

Chapter 15: Good to Go

The tension and anxiety is not as high as it was for yesterday's breakfast. The trip to Claude's Café is much more relaxed. Sandi and Lionel are the first of the 'brew crew' to arrive. They pickup their coffee and head to the Studio to wait for the others to arrive. 'Old Shoe' parks his pickup in one of the two handicap spots. 'Smooth' arrives shortly after that. 'Boilermaker' won't make it today, he has kitchen contractors about to begin some work. 'Usher' is the last to show.

Shortly after the morning conversation begins to pickup its cadence, Lionel receives a text message. 'Elvis is in the building.'

"Sandi, we need to follow-up with contractor. He is next door in the alcove ." Both rise and excuse themselves for letting business interrupt a good story.

Masking-up they enter Claude's and proceed to the alcove were Agent Marcus is waiting. Greetings are exchanged. Everyone puts on their business face.

"We are fully funded. A plan for neutralizing the Spinnaker operation will begin tomorrow. Let your social friends know you are leaving for Dallas to spend a couple of months out that away help with a convalescences of a relative's spouse. Place all of Sandi's baggage in the Acura before leaving home for Claude's. 'Explain you will be leaving directly after coffee tomorrow. You intend to drive since you will be there a while.'"

"So what strategy did you guys evolve?" queries Lionel.

"We are going for a 'sting' operation. We will contact the mysterious masters of Spinnaker. Tell them we know what they did, but that we would like to buy a subscription for the application and unilateral control of one state from three satellite states. That should bring-out the rats at some level fairly quickly.

"We strongly suspect that the application is off-shore now and operating from a place with no extradition to the US. But its tentacles extend from somewhere in the US.

"Questions?"

Neither Sandi or Lionel have any questions.

"To launch everything on a good note, just go through your normal routine today and tomorrow. That is all I have for this morning.

"Good luck."

Sandi and Lionel return to the conversation underway in the Studio.

"Heh guys, Sandi and I just received a call from Texas. We need to leave tomorrow after coffee to help with a relative. We will have more information tomorrow. But it looks like will be gone for a while.

"No we are not going to do ZOOM call on Texas time just to drink coffee and hear old lies."

After that bucket of water, conversation slowly rebuilds its tempo. Shortly the various members of the brew crew begin to drift to more engaging daily activities.

When Sandi and Lionel arrive home they begin to pack. Lionel calls Andrew to see if he can bring pizza tonight so they can see the boys. Having been forewarned by the FBI, Andrew readily agrees. He will leave the garage door open so the Acura can be driven directly inside to preclude wandering eyes.

“It looks like the only bright spot in all this is that we will be seeing the boys tonight.”

“I hear that,” adds Sandi.

“I just hope that Anna and Dave don’t want to take me crappie fishing. It is not my thing. I don’t know where or when I lost control of my sister. We both hated fishing when we were growing-up. Now all she wants to do is go crappie and bass fishing and step out for a little two-stepping.”

“Let me check Will’s puzzle box. If it is ready we can wrap it and ask Liz and Andrew to give it to Will on his birthday for us in case our situation has not resolved by February 27.

Returning from the garage Lionel says, “The puzzle box is dry. It locks, unlocks and slides exactly as it should. He will get a bang out of it until he learns to turn it upside down, tap the corner with the magnetic locking pin, then start sliding the lid diagonally.

“We can put a Grant bill, an Eisenhower silver dollar, and that old buffalo nickel in the puzzle’s cavity along with whatever you think might fit the occasion.”

“I’ll have to think about that for awhile. But I can pull things together in preparation for wrapping the gift. I have a couple of other things for the Big Day.’

“Should we make a running list of things to pack and address before we dash-off to immortality tomorrow?” asks Sandi. “I will leave a free running trail of ‘yellow stick’ems’ on the counter. Just write illegibly, Geek.”

“Let’s pack after lunch. I want to do some backups before we adios

“I see Jerry and Clara outside. I need to set our story. I’ll be back shortly.”

Dashing outside as if to inspect the creek side of the house Lionel greets Jerry and Clara

“Jerry, how’s the walking going? You guys seem to be in good for old farts like us.”

Clara jumps-in with “It is a beautiful day. When will you begin feeding the Bluebirds and Cardinals?”

“Not for awhile I am afraid. You know about my brother with Parkinson's. We need to dash out to Texas and Oklahoma to help with a medical issue and maybe assist in some way in convalescences. We are going to leave tomorrow morning after our return from coffee. Because of the length of the stay and the uncertainty, we are driving.

“Andrew will borrow the Bug while we are gone. He will pick it up sometime early tomorrow. So if you see it on the street or in the driveway, that is okay.

“We expect to be gone for a couple of months. So Andrew is going to be working AirBnB to rent the house. Our lawn maintenance guy to make sure everything goes smoothly.

“Like always if you see something that bothers you or looks wrong just call Andrew. Or if you have questions you can just email us. If any one asks just tell them we are in North Texas helping my brother’s family for a couple of months. We are coming back. We just do not know when. That is why we are taking the Acura rather than flying.

“It’s good you have a son living close-by. Our son is in Boston.”

“Well enjoy the nice weather and your walk.”

Eventually the lunch hour arrives.

After cleaning-up from lunch, Lionel asks “Since the FBI is paying the ticket and baggage fees do you want the bags we used for our last trip to Italy-France?”

“Yes, please. Plus bring the Eagle bag with the large wheels.

A few minutes later while Lionel is pulling the bags Agent Marcus calls with an update. Upon returning downstairs Lionel informs Sandi of a minor glitch in the separation plan.

“Agent Marcus just call to say the Vass site is not ready. They had a technical issue arise that will delay occupancy for about two to three days. So I am in limbo until the FBI is ready. I will have to dance around with Jerry and Clara if I see them. But your departure is still on schedule for tomorrow.

“According to Agent Marcus we are to have the Acura loaded with your bags before we go for coffee. Then when we leave we will drive to the that warehouse off Westgate. Then we do the bag drop, kiss you good-bye, and substitutes Agent Howe for you. You’ll meet your Air Marshal traveling partner and board later in the day.

Between you and me the Dallas code for ‘all is well’ is ‘boots’. If you have a problem that needs outside attention use ‘gadget’. If my presence is needed ‘junkie’. Try to send ‘boots’ every evening around 7PM Dallas time. Send the other two as needed. I will acknowledge ‘boots’ with ‘shine’; ‘gadget’ with ‘toad’; ‘junkie’ with ‘barf’.

Sandi and Lionel have the packing task nearly completed when the time to order Chou’s pizza arrives. Grandpa buys two large pizzas with one pepperoni and sausage and the second with half mushrooms and half green peppers, mushrooms, sausage. A side order of bread sticks and two chicken salads total-out the call-in order. Pickup is slated for 6PM.

Lionel texts Andrew at 5:30PM, “On the way.”

Andrew opens the garage door and responds, “OK.”

Lionel and Sandi pickup the pizza at Chou’s and continue on to Andrew’s. Shortly they arrive and drive into the open bay of the garage. The grandsons are dancing around on the garage stoop as much from greeting the grandparents and the smell of the fresh pizza as holding the two dogs back. One dog is yapping, the other ‘peeing little spots of greeting’ on the stoop. With all the noise, Lionel just drops his head and listens to the music.

“This is just the way it should be,” Lionel thinks to himself.

Everyone migrates to the kitchen where the pizza boxes are opened, the bread sticks distributed, and the chicken salads set. Everyone but grandpa loads their plates with pizza, bread sticks and chicken salad. Grandpa takes a single piece of sausage, green pepper and mushroom, a bread stick, and a good helping of salad. They move to the dining room as the plates are filled.

Conversation centers on school, piano lessons, rock climbing, and marshal arts class. Eventually, basketball limps into the conversation. Zack seems to be a rarity in the Jones line. He takes after his Liz's uncle, Brad, who played a little college ball.

Liz and Sandi talk obliquely about the new car pool arrangement that she and a couple of her new friends have recently setup. Andrew asks how Lionel's brother is doing and whether there is any return date set. The hope is that Zak and Will will believe that Sandi and Lionel are on their way tomorrow to Oklahoma.

Because it is a school night, things end quickly after supper with a brief piano recital by the boys. That is followed by hugs and kiss all around. Then the quick exit. In the Acura, Sandi has a brief cry as they backup into the street.

They are back at the house by 730PM. They make quick work of the final packing for Sandi's trip to DFW.

Lionel makes three trips down the stairs to load the 'tools' and appropriate amounts of ammunition.

After packing Sandi and Lionel relax with a Pinot Noir on the back porch. It is a little cool but pleasant. They enjoy the dark and sounds of North Raleigh.

Beginning a serious conversation Lionel opens, "Don't let the FBI push you around in Texas. Dave and Ann will be protective. But they are both really law and order type.

"If you need to talk to me go buy or have Dave buy a new pre-paid cell.

"Are your ready to do this?"

"No, Sandi wisely answers. "I was ready to follow you to Ft. Bragg two weeks after we were married. I was ready to move to a house in Texas you bought without me seeing it.

"But this is different, very different. There is a real chance this might not end nicely."

"I know, I know," agrees Lionel.

"We are suppose to be retired like the rest of the brew crew. Our adrenaline rushes should be limited to spilling coffee not gun fights in parking lots. Now we have had to include Dave, Anna, Drew, Liz, and the boys in this ever widening circle of fear and anxiety.

"We have to end it somehow."

"The real victims here are two young kids who neither of us knew when this all started. They are dead. One still has not had her body recovered. The perpetrators are evil, bad people. They made the decision to put this situation into play. Unfortunately, it has become our cross to carry.

"I do not know how it is going to end. But it will."

“That is not good enough,” states Sandi. “I need to know that Zak and Will will be okay. And Liz and Andrew.”

“The FBI seems to have a solid plan and resources to provide a good level of security,” comforts Lionel. “Let me see what I can do to help get that “warm-fuzzy” feeling going again.”

“Let me make some calls this evening. If I come-up with a backup plan will that be helpful.”

“It can’t hurt.”

“I need to go to the store. I will be gone for a few hours.”

Before driving the Acura, Lionel exchanges the current NC license tag with an old one with the same color scheme as the current one. Exiting the the garage he goes to the grocery store on Creedmoor Road. There he purchases six debit gift cards with \$300 each with a face value. The he makes a call to La Quinta Inn near the Crabtree Mall to book a room for this evening using one of the debit cards just purchased. He arrives there in about ten minutes and checks-in using his his NC license and a new debit card. He adds one of the cards to his check-in account. Then he goes to the phone and calls a cousin in Aurora , CO.

“Fred I need your help and advise. When you were here a year or so ago you talked about a friend who was with you in the Air Force on field security. Do you think your friend might be available for a little security work?

“Affirmative. But he would need to setup a meeting with you.”

“I can rent this room for a couple of days. It should remain a safe place for a meeting. Set a meeting time for any of the next three days. I will be here each day at 10:30AM unless it rains or snows. The meeting will be in 312. Just have him call 10:30 to11:30 on the day he drives from Fayetteville.

“Will do cuz. Do I need to plan anything?”

“Let me talk to your friend first. We may need all the Jones-boys.”

“Roger that”

“Bye,” closes Lionel.

Closing the call Lionel puts a do not disturb flag on the handle for the hallway. He stops at the front desk to pay for the next three nights in cash. The he heads back home.

Arriving home he finds Sandi has gone to bed. He follows shortly.