

Three Sheets to the Wind

The meeting lasted an hour, with everyone reviewing their current cases while estimating the time needed to wrap them up. Langley was working on a title theft case. The client owned their house outright, but when they tried to take out a second mortgage, they discovered someone else already had a lien against the property in a completely different name, claiming the client's house was a rental property. Langley was days away from closing the case, leading his contact at the Richardson Police Department to make an arrest for bank fraud and grand theft.

Christian and Elijah were working cases on separate college campuses, one of which was a case of repeated theft at a student apartment building at the University of Texas at Arlington. Elijah had narrowed down how the perpetrator had accessed seven of eight apartments in one building, leaving no evidence behind but removing property of value. The most grievous losses had been completed papers from laptops and computers. Also missing were compromising photos from two of the students. Both refused to say who the photos were taken with or by, but a theory had developed.

Elijah had posed as a student and rented the eighth apartment in the building. The Tech Center produced micro cameras and placed them inside doorknobs to replace the existing ones in the apartment. After that, it was just a matter of time. The students were out for two more days, and the culprit

would return. Soon after, the case should be solved, and an arrest made.

Christian was working a case at a local community college involving a professor selling grades. He had been on the case for two days when the school adjourned for Winter Break. He estimated it would take one to two weeks to wrap it up.

After Blake and Mindy went through the case wrap on the two they had just closed before taking two weeks off, Mindy said her fiancé Tate had referred a couple from White Settlement to them, and they would be coming in for a meeting in less than an hour.

Tinker gave a briefing on logistics at Sharon's request. "We are buying a few older, non-descript vehicles for undercover and infiltration work. I've been working with Rent-A-Heap, which sounds like we're getting some junk, but they're all certified. I'm looking at buying two cars, a panel van and one step-side pickup. I'm also working with a body shop in Grapevine that promises quick turnaround on paint changes and bodywork should it become necessary."

Christian said, "Any plans on buying a Harley?"

Tinker rolled his eyes a little and said, "I may be in this chair, but I can still plant a size thirteen in a backside if I need to."

Christian laughed, and so did the rest of the team.

Tinker said, "I expect to take delivery of the four-wheeled vehicles at the end of the week. We can keep them parked here for security. It makes it look like someone is home."

New cases were assigned, and the meeting broke up. Mindy and Blake walked to Mindy's office and talked about the couple Tate McAllister had referred to them. Tate did some estate planning work with them three years earlier, and they

called him for help when local law enforcement had failed to assist them with a missing persons case.

Mindy said, "This couple, the Alexanders, are afraid their only child has been kidnapped or worse, and they believe that since their son was almost thirty, the police didn't go to much trouble looking for him. So sad. I hope we can give them some peace of mind."

Blake said, "We will get them some answers. Whether those answers bring peace, we'll have to wait and see." He looked at his watch and said, "They should be here in a few minutes. I need to run back and talk to Rick, and I'll meet you in the consultation room. Can you ask Tinker to join the meeting?"

Blake headed to Tech Town, the name given to the area of the office where Ron and Rick spent their days and many evenings. Rick sat calibrating the 3-D printer when Blake rolled a chair over and sat beside him.

"Where'd the paper come from, Rick?" Blake asked.

"Paper?"

"You know what I'm talking about. The paper you used to print these three-dollar bills. That was as good as I've ever seen. Which is the same thing I thought when we busted Vincent Adebowale. Where'd you get it, and how much do you have?"

Rick looked at Blake as though he regretted the gag gift he had made for Tinker. He finally said, "I have maybe three sheets left, and I got it from the Adebowale case. He had ten boxes of it in his garage."

Vincent Adebowale was a counterfeiter in the United States on a work Visa from Nigeria. He had passed several dozen one-hundred-dollar bills to fifteen big box stores, getting real currency in change and then returning the items. The Franklin Investigative teams had been hired by the owner of Stan's

Appliances after the Secret Service brought twenty-seven notes he had deposited and signed for the loss.

As a small business owner it was harder for him to absorb the loss than it was for the Sam's and Costco's Adebowale had defrauded. He was identified from video surveillance footage from a Gentlemen's club across the street from Stan's Appliance Store. Once they had a partial license plate and make of the vehicle, they found him.

Ron and Rick used a signal-blocking device to interfere with Adebowale's streaming and Internet, then intercepted his call for service. Next, Rick and Ron tag-teamed the service call and positioned hidden cameras throughout the house and garage where the fiber optics optical network terminal (ONT) was located.

Rick said, "I found the cases of paper out in the garage, pulled some off the top, and slipped them in my coat. Not to do anything criminal with it!"

Blake said, "That never entered my mind, Rick. If anyone ever asks me to vouch for you, I'd tell them with a clear conscience that you are a man of integrity and above reproach."

Rick responded, "Thank you, Blake. That means a lot coming from you."

"No need to thank me, Rick. I will always be a straight shooter with you. That's why I came back to talk to you in private. To tell it to you straight. However much you still have, that paper violates Title 18 USC Chapter 25. It needs to be turned in to an agent of the Secret Service."

Rick had a smile on his face that began to fade, and he said, "You're serious? Do you want me to give this paper to someone who could either say, 'Thanks' or 'You're under arrest'? Can't I just burn it? Put it through the shredder?"

"You could have before I became aware of it. Now I'm compromised because I know that an ongoing felony is taking place in my business. Tinker knows a guy. Go see him later so we can take care of this the right way, and you still get to come to work here. That's important to me, Rick."

Blake returned to the middle of the office to the consulting room and arrived as Robin was bringing the Alexanders back for their meeting. Mindy and Clyde were already waiting when Blake walked in and stood until the older couple came in and were introduced.

As Blake sat, he saw Rick walk by, spot Clyde in the meeting, and head for the back. He looked sick about the situation. Now, over three sheets of illegal paper, there was the possibility of going to jail or paying a fine over what he intended as a joke. Blake thought Rick, fittingly, looked as though he was feeling about three sheets to the wind.

