

## WHAT WENT WRONG?

“Okay, thanks for the update, Bill,” said Travis.

“What’s up?” asked Sherry.

“Bill says the man they grabbed as One-Patch Isaac was an imposter – a double. The DNA did not match. The feds don’t think Isaac intended for the double to get caught, but if he did get apprehended, then Isaac would learn from it.”

“Where does that leave us?” asked Sherry.

“Our mission has concluded. Bill’s intel source doesn’t believe he will try anything further in Elnora since that has been compromised. They believe Isaac will move on to another town where he’s not known.”

“So, we’re still a go on your plans?”

“Yes, if you’re still willing.”

“Where do we start?”

“The first thing we need to do is pay a visit to Pastor Collins at St. Paul’s. I want to get a list of all

the confirmands going three years back and three years forward from the year I was confirmed.”

“What are you looking for?”

“I want to find them and see where they are in their spiritual life. Do they belong to a church? Why did they leave St. Paul’s? So, when we get those names, I need you to use your investigative skills and help track them down.”

“And we develop a historical sketch for background and timeline.”

“You are such a blend of intuition and reasoning, Miss Sherry.”

“I wish I could get my boyfriend to understand that.”

“Give it time ... Give it time. Us men are kind of slow about certain things.”

They had a couple of hours before Pastor Collins could see them, so Travis gave Sherry a brief tour of the town and countryside. Elnora hadn’t changed much in the way of new business or industry in the past twenty years. Gene Harris did modernize the dehydrating plant in town to handle a

larger volume of alfalfa. Kaytos Grain Harvesting, which Travis didn't recognize, built a huge, new complex of elevators on the outskirts of town. The trip down Main Street brought many memories to Travis, but it also brought some sadness. Many of the old brick buildings needed repair and the street had its share of patched potholes.

The final leg of the tour took them by the Sawyer farmstead on County Road G. Parking outside the driveway, Travis took a long look at the place. A sign at the road read, 'Waystock Farms'.

"So, this is it. Who is Waystock Farms?"

"I don't know," said Travis. "I know my uncle, who bought the farm from my parents, sold it a few years ago, but I didn't know those to whom he sold it. I'm not familiar with the name Waystock, but from the equipment I see by the barn, they must be a big operation ... Well, it's about time to head to St. Paul's."

"Thanks for meeting with us, Pastor Collins," said Travis.

"You're quite welcome. Thanks for giving me a heads up on what you needed. I had to do a

little digging, but I found the names for those years. I can't give you much information on the confirmands from a personal perspective. I've been here for ten years, and I've never had a confirmation class. During the range of years that you want to look at, it appeared as though St. Paul's still had an active congregation."

"Obviously, something happened over the years. Any thoughts, Pastor Collins?"

"Given the demographics of Elnora, I believe St. Paul's has succumbed to the demise of the family farm. Most of the family farms have sold out to big conglomerates. In many cases, I don't think they wanted to, but the kids had no interest in farming and the parents just got too old to run the farm any longer. So, they sold the farm and moved to wherever their kids were."

"That tells me a lot, Pastor Collins. I appreciate that insight. Well, we won't take up any more of your time. Thank you very much for this info."

"It has been my pleasure. I have always wanted to talk about this, but I never really had

anyone to talk to. Good luck on your project, Pastor Sawyer.”

“Okay, Sherry, while you’re doing your run down on the names, I’m going to go into town and visit some of the other churches. Hopefully, I can talk to a few of the other pastors and try to get a sense of where their congregations are.”

“Okay, Travis.”

“I’ll make sure I’m back at 6:00 o’clock so we can get some dinner somewhere.”

Travis had a chance to visit six other churches in Elnora. He was able to speak to four other pastors and learned some interesting things. He headed back to the hotel and picked up Sherry.

“I found four of the thirty-four names on the list still living in Elnora. Six others are living in Lincoln and three have passed away. The rest are scattered across the Midwest ... What did you learn on your trip into town?”

“There weren’t any of the six churches that I visited who had an increase in membership in the last ten years. Two had stable attendance, but the others had declining numbers in varying amounts.

The four pastors that I was able to talk to differ a little in their opinions as to why, but a consensus formed around one word – ‘apathy’. They acknowledged that the family farm situation had affected them a little, but not as much as St. Paul’s. About fifteen years ago Elnora suffered extensive damage from a tornado. The pastors all reported a revival of attendance for a while, but it waned after a couple of years. They said there was a nondenominational church in Hammitsville, the next small town down the road, which had booming growth. The untold secret, though, was that while the attendance numbers were increasing rapidly, there was the issue of a revolving door. Many would come for a while and then not go back, while other new parishioners would replace them until the cycle came around again.”

“So, what next?”

“I’d like to try and make contact with at least the four still in Elnora tomorrow. Then I think it will be time to head back to Omaha. I will have to do some long-distance contacting when we get back home.”

“Did you say you were buying dinner, Travis?”

“Of course I am, Miss Sherry.”

“Good. Then I think I will order a steak.”

“I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

The next morning, Travis and Sherry made their calls, but only found one of the four at home. Roger Taper was the last confirmand at St. Paul’s. He started a family after high school and remained active in the church for a few years. He said it got to the point where he felt lonely, and he could sense the same with his wife and kids. Eventually, they began attending a Presbyterian church in town and have been there ever since.

Travis and Sherry headed back to the hotel and packed up. They booked a flight out of Omaha for the next day. The drive back to Omaha was uneventful, and the airport seemed unusually quiet. Outside of a little turbulence over Missouri, the flight was smooth.

As Travis stood up to go to the restroom, he saw something that made him sit back down.

“We’ve got a problem, Sherry. There’s a man holding a boxcutter to the flight attendant’s neck. They’re making their way up the aisle.”

“Travis, I don’t see anyone who looks like an air marshal in the front or at least anyone who looks like they might be getting ready to make a move.”

“We’re going to have to make a split-second decision here, Sherry. If they keep heading for the cockpit door, that’s a bigger problem. That door should not be opened, but ...”

“Nobody should have gotten by security with a box cutter either, Travis.”

“We can’t let him get up to the door. It is too far away for us to make a move then. We lose the element of surprise. If no marshal is aboard this flight, then we have to make a move, and it will have to be when he gets alongside us in the aisle.”

“What do you want to do, Travis?”

“It doesn’t appear like he’s holding the cutter directly against the attendant’s neck. It looks like it is a couple of inches away. It will be tricky. We don’t want the lady to get hurt, but we can get it done. I can get one hand on the cutter and snap his

elbow with the other if I don't have to struggle with him too much. So, if you can follow right behind me and slow him down somehow, then I think it will work. Maybe a blow to the carotid or whatever target is open to you."

"Right."

"Still nobody that looks like an air marshal?"

"No."

"On three, then," Travis whispered. He started the countdown with his fingers, and they made their move.

Travis grabbed the hand with the cutter and slammed his other hand into the man's elbow. The blow was hard enough it made the assailant drop the boxcutter. Fortunately, the flight attendant took off when she felt the pressure gone and remained unhurt. Sherry's blow stunned the man, and Travis followed with an uppercut to the man's jaw, laying him out in the aisle. Another man threw Travis a strap from his bag and the attacker's hands were bound.

"We're not done yet, Sherry. Hopefully, this guy isn't strapped ... He's clean."

When the plane landed in Omaha, a bevy of law enforcement greeted them at the plane door. With the captive carried off the plane and with witnesses interviewed, the FBI agents slowly released the passengers. The air marshal in charge asked Travis and Sherry to hang back for a couple more questions, and then he let them go.

When they got to the plane door, the air marshal turned around and looked at Travis and Sherry one more time.

“A pastor and a customer service manager?” posed the man, with a skeptical look. “Hmmm.”

When the duo got to a quiet area in the building away from reporters and photographers, Travis turned to Sherry and said, “I suppose we should call Bill now.”

“I don’t think so,” said Sherry. “I think we should just go home and pretend we don’t know anything about this afternoon.”

“Hello, Bill. Just letting you know we are back in town.”

“I see,” said Bill. “My first question is, ‘Are you alright?’. My second question is ‘What went wrong today?’”

“I assume you mean with the flight home?”

“Yes, I normally don’t like to see my team members splashed all over the television screen on national news. It’s bad for business.”

“Tactically, as far as our actions are concerned, it was a precision strike. But we had no choice. What went wrong should be more properly addressed to airport security. How did that guy get on board with a boxcutter?”

“Oh, I figured that, Travis. Look, I’m glad you and Sherry are okay. You guys can fill me in on everything tomorrow. Go home and enjoy your families. You and Miss McCall may have to lay low for awhile until we can see how the publicity plays out. We don’t want you compromised and put in any future danger.

“I agree,” said Travis.

“I’ll see you guys tomorrow.”

