. “I’m sorry, Jim—I was just going to leave this on your desk. I didn’t mean to intrude.”

How long was she there? What did she hear? There is nothing like a family scandal to change an employer/employee relationship. Shit!

“It’s okay, Miranda—come on in.” Jim realized his voice was wavering. He was noticeably shaken as he said, “Let’s get to work on the Constantino case.” There’s hundreds of thousands of cardholders depending on us for this one.” The two of them moved to a small round work table in the corner of Jim’s office. He always used this table when reviewing cases with his employees. A voice interrupted them.

“Don’t tell me Miranda needs help!” Scott Troia’s head was protruding into the doorway, his body unseen around the corner. “This must be some tough case if she needs your advice.”

“Come in, Scott, maybe you’d like to hear some details of the Constantino case.”

“You bet I would, Jim.” I heard on the news this morning that this is the biggest credit card fraud in history. They’re calling it the *Great Cyber Robbery*. Whoever solves this one is going to make a name for himself—or herself.”

“I’m not in it for fame, Scott,” said Miranda with a contrived smile, “I just want to solve the case.”

Jim knew she was sincere. Already forgetting about the conversation with Peg, Jim said in a calm, confident voice, “Tell us what you know so far. Let’s take it step-by-step.”

“I have run all of our diagnostic software,” Miranda said, with a sigh, “and some of my own as well. I recovered the NTFS file system artifacts, including the swap file, file stack, and spooler files. I have restored all of the prior data that had been deleted from the computer’s hard drive. There is no doubt that Constantino’s family is involved in some minor illegal activities, but I have found no

clues to connect this computer to anything significant. There is no mention of American Express anywhere and no trace of malicious applications or programs capable of intercepting point-of-sale transactions. I have checked all of the e-mail accounts and retrieved all correspondence. Unless I am just overlooking something obvious, I'd say this computer is clean."

Jim noted her serious tone; her cheeks had gone pink. "There's nothing to say it isn't clean, Miranda. It's clear that the FBI came up empty too. Their best people have been scratching their heads on this case. That's why they finally decided to ask us for help."

"I can tell you that they're right about one thing," said Miranda, "it is Tony Constantino's computer. In addition, it was once configured as a server. The baffling part is this—there is no evidence that it was ever used as a server. It may as well have been used for playing video games."

Jim's eyebrows furrowed, "You said earlier, there were no e-mails past last June. Were there other files created since then?"

"Yes, loads of spreadsheets and word processing files. This computer was used right up to the date it was confiscated by the FBI." Miranda looked at Troia, "There is an old AOL account, but it looks like it was used only for personal correspondence. This computer is clean."

"Scott—care to give it the once over?"

"You know it, Jim—that is, if I can get my head to stop pounding!"

"Too much beer on the plane?"

"Too much beer in the airport!"

Miranda perked up, "Oh, I forgot to ask you. How was your speech at the conference?"

"Out of six hundred attendees, only five hundred and ninety-nine fell asleep," Jim joked. "I'd say that's okay."

Scott interjected, "He knocked em' dead, Miranda, and thank God too, or we might have had to spend another grueling hour in that airport lounge. A few more beers and he may have surrendered to that pretty flight attendant." Miranda still felt too new to tease the boss, but she was a little curious about the flight attendant.

“No kidding? Flight attendants aren’t usually the aggressor,” she said.

Jim didn’t reply.

Troia didn’t hesitate to comment for him, “Yeah, women flirt with Jim all the time, but the man’s a rock.”

He is a doll, Miranda thought. *Sounds like he’s a gentleman too.*

“It’s good to know that there are still men out there who are faithful to their wives.”

Jim’s cheeks were pink; he cleared his throat. “Okay Scott, I think we wore the flight attendant thing out last night too. What do you say we get some work done?”

Scott gave Jim a sly grin, “Slave driver.”

“Miranda, don’t share anything else with Scott. Let him take a fresh look at this, and for God’s sake, don’t feel like you failed us in any way.”

Miranda’s eyes fell to the floor, “I should have been able to find something more.”

Looking sympathetic, Scott interjected, “Look, Miranda, you’ve been a star player with this company since you came here. If you couldn’t find anything, there’s probably nothing to find. And contrary to popular belief, some computers are clean, ya know. But since it’s Jim’s policy to get a second opinion on cases of this magnitude, I’ll take a peek and see if anything turns up.”

“Miranda,” Jim said, “Howard Beekler is having some difficulty with his current project. Can you give him a hand?”

An undertone of disappointment betrayed Miranda’s smile. “A day with Howard? This should be interesting.”

“I know Howard’s a little geeky, but he’s been doing this for years. You might even learn something from him.”

Scott started laughing, “Yeah, like how to color coordinate a pocket protector with your favorite outfit.”

Jim tried hard not to laugh, “That’s enough Scott. Like all of you, Howard is a valued employee.” Jim smirked, “A little different perhaps, but valued nonetheless. Now let’s get going, we’ve got a lot to do this week.” Miranda left to find Howard. Scott stayed behind.

“She’s wounded,” Scott said.

“Our egos get hurt every day, Scott. It’s part of the job. She’ll get over it.”

“She’s different than most, Jim. I’ve never seen anyone take it as personally as she does.”

“She’s determined.”

“She has a killer instinct for this stuff. Someday, you may be working for her.”

Jim smiled, “Great! Then she can have all the headaches that go with this business.”

“How are Erin’s wedding plans coming along?”

“Everything’s set, but I can’t wait for it to be over. The first O’Brien wedding is causing a little tension at home.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Scott said

Jim grew somber, “In addition, I think Tom is using drugs, and Peg won’t even entertain the possibility that it could be true.”

Scott’s eyebrows arched, “Little Tommy, our computer wizard? You could have knocked me out with that punch.”

“I know—it was hard for me to believe at first, but I’ve been watching him closely and I’m certain of it. He’s using! And he’s not so little any more. He’s nearly eighteen, a senior.”

“Any idea about what kind of drugs he’s using?”

“No, but I think it’s more than marijuana.”

“Jesus Christ, Jim! You’ve gotta get a handle on this, but quick!”

“I know, but without Peg’s backing it’s going to be difficult.”

“You know what that drug commercial says—‘Do whatever it takes to get between your kids and drugs.’”

Jim nodded, “As much as I hate to do this, I’m going to search his room. I need some proof.”

“Let me know if there is anything I can do to help, buddy.”

Scott appeared more wounded than Miranda. Having no children of his own, he admired and was very close to Jim’s family. Scott had been Jim’s best friend since their college days, and had always looked up to him. He not only admired Jim’s intelligence and good business sense, but his honesty and integrity as well. Scott Troia was a large man of Italian heritage, and stood at least three inches taller than Jim. His coal black hair was starting to show a peppering of grey. At

forty-seven, he had developed quite a paunch from sitting behind a desk. His gigantic hands had a smooth, almost feminine quality, but Scott possessed an incredible degree of physical strength. In their younger days, he had helped Jim out of a couple of scuffles at the college tavern they frequented on the weekends. After twenty-eight years of friendship, and fifteen years of working together, Scott and Jim were inseparable.

After college, Jim and Scott had planned to start a software development company. As much as Scott wanted to join Jim in business, he lacked the confidence to go through with it. Instead, Scott went to work in the IT department for Union Pacific, a large railroad company. For years Jim's software company survived on his reputation as a brilliant programmer. Although his business didn't thrive, he didn't starve either. Over a period of nine years, Jim's company changed directions several times. His initial experience led him to write software code on a sub-contractor basis for banks, where security issues were critical. Jim got a break when a giant anti-virus software company utilized his team to add security features to their software products. As the internet grew in popularity, so did the need for his experience in security issues. Jim began tracking the source of viruses but took a particular interest in white collar crime. He realized he had tapped a lucrative market and changed his company's course one more time. Capitalizing on the opportunity to become a leader in cyber crime, Jim's company literally eventually owned the insurance fraud industry in Omaha. In addition, most of the local law firms utilized his expertise to uncover digital evidence to prosecute computer criminals. CFC was now on retainer for three anti-virus software companies, a handful of big corporations, the U.S. Postal Service, and most recently, the FBI.

Nine years after Jim started his original company, he again asked Scott to join him as a project manager. Scott did not hesitate this time. He was well aware of Jim's success and realized that he was quickly becoming the most sought after consultant in the cyber crime industry. Most of the time, Jim insisted that his employees match his own knowledge of the industry, but he made an exception for Scott. Although there were more talented software engineers in

the field, he trusted Scott more than anyone. Jim knew that Troia had a great work ethic and he needed an honest, principled man to manage his growing staff.

"I appreciate that, Scott. I may run home after lunch. Tom is at school, and Peg is taking Molly to the Zoo."

"What'll you do if you find drugs?" Jim's eyes looked uncertain.

"Find out where he's getting them and cut off the source."

"You know I have connections."

Again, Jim smiled in a teasing way. "You mean your MAFIA friends?"

"I mean my uncle's family. You know they are there if you ever need them."

"Thanks Scott, but I've been getting by for twenty-five years without their help."

"Twenty-eight, but who's counting?"

Jim grinned, "Do you really believe they're affiliated with the mob?"

"I'm positive of it, Jim. You know that I would never do anything illegal, and I've never asked for their help in the past, but they do have access to information you and I simply can't get. Maybe they can find out where Tom is getting his drugs."

"What would your uncle say if he knew you were analyzing the computer belonging to their mafia kingpin?"

"Well for starters, I'm pretty sure they don't have any affiliation with Tony Constantino. The Omaha organization is miniscule and their mafia ties are distant, but Constantino controls one of the most powerful mafia organizations in the country."

"Well, you can be sure I'll keep your offer in mind, Scott. Meanwhile, the Constantino case—excuse me, I guess it's now called the *Great Cyber Robbery*, is the hottest thing we've got going. Can you get to it this morning?"

"I'm already on it, Jim," Scott said, walking to the door. Seconds later, Jim heard Scott yell down the corridor, "I'm gonna need aspirin Linda—lots of it!"

At eleven o'clock, Jim called Linda Simmons into his office. "I'm leaving for the day, Linda. Have you had any luck tracking Vince down?"

"No I haven't. No one at the Bureau has seen him today, and I've left him three messages. Still no luck with the *Great Cyber Robbery*?"

Jim rolled his eyes, "I sure would like to know who decided to give this case such a comic book name."

"It's the number one story in the news—kind of exciting, don't you think?"

"Yeah, I suppose, but we aren't making much progress on the case. I need to see if Vince has uncovered any more details that can help us unravel the mystery. Constantino's hard disk appears to be clean as a whistle. They may have confiscated the wrong computer."

"Are you going to look at it yourself, Jim?"

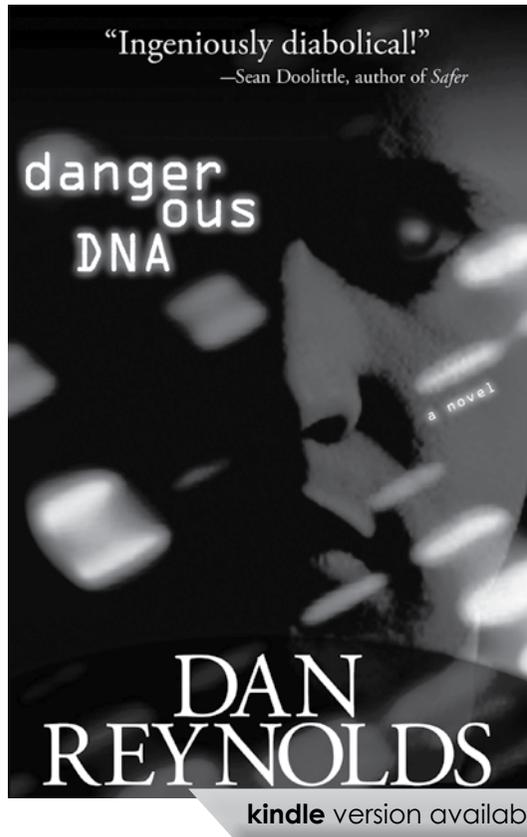
"No, I've reviewed Miranda's reports, and Scott's taking a fresh look at it now. I don't think there is anything I would have done differently. If Vince calls back, have Scott speak with him. I'll brief him as to what questions to ask before I leave. If Scott comes up empty, we'll just have to ask Vince what he wants us to do with the computer."

Linda Simmons was a slender woman with sky blue eyes and blond hair. Jim thought she must have been a breathtaking beauty in her youth. But at forty-nine, she looked ten years older. Her deeply tanned skin was leathery from excess exposure to the sun. Her blond hair showed long streaks of gray and she still wore it at shoulder length. Linda answered the phones, kept Jim's appointment calendar, and the company books. Even though Scott was the project manager, Linda knew more about the details involving each project than anyone else in the office. She was a valued member of Jim's "trust network."

"You go home to your family, Jim. We'll take care of everything here until Monday."

"Thanks, Linda. I have a lot to do before the prenuptial dinner tonight," *including searching my son's room for drugs.*" Jim quickly briefed Scott as to what he wanted him to ask Vince Mitchell, the

FBI's Director of Computer Forensics, when he called. With the day's laundry list of action items complete, Jim made his way through the busy office toward the front door. He caught Miranda's glance as she was explaining something to Howard. She rolled her eyes and smiled as if to say she'd rather be working alone. Jim returned the smile, thinking to himself as he approached the door; *she's a great asset to the company.*



As Detective John Dietrich delves into a series of seemingly unrelated crimes, he realizes that he should be content that these cases are open and shut. However, something seems terribly wrong. In every case there is too much evidence—easy evidence that will surely convict five highly respected citizens. All of the suspects have iron-clad alibis, and no apparent motives, but the videos, fingerprints, and DNA will surely convict them. When the mayor of Kansas City is linked to the crimes, Dietrich investigates the cases more closely. Recent clues suggest that the mayor’s friend, hailed as the wealthiest bachelor in the city, is in danger. Can Dietrich save his life?

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