

Chapter 2: More Questions Than Answers Raleigh, NC December 16, 2021

“Prince Jones,” Aminu, “are you available for a sensitive mater?”

After obtaining an affirmative response from Lionel he continues, “An small shipping container or pod seems to have found its way to my import/export warehouse. We were going to ship it ‘as is’. But we needed the room in our international shipping container so I wanted the small pod opened so we could fill space with more items going in this container shipment.

“But during the transship, one of my people recognized a photograph from a wedding. It seems that the photo shows a wedding party that Stacy and Frank may have attended last Summer in the San Juan Island of Washington. The photograph is was part of a custom-made remembrance book that documents the destination wedding.

“I placed a hold on the pod as it is. Then I called Maduka. He said he could not endure looking at at his daughter’s belongings now. He asked me to hold the pod until he determines what if anything the authorities may want.

“The pod is one of four that one of my customers, Weli Olude, purchased during his last buying trip to Atlanta-Charleston-Savannah. He generally brings them back to Raleigh to sell what he can at the State Fair Grounds Flea Market. Whatever, he can not sell he ships to Nigeria. He and a couple of his helpers ill with COVID, so he skipped the Flea Market and sent them to my warehouse for shipping.

“My people say 'wahala dey o' <<bad vibes here>>and do not want to touch the pod any more. I had them jack it into the corner by the office.

“We are waiting at the moment for the Raleigh, Atlanta, and Oklahoma authorities to to let us know if they have an interest.”

“Aminu, let me know when you receive clearance,” responds Lionel. “I will help you work the pod.”

Import/Export Warehouse Raleigh, NC December 20

“Thanks for coming to help me.,” Aminu says. “The three authorities have expressed no interest in the contents of the pod. They seem to agree that Stacy and Frank met non-violent deaths while disoriented and confused by their diabetes issues.

“I had the pod moved outside so we can take our mask off to work. We can just transship the contents from the original pod to the one next to it.

“Anything we find of a personal nature we can place in either boxs for Stacy or for Frank. I will let Maduka and Frank’s parents know we have accumulated personal items in which they may be interested. If they want those items, I will send the boxes to them.

“Ready?”

“Sounds like a plan. Let’s do-it,” agrees Lionel. “I need to be on my way in a couple of hours.”

“If we finish early I will spring for a coffee at Jack’s,”

As the sort and transship begins Lionel asks, “Do you know why Stacy and Frank’s stuff was packed in a pod that turns-up Charleston?”

“According to the Atlanta authorities,” responds Aminu says, “a moving crew arrived in mid-February. They had a key and a copy of the load manifest. Someone had already loaded boxes and disassembled various items like beds, tables, etc. So the neighbors did not raise an alarm. The moving company was from Almon, Ga. According to the authorities, it seems to have gone out of business over the Summer. The closure was blamed on COVID. That may explain how the pod was moved to Charleston for eventual auction. Interstate 20 runs from Atlanta to Almon to Charleston.”

“Wait. Let’s take a couple of photos as we begin,” suggests Lionel. “We don’t know where this is going to lead. Or how sensitive the parents might be to the kids’ stuff.”

So as the pod gate is raised Lionel Jones takes a couple of pictures before moving forward. He does not see anything noteworthy that might causes an immediate halt.

“Heh, Aminu, let’s start with that wedding party book,” poses Lionel.

Aminu looks at the box nearest the pod’s gate. “Here it is,” he states as he raises it from the box. He notes the book on the initial line of the manifest sheet as he begins placing items going into Stacy’s collection box.

As Aminu puts the book into the box, Lionel makes the observation, “It appears like whoever was going to receive this pod did not expected the contents to be serviceable. Aside from stuff in the boxes, it looks like the furniture has been pulled apart without concern for damaging the items. Look at those chairs, the table, even the bed boards and rails do not look like they are usable any longer. The fasteners and hardware for the furniture seem to be missing or mixed.

“This is a mess. I do not think the furniture is worth our time now.

“But it looks like the boxes of clothes, kitchen, bath, and knickknack items might be salvageable or of value to the families.”

“I am going to call Weli to see what he knows about the contents being trashed,” says Aminu.

Shortly as they work Aminu checks a text message from Weli. “Weli’s text message says he did not take a detailed look at the contents of the pod. He knew that the furniture had been disassembled. But he was unaware that it was no longer serviceable. He wants us to leave the pile of furniture. He does not want to pay to have it exported if it is so severely damaged. He will haul it to the dump. Anything else that does not have sentimental value for the families he would like to sell at the Flea Market or export for sale to help recover his cost.”

A little short of two hours later Aminu and Lionel have the contents of the pod sorted into five piles: three boxes for Stacy, two boxes for Frank, three common boxes, a pile of unusable furniture, and a pile of useless, garbage items like crushed cereal boxes, mildewed bread, etc.

“Aminu, what do you see that is not in this pod of household items for a typical young couple? I don’t see any electronic equipment or devices, CDs, DVDs. I don’t see Stacy’s or Frank’s laptops, drives, power supplies, cable modems, WIFI hubs, etc. that I would expect to see from a couple of young kids who make their living remote from the office. There is nothing in this pod that supported remote program development or remote content creation.

“This is strange,” agrees Aminu.

“I am going to call and cancel my meeting. We need to take a closer look at the boxes for Stacy and Frank.”

“Prince Jones you are worrying me,” says Aminu. “We are trying to calm Maduka and his wife. Not raise their anxiety levels. They still have received no further closure regarding the disposition of Stacy’s remains other than the first discovery.”

“What do we have so far?” laments Lionel as he looks at the five sorted piles.

“We have a pile of garbage that is beginning to become rank. Let’s go through it quickly and dump the garbage into you dumpster.”

After a brief period of stooping and tossing the garbage pile is dispatched to the dumpster with the agreement that there is nothing of value in the dumpster.

“Aminu, do you see any value in this pile of destroyed furnishing. It looks like someone tumbled all the furniture from their condo. We seem to have a kitchen table, some chairs, parts of a lazy-boy lounge, three different styles of shelving that have been battered, two different ruined bedroom suits, patio furniture that has been worked over with knives and a demo bar.

This stuff is just trash now. I don’t see any value in moving it any farther than the dumpster or dump.”

“I’ll take a few pictures and send them to Weli” says Aminu. “He may just want to have my people put the debris in the dumpster.”

Moving to the third pile with items which may have been common to both Stacy and Frank the pace begins to slow as Lionel and Aminu work the manifest list:

- Kitchenware: Pots, pans, cooking utensils, dishes, semi-formal setting for six, casual setting for fours, eating utensils, dining ware, towels, hot pads, gloves, cookbooks, calendars, refrigerator magnets, cleaning supplies, waste can, etc.
- Bathroom Items: Towels, washcloths, soaps, shampoos, toothpastes, shaving creams, razors, toothbrushes, rugs, feminine hygiene products, shower mats, various over-the-counter items, cleaning supplies, etc.
- Bedroom Items: Pillows, sheets, blankets, rugs, etc.
- Family Room: Differing quantities of Sunday newspaper editions, two different magazines, three coffee table books, the destination wedding album, both volumes of the Perl Jam Anthology, a James McBride novel, pillows, a boxed Ouija board three afghans, a boxed collection of various planchettes, various NCSU and UNC blankets and sports fan memorabilia, wire trash basket.
- Tools: Wrenches American and Metric, various screwdrivers and pliers, two hammers, rubber mallet, 4-1/2 in. circular saw, two handsaws, clamps, glues, paints, brushes, buckets, car soaps, etc.
- Sports: Two tennis rackets, three softball gloves, four softball bats, six fishing rods/reels, a tackle box, minnow bucket, one golf bag with various clubs, two medium size and one small size ice coolers

“This pile of common items is serviceable and may be of resale value to Weli unless it has sentimental value to Stacy’s or Frank’s family,” observes Lionel.

“Let’s move to Frank’s pile next. We need to focus on the missing office and electronic device items. “

Frank’s two boxes yields a manifest list of “guy things”:

- Clothes: Trousers, shorts, collard shirts, T-shirts, outer ware for work, leisure, casual and dress. Typical men’s undergarments. Three suits. Various casual, sports, work, and dress shoes. Thirteen ties of various styles/patterns. Sports ware for running, swimming, softball, etc. NSCU clothing paraphernalia.
- Clothing accessories : Belts, cuff links, pins, pukka shell necklace, small gold necklace, three different rings, etc.
- Personal accessories: Scarfs, gloves, sunglasses
- Travel bags: Suit bag, carry-on, one check-in size bag, one duffel bag.

Stacy’s three boxes produced the manifest list:

- Clothes: Slacks, shorts, blouses, halter tops, outer ware for work, leisure, casual and dress. Sleep ware and robes of various variety. Typical ladies’ undergarments. Sixteen dresses for various casual, work, or formal. Various casual, sports, work, and dress shoes. A slew of scrafs. Sports ware for running, swimming, coed sports, etc. UNC clothing paraphernalia.
- Clothing accessories : Belts, pins, one pearl necklace of good quality, various gold necklace, various rings, various earrings, various pieces of custom jewelry. hair adornments, etc.
- Personal accessories: Scarfs, gloves, sunglasses, four purses.
- Travel bags: Two carry-on bags, three check-in size bag.

“What do you think, Prince Jones?” asks Aminu. “It seems like Stacy and Frank just abandon their condo to a bunch of derelict movers. And just left Atlanta with all their office work equipment and several days worth of clothes, incidentals, and insulin.”

“Aminu, I agree.” adds Lionel. “It is likely that they may have really taken-off on a lark or eloped like Maduka told you. But would they have ventured so long without letting their family know? These two were adults with on-going jobs.

“See if Stacy’s and Frank’s family want us to look deeper at the destination wedding album. May be there is something that it will tell us besides two people attended a wedding last year. But check with the parents first.”

“I will let Maduka know what we have found and what we have not found,” remarks Aminu. “Depending on what he and his wife say I will release what they tell me to Weli. He may see enough value in the common items and clothes with accessories to ship them with the other three pods to Nigeria.”

Later that day Aminu meets Maduka for coffee to report on they day’s findings.

“My cousin, Lionel and I have found little to report. It seems almost as if Stacy and Frank closed their condo and just moved temporarily without wanting to tell you. The moving company they hired to pack their belongings handled their items in a very rough manner. As you already know that company went out of business and unclaimed items were sold at auction in Charleston. That is how Weli came to purchase the pod.

“Here is a copy of the manifest lists that we assembled today from our sorting and inspection. I also have copies of the more interesting items.

“With all the rough handling most of the furniture and condo furnishings are no longer serviceable. The group we called “common” is just a collection of items we could not easily sort into a category of Stacy or Frank. They do have resale value for Weli. If there is an item that either family wishes to have returned to them, just let us know.

“The one item that may be of use in any future follow-up on Stacy and Frank may be the destination wedding album. We would like you and your wife if possible to look at it the personal items that we think belonged to her. Once again if you wish to keep anything just let me or WeliOlude know. It would be appropriate to let Weli resell what he can so he can recoup his cost. But you wishes and comfort come first.”

“Prince Aminu thank you and Lionel for your efforts. I will review the destination wedding album this evening. If my wife is able to contemplate reviewing it I will ask her to join me. If she is able we will go over the manifest lists as well. She may also be willing to inspect the items from the pod in the next day or so.

“I will also call Frank’s father to see what he may want to retain as far as items on the manifest.”

“Maduka, both Lionel and I are at your disposal on this matter. We will move forward as you and your wife direct us. Lionel is retired so he has the bandwidth as well as the interest to continue looking.”

Early the next day Aminu receives two calls:

The first call comes from Lionel: “Aminu, I have a couple of questions for you. First has Maduka allowed us to delve further into the destination wedding album? Will he allow us to examine the other three coffee table books as well.”

The second call comes from Maduka: “Prince Balaji, the manifest list means little to us or to Franks’ family. Except for the wedding album, Stacy’s jewelry, and her UNC memorabilia we have no interest in keeping anything. Her mother said there should have been some personal memorabilia like stuff critters and travel mementos. If they are in the pod, please collect them for us.

“Frank’s parents would also like his jewelry and NCSU memorabilia items. There should also be a couple of road race medallions and metals. If you can find them, please collect the items for his parents.

“Please have Weli Olude dispose of the remainder as he sees fit.”

“Maduka, we have the jewelry already secured for you,” responds Aminu the stuffed critters and race metal items we did not see. Stacy and Frank may have taken them with them. We did not see any of their office equipment or work product. So they must have taken them while packing for their elopement.” <<Let us pray thinks Aminu as he finishes the thought.>>

“Are we in agreement that Lionel and I can look a little further into the the items from the pod. Lionel would like to examine the destination wedding album, the coffee table books, the Perl Jam Anthology, and magazines in a little more detail.

“He does not suspect anything at this time. But he would like to try to fathom what might have been on Stacy’s and Frank’s minds shortly before they left the condo.”

“Aminu, that is okay with me,” answers Maduka. “please give me a call when you and Lionel are done so I can pickup Stacy’s and Frank’s things.

“You too much” closes Maduka dropping into Pidgin English.

About an hour later Aminu calls Lionel.

“Prince Jones my cousin Maduka gave us permission to look where we want.

“I am pulling a few things together for the two families. But you are free to go wherever the destination wedding album and other written material take you. Maduka would like the album returned when you are done. Drop by my warehouse this afternoon and I will have the material waiting in the office for you.

Before the Raleigh starting gun sounds for the afternoon traffic rush Lionel stops at at the warehouse to pickup a small book of books and magazines.