

Chapter 14: Turning The Crank

Breakfast is a bit tense with the tension in the air and anxiety running high. But Sandi and Lionel manage to pull it together. They leave the house in as normal behavior as possible. That includes having to exit the car at the bottom of the driveway to manually shut a garage door that refuses to listen to Sandi's Acura remote control signal. It gives Lionel a chance to walk-out the morning leg stiffness. Finally they are on their way to Claude's Café. The only aggressive behavior comes from the seat belt warning lady as Lionel is a bit tardy in buckling. They exit the neighborhood mutually shaking their heads the humor of the situation. 'If it weren't for bad luck....'

Just like clockwork the white service van with the green ladder on top joins the Acura on Lynn Road. The two vehicles proceed on Lynn Road and turn right with the light moving North on Ray Road. Making a right into the Food Bin Shopping Center the Acura parks near Claude's Café. With the Pandemic Lionel orders via cell for delivery at the door. Cash and coffee (two small, one with lots of cream, one black) are exchanged.

Sandi and Lionel retire to the 'Geriatric Studio' next door to the main Claude's Café. As usual they are the first of the brew crew to arrive. Before anyone else arrives they begin to discuss the Will's puzzle box, the coming separation, and the growing chaos that was derived from a 'good turn'.

"No good turn goes unpunished," quips Sandi.

Just a moment later 'Smooth' and 'Old Shoe' join the brew crew. Old Shoe is looking particularly dapper today. Conversation picks up its normal topics and pace. A couple of minutes into the conversation Lionel's cell phone rings. Old Shoe is looking particularly dapper today.

"Where are you Mr. Jones?" questions Agent Marcus.

Rising from the table and walking outside Lionel respond, "I just walked out of the Claude's Studio. It is next door to Claude's Café main seating area. You must have missed me when I picked-up my coffee at the door."

"I am parked next to the service van with the ladder. I had the owner reserve the very back table in the main coffee lounge. I will meet you there shortly. Sandi can join us if she wants."

"I will check with her and meet you there shortly," answer Lionel as he re-enters the Studio.

"Sandi the contractor just called. He is in Claude's waiting to talk. Join us if you want."

"Okay, let's go. 'Old Shoe' if you guys leave let us know."

Walking into Claude's wearing COVID mask Sandi and Lionel join Agents Marcus at the back alcove table.

"This is comfy," observes Agent Marcus as greeting are exchanged. "While I was sitting in the parking lot, Agent Howe verified she can see your cell phones and the car trackers. She is still in the van. Now please turn-off your cell phones. I am going to signal Agent Howe now so she can double check that even with the phones off we can detect your location. "

Sending the signal receives the ACK response that both phones are being tracked even in the off mode.

“Agent Howe confirmed she has both phones being tracked while in the off mode.”

“Next let’s setup the hidden ‘mic’ operational mod. If you will, both place your cell phones on the table. Sand’s is an iPhone and Lionel’s is an Android. Pressing the off-on button and holding as daaaaa-daaaa-daaaa-dit twice then covering the front camera lens for a count of six second or more will activate the microphone only. Entering the code 730224 will disconnect microphone.

“Please be aware that the camera starts sending live video as well as audio. But the screen does not go to camera mode. When you feel the third long vibration drop and take cover. Expect a lot of confusion, noise, and disorientation.

“Let’s try this at least once, but without the confusion and noise part. Ready?”

Both Sandi and Lionel give thumbs-up to the exercise.

“Mr. Jones, please start the microphone,” instructs Agent Marcus.

Lionel gives his FBI cell power button presses timed to ‘daaaaa-daaaa-daaaa-dit’, ‘daaaaa-daaaa-daaaa-dit’. He then covers the front camera lens and slowly counts to 15.

“Test 1 underway. Mr. Jones will now hold the cell. Mr. Jones please pull a book from the shelf and scan the ISBN number from the back. Thank you. Agent Howe please play ‘fire in the hole’.”

Both Sandi’s and Lionel cell phones begin to vibrate, stop, vibrate, stop, vibrate a final time.

“At this point you could expect to see the doors being kicked-in and FBI Tactical SWAT announcing itself with authority.”

“We will text you a couple of times today to setup additional tests to confirm you both have a working microphone/camera/vibrate cell phone.

“We have a box that is being delivered via FedEx by an FBI driver to your house early this afternoon. In the box is a collection of special NC license tags. Feel free to swap them around on the Acura and VW every day or so. In that box you will also find a travel packet with first class ticket and boarding pass for DFW on American 2418 leaving daily at 1538 hr for a Margie Prat. The appropriate TSA documentation is in travel packet with Sandi’s NC Driver license picture. An Air Marshal will meet you at the Departure Zone 4. The Air Marshal shall escort you through baggage drop-off, through a special TSA check-in, and assist your boarding out of RDU and landing at DFW. The Air Marshal is a female for comfort reasons.

“We checked the numbers of ‘Jones’ families in the immediate region. There are a sufficient number that should provide enough camouflage to mask direct family linkage. But we have taken steps to provide Andrew and Elizabeth with similar cell phones to ones you just received. RPD, Wake Sheriff’s Office, and the FBI will provide frequent patrols as a backup. Both grandchildren will be car pooled by FBI female agents to maintain the appearance of a normal routine. The car pool will continue for a few weeks to insure there is no surveillance be run by any one.

“The rationale for not having a firm RDU departure date is that we are still working on the approach we want to take. We are discussing either a Trojan horse style attack on the operation site, phishing, ‘we know what you did’ style blackmail, or a couple of other ideas. The decision will be made at a higher pay-grade than mine.

“Your cousin’s location will not work. We can not secure it well enough without drawing attention.

“But based on the informal conversation you have had with the Agents involved, we have found a site a couple of hundred yards from Crystal Lake near Vass. We have purchased an option on that dwelling. If you agree we will begin securing a perimeter around it. With Sandi going to DFW we will move a “retired widower from Raleigh” into the ‘dacha’. Periodically, the Vass residence will appear to have house guests, fishing buddies and girlfriends. Buddies and girlfriends will be Agents assigned a short working vacation rotation. You will be allowed to carry your normal every day carry. You may also bring your bolt action hunting rifle. Weapons will be secured on-site in an FBI controlled gun safe. Ammo will be secured in a separate ammo locker. Only the on-site Agent shall be armed while inside the dwelling. You will be responsible for your own menu but a per diem should cover your cost of rations. You and the on-site Agents can merge per diem expenditures. Shopping trips will be with FBA escort only.

“A Raleigh condo on Renwick Crt just South of the Forum will be available for when you need to return to Raleigh for short visits. An arrangement has been made with your regular lawn service to maintain your current main residence. As far as the neighbors know you are renting the house via AirBnB while you two spend a couple of months traveling to visit family in Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Michigan. The mail will be halted and redirected to the Renwick Crt address where it will be collected daily.

“Financially your bills and credit card be paid through a account that is managed by the FBI. The FBI will bill you monthly as a property management company. Normal statements will be forwarded to you for review and authorization via email. Paper copies will be maintained and returned to you after this episode has concluded. Any issues arising from your participation will be managed by the FBI.

“We understand that there is one medical appointment that needs to ‘occur’ for Sandi. That appointment will happen as scheduled. We will let you know how we resolve this open action between Sandi and her doctor later. All other appointments can and will be deferred. Pharmacy issues will be managed by the FBI posing as your advocate.

“As you may have notice I have been reading a script. You will receive a copy of this script to help keep everyone on the same sheet of music. It may also serve as a key piece documentation in future prosecution.

“What questions do you have?”

For nearly the next hour Sandi and Lionel pose questions about one thing or another.

“Well if that is all, let’s close the meeting. But before we do. We will have the Question/Answers transcribed and added to the script I read. Then I will sign that collection and initial each page as the representative of the FBI. I would like Mr. Jones to sign and initial each page. Please annotate any objection as you initial the page.

With the signing and initializing complete, the meeting closes with ‘thumbs-up’ all around.

After lunch Sandi and Lionel sit down to have a heart to heart talk.

“We have faced a few challenges over the past years,” observes Sandi. “But it is the first time a good deed boomeranged on us so dramatically. I will let Anna know that the DFW trip is still a go for me. But we do not yet know the when.

“I guess I should pack a couple of suitcases. You can send me whatever I find I need.

“We probably should begin to pull together the paperwork for our taxes from 2021. We will need to have them submitted before this is all done and life returns to normal. Oh We will have to file for an extension.

“I agree. I will start the ‘worksheet’ we have been using for the last few years. Then when you have inputs I can make them. Please remind me to ask Marcus about completing the forms for 2021.

“It will be so much better if we can knock this out before we split. Otherwise, we will be doing it via email or having to obtain an extension.

After about an hour and a half of working the worksheet for 2021 and breaking down the tax receipts Lionel reaches the place where he is waiting for inputs from Sandi and their investments.

“I have pushed the worksheet and receipts as far as I can for now.

“I am going to check Will’s puzzle box to see how the staining dried on the box and lid. I will be in the garage.”

“This stain job looks better than the last couple of projects,” observes Lionel following his inspection of the birthday present. “I just need to touch-up the places where the holding fixture contact left voids. It should take longer to clean-up than to setup and touch-up.”

Once again Lionel underestimates the time to complete the touch-up. With the touch-up completed and the puzzle box and lid re-positioned on the holding fixture he begins the clean-up task which does not take as long as he anticipated. Lionel closes-up the garage and re-enters the house.

He pulls hamburgers to barbecue for supper.

After supper he retreats to the workshop/office to check his email. Agent Marcus has sent a email through proxy email account on gmail that announces that a decision and a DFW flight set. He request a meeting for tomorrow ‘same Bat time, same Bat station’.

Having a rather idle evening Lionel seeks to enjoy the evening watching Larry, Daryl, and Daryl snips for a while. Then he returns to Robert Penn Warren’s All the King Men for the rest of the evening.