

Chapter 18

Clayton loved the Go Pro camera he “borrowed” from the house on Camano Island. He set it up in the cockpit of the Cessna 182 he liberated from the Stanwood airport on Camano Island. The 182 Skylane was a bigger, more powerful version of the Cessna Skyhawk he crashed at Port Townsend.

He had a few hours behind the yoke now and felt more confident with the airplane. It was faster and had a longer range. He should be able to make it to Idaho on the first leg.

With a little on-line study he had mastered the GPS installed in the plane. Navigation in this computer age was simple.

He got good footage of himself at the controls, thoroughly enjoying the freedom of flight. After a while, he turned the camera around to look out the dashboard. He managed to get some really dizzying footage when he crash-landed at the Flying H Ranch just outside of Buckley, Washington.

He wasn't on the ground long. Flying H supplied him with another Cessna 172. There were three other single engine planes tied down on the grass airstrip, but Clayton decided to stick with a familiar plane. Besides, the gas tanks were full.

Several more hops, with a new plane at each site, brought him to Indiana. He just couldn't seem to get landing down. Each time, he ended up in a heap along the runway. He had a few cuts and bruises, but the last landing really hurt. he had a deep aching pain in his side.

It was time to cool it for awhile.

Clayton found a nice house near the Indiana Dunes State Park on Lake Michigan. It was an A-frame with a nice bedroom in the loft. They had a good Internet connection and a spiffy computer.

Clayton spent several hours editing his flying movies then inspiration hit him.

He attached his Go Pro camera to a broom stick and began a tour of the house.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I’m Clayton Johnson-White, the so-called Fly Away Bandit, broadcasting to you live. I won’t say where I am because I don’t want to make it too easy for the police. Let me just say that I’m where they would never expect to find me.”

He had no idea how many people were watching his live Web cast, but he knew he had some fans out there.

“First of all, let me give you a tour of my new house. The owners have very kindly provided me with everything I need to hang out here for a few days.”

He turned his camera to sweep the living room furnished with rustic furniture and a river rock fireplace. he had built a roaring fire for his video. Next he turned the camera to the kitchen.

“My hosts very considerately left me a pantry full of food, not to mention a freezer with goodies that will keep me going for a month.”

He walked up the stairs with the camera in front of him.

“This is my bedroom.” he swept the room with the camera. It had a brass rail double bed with a hand-sewn quilt. “There’s a well stocked book case. The owners share my tastes, there’s lots of Clancy and Clive Cussler here.”

Clayton sat down at the computer.

“I don’t want to show you any outside pictures right now; I don’t want to tip law enforcement as to where I am. But, I will show you some videos that I made on my trip out here. I got some great footage flying over the Cascades.”

He punched a few keys on the computer and switched his Web cast to his newly-edited videos.

“I want to let all my fans know that I’m doing fine. I’m having the time of my life. I’m done with Washington for now. Don’t expect me back anytime soon. There’s a whole big world out here to explore and I intend to see some of it.”

The video came to the end, so he turned the computer's web cam on. he smiled into the camera.

"This is for all of you law enforcement types out there." he stuck out his tongue and blew a raspberry at the camera. "Catch me if you can. This is Clayton Johnson-White signing off. Who knows where you will hear from me next?"

Clayton leaned back in the chair and popped open a can of Coke. he saved his video, then went to YouTube and posted it.

He ran downstairs for a bag of chips and another Coke. When he got back to the computer, he checked for views on YouTube. he already had nearly a hundred. Before he finished his chips and Coke it was over a thousand and growing rapidly.

He was going viral!

"I've got your boy," Ted said into the speaker phone.

"Yeah, what did ya find?" Chris asked.

Ted leaned back in his chair. "The kid isn't very sophisticated. He's not making any attempt to hide his IP address. Either he doesn't know that you can track him with it, or he doesn't care."

"I'd vote for the first," Chris said. "He dropped out of school in the sixth grade. I doubt if he's been exposed to much advanced IT training."

"This isn't perfect. We have a service we use. I can give you his Internet Service Provider and state with ninety percent accuracy. He's using AT&T and he's in Indiana. The city is less accurate, about eighty percent. He's in a rural area, not in an incorporated city. I can send you his GPS coordinates, if you like."

“Yeah, that’d be great. I don’t know why I’m tracking him. I’m certainly not getting paid for this. I just feel a kind of responsibility for him. I know he’ll get caught one of these days and I’ll get put back on the case. I guess I’m just being proactive.”

“Karen’s gone.” Catrina burst into Ted’s office.

Ted looked up from his monitor. “Huh?”

“Karen has disappeared. She hasn’t been answering my calls. Doesn’t respond to texts or emails. I called her barista stands and they say they haven’t heard from her in days.”

“Chris, I gotta go. We got an emergency here.”

“Okay, amigo. Thanks for the help.”

Ted heard the click on his speaker phone.

“That’s not good.” he turned to Catrina. “She usually drops by each stand every day.”

“I called her brother. he hasn’t heard from her. I even drove over to her house. No one home.”

“Could she have gone back to Vegas?” Ted asked.

“I thought of that.” Catrina sat in one of the chairs opposite Ted’s desk. “I just heard back from our operative in Vegas. She drove by Karen’s house. It’s still closed up. No one home.”

Ted tapped his fingers on his desk. “Shit, Cat. This doesn’t sound good. Where else can we look?”

“I’m going over to her brother’s office now. I want to have a face-to-face with him. You want to go?”

“Yeah.” Ted stood and grabbed his jacket off the coat rack behind his desk. “Let’s rock.”

Dan Anderson’s office was in a low single story building on the main street of Kent, a suburb about a half hour south of Seattle. The plain looking tan concrete block building could have been anything. Only the sign by the road saying “Anderson & Associates, CPA” gave any clue as to what went on there.

Cartina pulled open the heavy blue door. "Catrina Flaherty to see Dan Anderson," she said to the plump, gray haired woman behind a bamboo wallpapered counter. "He should be expecting us."

Catrina looked around the crowded waiting area. Two love seats sat at right angles to each other, against the walls, with a square coffee table covered with old magazines and at least three daily newspapers in front of them. To the side stood a small bookshelf and next to it a water cooler. The top of the book shelf was covered with a creeping philodendron and potted daisies. A few hard back thrillers and romance novels lined the two shelves.

"Just a minute please." The woman picked up a telephone off the desk. "Dan, I have a Mrs. Flaherty here to see you. . . Okay . . . Right away."

"He'll see you now. Please follow me." The woman got up from behind the counter and led them through a narrow hallway to the back of the building.

"Cat, Ted, good to see you." The thin blond man stood and walked to the door to greet the detectives. "Please, come in. Now you've got me worried."

Anderson's office was dominated by a large L-shaped oak desk tucked into the corner. he had a two shelf bookcase behind him with some kind of weird impressionistic brass sculpture on it and pictures of his family on the walls.

"Worried? How so?" Ted asked.

"I hadn't really thought much about not hearing from Karen. It's not unusual to go a week or so without talking to her, but now that I think about it, it's a little strange that I haven't heard from her at month end."

"When was the last time you heard from her?" Catrina took a seat in the padded arm chair in front of Anderson's desk.

"Let's see . . ." Anderson looked up and to his right. "I think, yes. She was here last Friday. She had a power of attorney for me." Anderson pulled open a drawer in his desk and searched for a folder.

“Here it is. She wanted to give me the authority to run her business in case something happened to her.” A strange look came over his face. “Why? Do you think something happened?” he started tapping his fingers on the desk.

“We don’t know,” Catrina said. “She hasn’t returned my calls. We think it’s a little strange, when we’re involved in an on-going investigation for her that she wouldn’t stay in contact with us. Did she say anything about leaving?”

“Well, she did seem kind of nervous. You know.” Anderson paused as if trying to make up his mind. “You know,” he finally said. “Remember, the last time we talked, that I said I thought Dick had been laundering money for the mob?”

“Yes,” Ted said. Why wouldn’t Anderson make eye contact with him?

“Well, Karen said that she’d heard from a mob boss. A guy named Tony something or other. he told her that Dick had a bunch of their money and he wanted it back.”

Was Anderson breathing a little faster?

“Holly cow!” Ted said. “And you didn’t think that was important?”

“You have to understand Karen. She’s a frustrated actress.” Anderson threw his hands in the air. “She’s a bit of a drama queen. I take everything she says with a grain of salt.”

“But no one’s heard from her. No one knows where she is. Don’t you think you should take that seriously?” Catrina asked.

“I guess . . . so.” Anderson rubbed his forehead. “What do you think happened? If the mob offed Dick, do you think they did Karen too?”

“I don’t know what to think yet.” Catrina said. “I know Dick had a big insurance policy. Did Karen have one too? Do you know who her heirs are?”

“Gee. I don’t know . . . She doesn’t have any kids. Maybe our parents? We never talked about it.”

“Well, if you hear from her, Mr. Anderson, will you please let us know?” Catrina rose from her chair. “Have her contact us as soon as possible.”

“What did you think?” Catrina asked as they climbed into her Ford Explorer.

“My spider sense is tingling,” Ted said, buckling his seat belt. “Something smells rotten in Denmark and I don’t think it’s the fish. I don’t think he was leveling with us.”

“I got the same feeling. I know a liar when I see one. Do some digging, Ted. Find out if Karen has a will, a life insurance policy. Find out who her heirs are.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to keep a sharp eye on the barista stands and Mr. Anderson.”

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Clayton Johnson-White was nowhere as smart as he thought he was. he might as well be sending James Winston daily emails with his whereabouts.

It was child’s play for Winston to follow the trail of crashed stolen airplanes across the country. The latest was found at Shelby County Airport, just outside Shelbyville, Illinois and a stone’s throw from Springfield.

The Toyota Corolla that was stolen from in front of the grocery store in Shelbyville was recovered in Indianapolis, Indiana. This kid couldn’t have left more clues if he tried.

Winston hated flying, and besides, he needed ground transportation when he got there. The Johnson-White kid might be making better time than him, flying across the country, but Winston was the tortoise. Slow and steady. Driving across the country was soothing for him, it allowed him time to think and plan.

The midnight blue Chevy Tahoe SUV was a comfortable ride with an outstanding sound system. Winston listened to classical music and practiced for his next performance as he drove. he belonged to an a capella choir that performed all over the country. The choir director prized his deep, mellow bass voice.

“Si--lent night, Hol--y night . . .” The melodious tones rolled off of his tongue. Their next performance would be the annual Christmas Concert held at Bastyr University in the Seattle suburb of Juanita.

He pulled into the parking lot at the police station in downtown Indianapolis, got out and stretched. he had been driving for six hours straight. he could use some shut eye, a shower and a shave. he craved a comfortable hotel room where he could Skype his wife, Frannie, and talk to the grandkids. But first things first.

At the sergeant’s desk inside, Winston waited his turn.

“Next,” the desk sergeant called.

“Hi, I’m James Winston.” Winston held up his badge. “Fugitive recovery agent.”

The desk sergeant didn’t seem very impressed.

“I’m on the trail of a young man from Washington State. he stole a car in Shelbyville that I believe has been recovered here.”

“Yes,” the sergeant said.

“I’m looking for a list of cars that have been stolen in Indianapolis in the past twenty-four hours. I suspect that he will have stolen a new one to continue his flight.”

It was Ted's day to pick the lunch spot. Catrina almost always opted for Thai food. All those noodles and stuff were okay, but they weren't Teddy food. It wasn't raining and the weather was only mildly chilly, so Ted selected the Pecos Pit, an outdoor BBQ joint across the street from Starbucks world headquarters.

He could taste the slow roasted BBQ as he sat at his computer. A pulled pork sandwich, with hot, spicy sauce and a side spike, a fiery Louisiana sausage on the side. Mmmm . . .

"You ready yet, Junior?" Catrina pulled on her jacket as she passed by Ted's door.

"You betcha, Mama." Ted locked his computer and jumped up.

"Where we going?" Catrina asked.

"Pecos Pit." Ted pulled on his coat.

"Don't you ever get tired of BBQ?" Catrina asked as they went through the heavy door. "Abiba," she tossed over her shoulder, "we'll be back in about an hour."

"Yes, ma'am," the large black woman behind the reception desk said.

"Don't you ever get tired of Thai?" Ted rejoined as they walked down the long staircase.

Catrina held the heavy glass door open for Ted.

"Thank you, ma'am."

"Who's driving?" Catrina asked.

"I'll drive." Ted started towards his BMW.

"You know," Catrina said. "You should get a real car. That toy is like riding in a toilet bowl."

Ted's spider sense suddenly started tingling. he looked around.

A long, black Lincoln Town Car was parked next to his Beemer.

The driver's door opened and a tough looking man with dark hair wearing jeans and a leather jacket got out. Ted immediately noticed the bulge under his jacket.

"Mr. Caglione sends his respects," the man said.

Ted felt his back. he wasn't wearing the gun Catrina had given him.

Both Ted and Catrina had dealt with Caglione in the past. Ted had done a network penetration test for him several years ago. It was a legitimate business contract, but Ted's work had helped Caglione stay a jump ahead of the US Attorney. Caglione told Ted that he owed him a favor.

Catrina had collected on the favor.

When she went to Mexico to capture and return the drug dealer who left his wife in Seattle holding the bag, she went to Caglione for help. Owning guns is all but illegal in Mexico. She was going up against some dangerous criminals and needed firepower.

Caglione had repaid his debt to Ted by putting Catrina in touch with an arms dealer in Mexico.

Now Caglione wanted to talk with them. Was he calling in the favor?

"I thought Mr. Caglione was in prison." Ted said.

The driver opened the passenger side back door. "Mr. Lamont will speak for him."

Ted looked at Catrina. She nodded, and Ted slid in. Catrina followed him.

"Mrs. Flaherty, Mr. Higuera, I'm Tony Lamont," The heavy, swarthy man extended his hand.

"Mr. Caglione apologizes that he couldn't make this meeting in person, but you understand, he is unreasonably detained by the state."

Ted shook Lamont's hand. Catrina nodded.

"I want you to understand that I speak for Mr. Caglione. Everything I say is coming from his lips. Capiche?"

"We capiche," Catrina said.

"Good. I understand that you are looking for Dick Randall?" It was a question.

"Yes, his wife hired us to find out what happened to him," Catrina said.

"What do you think happened to him?" Lamont asked.

“We don’t know yet.” Catrina looked directly into Lamont’s eyes. “He could have been killed. he could have disappeared. We wanted to ask you, did you ice him?”

“Mrs. Flaherty, we’re not in that business anymore. All of Mr. Caglione’s businesses are strictly legitimate.”

“Yeah, and I’m Santa Claus.” Ted said.

Lamont looked at Ted like he was an ant, just asking to be squished.

“I can assure you; we had nothing to do with Mr. Randall’s disappearance.” Lamont shifted his considerable weight in his seat. “We want to find him as much as you do. I’m thinking that we could work together, you know, pool resources.”

“Why are you interested in him?” Catrina asked. She was a little uncomfortable with the way Lamont stared at her.

“He has something of ours. We want it back. All we want is to reason with him. he returns it and everyone can go home happy.”

“What does he have?” Ted asked.

“Do you really need to know? Let us just say that Mr. Caglione does not like for people to take what’s his. he gets it back and we let Mr. Randall go on with his life. You can help us with this.”

“And if we don’t?” Catrina asked.

“Let me just say that Mr. Caglione likes you two. he thinks the world of Mr. Higuera here. Thinks he’s some kind of genius. And he really respects a woman who can make it in a man’s world. he likes you guys. he doesn’t want anything to happen to you. But, I gotta say, some of the strangest things happened to people who cross Mr. Caglione. You might say that they have the worst luck.”

Ted and Catrina exchanged glances.

“We don’t know anything yet.” Catrina said. “You can tell Mr. Caglione that when and if we do find Mr. Randall, he’ll know about it.” She opened the car door.

“That’s great. Mr. Caglione will appreciate your cooperation.” Lamont extended his hand.

Ted didn’t know what else to do, so he shook it.

Ted climbed out of the Lincoln after Catrina. he pushed the button on his key fob to unlock his car.

Catrina walked around to the passenger side and climbed in. Ted turned the key and the engine fired right up.

“What do you think?” Ted asked.

“I think that Caglione did not have Randall killed.” She buckled her seatbelt. “Anderson wants us to believe that Randall was laundering money for the mob. That he was skimming and that the mob had him killed. I’m not buying. If Caglione is looking for Randall, that means that they think he’s still alive. That he faked his death.”

“Yeah. I agree.” Ted backed out of his parking spot and pulled into the street. “If Caglione didn’t have Randall killed, and he’s dead, then who did? Who else had motive?”

“Well,” Catrina grinned at Ted, “There’s always our client. She has the most to gain.”

“How about his son? Junior didn’t know about the new will. he probably thought that daddy was leaving him everything. Maybe he needed to bump dear old dad before he left everything to his blonde bimbo.”

Catrina looked out the side window as they passed her favorite Thai restaurant. She sighed.

“That’s presuming that he is dead. I’m not ruling out the faking his death angle yet. Things were coming to a head for him pretty fast. I can picture him wanting to get out of Dodge.”