

Chapter 16: Getting the Band Together

Coffee call at Claude's Café with the usual brew crew suspects proceeds in its normal volume and topics. Before the informal break-up time 'Smooth' reminds everyone that Sandi and Lionel are traveling to Oklahoma for at least two months. The normal round of 'drive safely' and 'we hope for the best' adds another fifteen minutes to the departure drama. Lionel follows 'Smooth' and 'Old Shoe' as the drive separately West on Strickland Road. As 'Smooth' and 'Old Shoe' split Southward toward their homes, Sandi and Lionel enter the I540 Outer Loop heading towards Lumley Road. Exiting I540 at Lumley Road they travel Eastward staying on Lumley Road until crossing under the US70 overpass. Doing that results in the road changing names to Westgate Road. The first left drops down to a set of garages and warehouses.

Following Agent Marcus' prior instructions Lionel quickly locates the garage he needs. As he pulls in he spots Agent Howe standing beside an opened garage door. She waves and directs them to enter. Inside they park and find Agent Marcus with another "Agent-Looking-Female".

Lionel leans over to Sandi and says, "She looks like she might be carrying. I'll bet she is your traveling companion."

"Yea, Sherlock."

Agent Marcus introduces Air Marshal Fanover to Sandi and Lionel.

"Why don't you two say your good byes while we cross load," suggest Agent Marcus. "Thanks for trying to match Agent Howe's outfit for the transfer."

Sandi and Lionel hover by themselves as old married couples will do.

"FYI, Sandi, I am trying to assemble a Jones-boys team to help insure smooth car pooling and a quiet Morlin Drive neighborhood. It may cost a small chunk of our retirement but it is worth the peace of mind.

"What did you do?"

"Nothing illegal. I am still working out the details. At the moment I have not met with the recommend security specialist. I just know he is qualified and can quietly bring together a trusted squad.

"I know Andrew and Liz do not believe that bad things can happen to good people. But this security team will provide us with an extra layer of comfort."

Returning to the imminent separation situation, they kiss a final time as Sandi joins her new traveling companion for the short drive to the priority departure waiting lounge.

Agent Marcus makes an offer, "If you feel comfortable returning to your house by yourself you are free to do so. We have not seen anyone following you or Sandi. So we expect a very minimal amount of risk, if you keep yourself out-of-view as much as possible. We see that you started switching license tags. That is a great way to become invisible in a white Acura SUV. "

“I just as soon be by myself until you tell me we are relocating to the Vass site. What was the issue there, if you don’t mind?”

“We had a problem in competing for intrusion detection devices and a crew to install. A polite way of saying it would be ‘a bigger name on the other line.’ Sorry if that was an issue with Sandi or you.”

“Just wondering is all.

“I am going back to the house and make myself mostly invisible.

“You all have a great day”.

As Lionel walks back to the Acura he notices that he has about forty minutes to reach the La Quinta Inn. “That is plenty of time ,” he notes. He arrives a little after 10AM at the door to room 312. He inspects the door frame for ‘unwanted entry indicators’ he set last night. All appears to be kosher. He enters and begins to relax with All the Kings Men.

“I am really beginning to enjoy this read.”

A little after 10:40AM the room phone rings.

“This is a friend of Fred’s to see Lionel Jones.

“What did you and Fred do in the Marines?”

“We weren’t in the Marines. We were US Air Force field security as Edwards Air Force Base.”

“Come on up.”

Searching the available programs on the TV Lionel selects a Country Music/Talk channel and increases the sound.

Shortly there is a knock at the door.

“Please raise your NC Drivers license or USAF retiree ID card so I can see it through the peephole.

Standing to the side Lionel puts his cell’s camera near the peephole and clicks a frame. Then he checks the quality of the photo. It will not win any state fair category but it shows a readable quality of the NC driver’s license number and personal profile.

“Please come in,” greets Jones opening the door. “Let’s not shake hands with the pandemic still active. I am Lionel Jones. I am one of Fred Rogers’ cousins.”

“I am Terry Locke. Fred Rogers and I go way back to the Air Force. What do you think I can do for you.”

“To say it simply, I need to ‘back-up the FBI’s protection on my son’s family. Currently the FBI has separated my wife and me for security reasons. The risk may extend to my son’s family pod as

well. The FBI and Wake County Sheriff's Office are providing a level of protection. But my wife and I would like an independently 'back that up.'"

"Two young people have already been died and I have been in a low level gun fight. So there is merit in taking precautions. We just want to make sure the FBI is successful in protecting Andrew's family. The grandsons are in an FBI sponsored car pool to and from school. Both my son and his wife have FBI cell phones now for communication of any threat. Other than that they have two some what aggressive, dumb Australian shepherd dogs.

"What my wife and I would like is a 'mobile picket' coverage. We hopefully do not need mercenaries or private investigators. What we need is basically are mobile tracking eyes on our grandchildren and residential checks when appropriate during the next few weeks to may be a full two months. I will work with my son to insure he and his wife are cognizant of this extra layer of warning and possible reaction. I have not and I do not intend to discuss this extra protection layer with the Agent-In-Charge. That would be your call.

"Can you take a look at their family routine to see what might be the most cost effective approach to providing 'mobile picket' level of protection. I use the word picket in the sense of a soldier at a listening post outside the fortification lines whose mission is to sound the alarm of approaching hostiles. Stealth is how the 'picket' survives.

"You are free to use this room for the next two nights, provided you do not put any charges on the room bill. "

"Give me their address so I can do a map reconnaissance," instructs Terry. "Then I will need an idea of their routine is. I will talk to Andrew and see if he is okay with us putting tracking devices on his vehicles. Or better yet dashboard camera looking front and back. We would also need a base of operations somewhere near his residence."

"The FBI will be stashing me at a remote location for the period. So you can access to my house. The neighbors have been told that Andrew is running our house as an AirBnB while we are gone."

"That is everything we need for the moment except a thousand dollar retaining fee for two days of consulting. By the end of the second day we will need an agreement and \$10,000 just to get things started.

"Let's get together tomorrow at the same time to see where we stand.

"Okay. Here is the second key to the room. "

"I will see you tomorrow at about 10:30AM," finishes Lionel as he leaves.

Lionel heads back to an empty house. Along the way he stops to buy some groceries, salmon nigiri sushi, and biscuits.

Upon reaching home, he emails Andrew asking for a brief meeting at the house if possible so the boys won't ask question about where Grandma is. Andrew replies that he has meetings until around 3PM. But he will 'swing by' around 3:30.

Lionel prepares his lunch. Eating lunch in silence he continues to read All the Kings Men.

A little after 1PM Lionel sees Jerry and Clara begin to amble around the side of their house. It looks like they are about to start a 'walk-about'.

Lionel greets them outside explaining, “Sandi has a stomach virus so our trip has been deferred for a couple of days. To limit everyone’s exposure you won’t see much of us until we finally leave.

“The house has been rented through AirBnB for a couple of weeks at least to a group of visiting engineers. Andrew made the arrangement through his work. So he will monitor the ‘renters’. There should not be any problem.”

The next two hours go very slowly and quietly.

Andrew finally arrives for ‘the conference on the mound’.

“Andrew let’s go sit at the kitchen table,” suggest Lionel. “Your Mom and I want to hire a group to provide additional security beyond the FBI call car pool and the Sheriff’s deputies drive-byes. Is it okay if the people I hire place Apple Air Tags in the purses, gps trackers, motion cameras, front/back dashboard cameras, and drones to provide independent surveillance of you guys.”

“Dad, I do not like the idea of having my family becoming enmeshed in your battles.”

“I know. But it goes much deeper than just me being chased by ‘hoodies’ from Durham. The people who were interested in sending a message were hired guns from Florida. They may have been part of the reason two young people turned-up dead. Aminu knew one of the people. The other person was a software engineer working on a phantom project. Circumstance brought the household effects to Aminu’s warehouse. All I did was volunteer to help Aminu sort through the items since his people claimed that the items were curse and would not touch anything.

“Aminu’s employees were right. The storage pod was jinxed. There was a hidden message which I found and gave to the parents. They took it to the authorities. Besides the death of two people and ‘hoodies’ ambushing an old vet, the recent fire in the Engineering building at State all seem to be related to the ‘jinxed’ pod.”

“Dad, mind your own business and let the FBI handle it.”

“How about this? If for any reason you become uncomfortable with the ‘FBI handling it’, call me and use the expression ‘Friday, Friday’ in the early in the conversation. I will have the people we want on stand-bye. If you give me the call, I will have someone from the group linkup with you. They will introduce themselves as ‘Ham and eggs’. They will know they have the right person when you respond ‘jell-o’.

“That’s reasonable. ‘Isn’t it?’ ”

“Yeh, fine, okay. Just have them on stand-by until I say. Okay?”

“Okay, agreed,” answers Lionel finally.

The rest of the day goes slowly in the house once Andrew departs.

Text message from Sandi arrives a little after 7PM as just, “boots, love”.

Lionel response is “shine, lone”.

The next day starts slowly with Lionel is still at home awaiting a “go” from the FBI. Near 9:30 AM Lionel prepares for a short bicycle ride. He loads his Filson Fly Fishing Guide Vest with his copy of All the Kings Men and glasses. He puts on his riding helmet and the fly fishing vest. Next he adds his conceal carry gun pistol, holster, and extra magazines to the vest. Finally he dons his bicycle riders safety vest, and cyclist gloves.

The trip puts him at the La Quinta a little after 10:20AM. He locks the Towne Electra to a post. From the lobby phone he calls Room 320 to check to see if Terry Locke is there.

Knocking at the door Lionel waits until Terry opens the door. Greetings are exchanged as Lionel enters the room. There have been minor changes. But all looks like an orderly operation center. Terry offers Lionel a cup of coffee.

“Well how did it go with Andrew?” questions Terry

“About as well as ever. He is not ready for direct interface with your team. He rightly is pissed that his family is even involved with the FBI car pooling. But that is just Andrew.

“He did agree that he would not throw a fit if your team just remained on stand-by.

“That provides us with plenty of fudge room.”

“Just what does that mean?”

“Well he wants the ability to decide when he is uncomfortable with his family’s security to meet with you and go over your surveillance options and resources. That’s like telling a ‘good ranger’ not to patrol on the other-side of the border to gather intelligence. The ‘good ranger’ knows he can employ techniques besides sending foot patrols across a border.

“I am good with doing anything that does not become a major felony to protect my grandchildren.

“Then you are okay if I bring in three others on this team detail. We have a couple of major things in our favor. First, Andrew and family live near main airport and Ulmstead State Park. Any time of the day that we have aircraft flying over head means we have background noise that will allow us to run a done surveillance mission of the house.

“Second there subdivision only has one avenue out. With assets we have we can post a mobile observer or picket if you will at a public parking site that will allow us to cover this exit route easily for watching the grandchildren movement. We figure that as long as we know grandchildren are in school they are secure. It won’t take us long to verify that the FBI or the bad-guys or both are following the grandchildren.

“Third, the after school event activities follow the same basic approach. We have rock climbing, piano lessons, martial art classes, city league basketball. Plus they will shadow their parents to other less structure activities.

Four, the house you are going to let us use is well located for this operation. We intend to use the u-store rental facility to accommodate some of our toys the neighbors do not need to see. We will work with the car rental office on renting various vehicles as we need to rotate in/out.

“Sounds great but what kind of operation budget will I need to fund?”

“You may have a lucky angle working on this one for you. I contacted your cousin last night. He explained the situation and relationships again with your grandchildren. He and I have a long

history so I am in this for expenses only. Plus one of fellows from the 'old Air Force Field Security band' indicated that he would join for expenses only like me.

"Then your cousin surprised me again. You may not have heard of the Asymmetric Services. That is the results of 're branding' the blemished Tidewater Security Company. Anyway as you do know they are located in Moore County. Your cousin apparently has a friend in the correct place to 'provide interns' from their training program. These are screened people who are close to obtaining their certification and first assignments. They will be provide in a team of three every two weeks for a period of three weeks. That gives a week to coordinate a change over.

"How many bedrooms and baths does your house have?"

"There are three usable bedrooms upstairs and one downstairs. The front room could also be used. Upstairs is one full bath and downstairs has 1½ baths. So it is better than living in the field. The kitchen is large and the barbecue works well. The house has large indoor and garage refrigerators.

"Parking is limited to the garage and driveway only. But public parking begins about fifty yards down Bella Vista Dr.

"There is a "Crunch" gym that opens at 5AM and closes at 11PM during the weekdays. Saturday and Sunday hours 6AM to 8PM so that resource is available.

"Bill Dante and I will move in as soon as you tell us. Until that time we will board out of the La Quinta. As soon as I can linkup directly with the Asymmetric Services training director we will move the first team up here into an adjacent room and start 'picket patrols'. Bill and his wife are experienced drone pilots. His wife may join as time permits.

"So how much do I need to drop into the expense account from which you will draw?"

Handing a bank deposit slip to Lionel, Locke instructs, "You need to deposit \$8,000 now in the Fidelity Bank account sometime before close of business today. Bring the remaining \$2,000 with you tomorrow.

"I suspect that Bill will be joining me some time today so the day-to-day expense are going to rise rapidly.

"I will begin surveillance of the house and verification of the movement of the grandchildren starting tomorrow in the AM."

"Okay, I will see you tomorrow at about the same time. Stay busy."

Lionel pedals home and eats lunch before going to the Fidelity Bank drive-up window on his bicycle. Dressed as he was this morning for his earlier bicycle ride he approaches the drive-up window. He dismounts and sets the bicycles stand. He loads the pneumatic tube carrier with deposit slip and an envelope with eighty Big Franklins.

"Lionel, Hello. I see you want to make a deposit to one of our newer accounts. You could have come inside."

"That's okay. I bought a milling tool from a Terry Locke. He asked me to drop the cash since he could not make it to the bank this afternoon. It looks like he and I will be doing a bit of business of the next little few weeks while he sells-down his machine shop."

"It is convenient that we use the same financial institution. Problem is I have to pull from my credit union for the cash. But heh, I can not resist a good deal.

"You all have a great day. Bye."

“Bye Lionel.

Returning to an empty house there is not a whole lot to do.

About 4:15 PM Agent Marcus calls reporting, “All is nearly ready for the move. Tomorrow we are inspecting the work at the site. Can you be ready for relocation during the day after tomorrow? Just open the garage door after 2:15 PM so we can drive Agent Howe into the garage. She and I will both meet with you for the departure. I plan to leave about 3 PM. You two are to do the final load out as needed. Then after dark she will drive the Acura and you the Bug to the site. I will be there already with the welcoming committee.

“See you in two days.”

“And a pleasant day to you as well Agent Marcus.”

The day continues to drag as Jones makes the final rounds for packing. For supper he has canned chilli while he reads All the King's Men. Local, state then national news is a hoo-hum kind-of-day.

Promptly at a little after 7 PM Sandi sends the text message, “boots, love”.

Lionel responds, “shine, love”.

The remainder of the evening is spend collecting intelligence on the Asymmetric Services and the Crystal Lake Vass, NC community. By the time Jones quits for the night he has come to understand that the Asymmetric Services operation and training area is locate just South of Southern Pines. So he would be physically less than six miles away he estimates. As for the Crystal Lake neighborhood, he has traveled the street view map of the neighborhood so he is comfortable with the house and road/street layout.

Accomplishing that he calls it a day and retires for the night.