

## THE TRAP OF SILENCE

“Maybe you can get through to her, Travis,” said Bill. “It’s kind of your forte.”

Travis opened her file and began reading. After a while, he said, “Nancy has surely entered a moral jungle, so to speak, fraught with all kinds of danger. Her actions have an admirable objective, but it doesn’t appear as though she understands the path she has taken to get there.”

“Hank’s wife works with Nancy at the library and has grown concerned. She says Nancy is a sweet, caring person, and she wanted to know if we could resolve the situation without engaging the law.”

“I don’t know, Bill. How do you feel about it?”

“Actions always have consequences, of course. Somewhere along the way, Nancy will have to accept the gravity of what she is doing and take responsibility. I’m just not sure, given everything Hank’s wife has said, that she really knows the ramifications of her seemingly harmless actions.”

“I agree, Bill,” said Travis. “Okay, let’s assume she isn’t aware. What do we have here? She works in a library—an honest, though probably less than lucrative job. Both of her parents have cancer and are struggling financially, falling way behind on their mortgage. Nancy has found a way to bring in extra money and help them keep their house and survive. How did she fall into this trap?”

“She was approached one day in the library. Undoubtedly, they had been studying her for a while. When they found out about her parents, they must have thought it was the opening they were looking for.”

“So, as far as we know,” said Travis. “She is acting as a go-between, passing along a sealed envelope that we believe contains information of some sort on an illegal activity—probably drugs ... Do we know who ‘they’ are?”

“It could very well be drugs, Travis. But here again, as far as we know, she is not privy to what’s in the envelope. I think she’s merely a part of the information conduit. Unfortunately, we don’t know who ‘they’ are. Hopefully, somewhere in the plan’s implementation, we’ll find out.”

“Her link in the chain—how does it typically go down?” asked Travis.

“Someone gives her an envelope, and she slips it into a specific volume that she then hides so no one else can check it out. Later, a courier comes along and requests that book. They pay her a healthy sum to keep her mouth shut. You and I would, obviously, know that to be suspicious, but maybe the combination of naiveté and desperation justifies the cost of her silence. So, we need to confront her and offer her a different path.”

“That path requires confession and forgiveness, as well as a solution, to gain her confidence and cooperation. True repentance, of course, means abandoning everything along the previous path and not going down it again.”

“If I might be permitted to enter the theological sphere for a minute,” said Bill. “I think it also should include some tangible proof of complete repentance.”

“Did you have something in mind, Bill?”

“I was thinking about Jakarta.”

“Hmm ... ah, yes, Jakarta. Works for me.”

Two days later, the team took their positions in the library. A couple of hours went by with no viable suspects.

“Wait, guys,” said Nathan. “There’s a guy coming in now, who is way too slick for a book nerd. It’s either comical or I’m wrong.”

“I’ve got him,” said Hank. “He’s going up to the desk now. Tommie, I would go ahead and move into position. Yeah, man, she’s reaching under the desk and pulling out a book. It’s a go, Tommie.”

Tommie stepped in behind the man at the desk. Frank walked beside Tommie and jostled him, causing Tommie to spill his coffee on the man’s shoes.

“Hey, watch it, buddy,” said Tommie. “Clumsy fool.” Pulling out his handkerchief, Tommie apologized profusely to the man in front of him, “I’m sorry, man. Let me get that off your shoes.” While bending down to clean the man’s shoes, he attached a tracking device to the man’s pants cuff.

As he stood up, Tommie said again, “I’m really sorry, man. I think I got it all.”

“Is he live, Jamie?” asked Bill.

“Got him,” answered Jamie.

The man walked out of the library and got in a charcoal gray car. Before he left, though, he put the book into one of the library carts near the door and slipped the envelope into his coat pocket.

“He’s traveling east on 5<sup>th</sup> Street and making a right turn on Frontier Avenue,” said Jamie.

“We’ve got a visual on him,” said Malcolm. “We’ll stay behind him as long as we can.” A few minutes later, Malcolm said, “Now he’s stopping in front of a self-storage place. Getting out and going into the office. Looks like he’s giving the envelope to the woman behind the desk. Now walking out.”

“Hold your position, Malcolm,” said Bill. “J.D. is right behind you. He’ll follow him into the complex.”

“Copy that,” replied Malcolm. “But now he’s coming back out of the complex and leaving the facility. Wait, it looks like the lady from the office is walking outside and heading to a storage unit. She’s unlocking Unit 426 ... the unit looks empty.”

“My bet is we’ll see a shipment soon,” said J.D.

“But of what?” posed Bill. “Anything for us, Travis?”

“Working on it,” answered Travis.

When the three people ahead of him finished checking out their books, Travis approached the library desk and said, “Nancy, I’m going to be right up front with you.”

“What do you mean?” said Nancy.

“I’m not a cop, but we do know what you’ve been doing.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Passing along the envelope that you slip into a special book.”

Nancy fell quiet, just looking at Travis. Then she said, “I always thought it was a little fishy. I suppose it was inevitable that I’d get in trouble ... So, what do we do next?”

“Like I said, I’m not a cop. I can offer you a way out. Do you want to hear it?”

Sighing heavily, she answered, “Yes ... It’s just my parents ...”

“We know about your parents, and we know these people have given you a great deal of money to do what you’re doing.”

“I’m sorry ... Go ahead.”

“First off, Nancy, you need to confess to God that you know what you’re doing is wrong and then ask for His forgiveness.”

“Are you a priest?”

“Something like that, Nancy. I can make sure your parents never have to worry about not having a place to live. I know someone who will give them jobs and who will work around their medical needs with a flexible schedule. They will also provide money for your final year of college. You can walk away and start over. But it comes with a cost. You and your parents would have to move and take on new identities. Can you handle that, Nancy?”

“You can do all that?”

“Yes, I can,” answered Travis.

She looked at Travis with tears welling up in her eyes and said, “Yes.”

“A couple of other things, Nancy. You also have to promise me that you will never go down

that road again, and if you ever need help, you will call me first.”

Nancy nodded in quiet acceptance.

“Now, if you are truly sorry, God will forgive you. That is between you and God. What I need is for you to show me you are sorry, and you can do that by helping us out ... Will you help us, Nancy?”

“Yes,” she replied quietly.

“Is there anything you can tell us about these people you’ve been involved with? Anything at all? A name or address? Anything?”

“I don’t know. I never saw what was in the envelope and no one ever gave a name.”

“You’re sure?”

“Well, there was this one time that one of the guys who picked up the book wore a shirt from a trucking company ... Markham ... no, Meldrum Trucking.”

“Jamie, did you get that?”

“On it, Travis ... I have a Meldrum Trucking with an address about a mile from the storage site.”

“Betsy, you guys need to watch for any Meldrum Trucking vehicles in the vicinity,” said Bill.



“Copy that,” answered Betsy.

“I’m tapping into some of the traffic cams in the area,” said Jamie. “I’ll try to give you a heads up if I see anything coming your way, J.D.”

Nancy asked for the rest of the day off at the library. Then she and Travis went to her parents’ home and explained everything to them. Travis gave them a little time to let it all sink in. In the meantime, he called Tom Peterson and Rick Paulson and briefed them on the need. In a matter of minutes, he had a home for Nancy and her parents to move into and a meeting set up for employment. Hank contacted a friend in the moving and storage business, and he said they’d have a moving crew out to the house in an hour or so. Rick Paulson called a realtor associate who said he’d buy the house on the spot, agreeing to keep it vacant for six months so the new owners didn’t have any problems from the ordeal.

“J.D., you’ve got a Meldrum Trucking vehicle headed your way,” said Betsy. “Single axle, red cab, and white van body.”

“Got him,” said J.D. “Yeah ... he’s stopping at the storage office. It looks like he’s got the envelope. We’ve got a driver and one helper. We’re going in behind him, so everybody get ready to move. This may be our opportunity.”

The truck passed Unit 426 and went around the corner.

“It’s not Unit 426, guys,” said Malcolm. “Maybe he’s making a pickup instead of a delivery. He’s stopping in front of Unit 484.”

“Hang back, Malcolm,” said Bill. “Let’s see what he’s going to do.”

The helper raised the rear door of the truck while the driver opened the storage unit. They began loading boxes from the storage unit into the truck. Malcolm and Dusty watched them for a while, and then Dusty got out of the car and walked over to the men.

“Excuse me, guys,” said Dusty. “I’m a little lost. Could you tell me where Unit 512 is?”

“I think it’s that next building, lady,” said the driver.

“Okay, thanks.” Heading towards the next building, she gave the team a heads up, “Didn’t see

any weapons on them, guys, but they could still have some in the truck.”

“Copy that,” said J.D.

“They’re loading the last few boxes now,” said Malcolm. “It’s now or never, Bill.”

“Okay, let’s move, guys,” said Bill.

With guns drawn, the team cornered the men inside the storage unit. They secured them and put them in the back of the truck with the cargo. Opening the last four boxes, they found auto parts on top and bags of oil absorbent below.

“Do you think we made a mistake, J.D.?” asked Malcolm.

“Well, I was just at the auto parts store last week to get some oil absorbent and the smallest bag I could buy was like fifty pounds. These bags are about ten pounds. Kind of makes me wonder about the quality of this absorbent. I think we should check it out, don’t you?”

“You mean like accidentally cut into one?” asked Malcolm.

“Precisely.”

Malcolm opened a bag with his knife and let J.D. check the quality.

“Why, Malcolm, I do believe they mislabeled these bags. I think what they have here is cocaine. Care to taste?”

“No. I’ll take your word for it.”

“We’re looking at millions here, Bill,” said J.D.

When Travis got the word, he went back into the room and told Nancy and her parents it was time to go. While they were packing a few bags, Travis opened the door and let Renee and Roger in.

“Nancy, Mr. and Mrs. Porter, I’d like you to meet Renee and Roger. They will accompany you on the trip.”

Mom, dad, and daughter walked out the door, casting a last look at the home they had known for thirty years.

“You’re driving the truck, J.D.,” said Bill. “We’ll deposit the truck in front of the police station on 6<sup>th</sup> Street. We’ll be right behind you.”

When they got to the police station, they left the key in an envelope on the passenger seat. Then they moved down the street a little, but with the truck still in sight.

“Tenth Precinct. Sergeant Johnson speaking. How can I help you?”

“Yeah, Sarge. Parked out front of the station is a little present for you. There are two men in the back of the truck and a load of boxes that contain some goodies.”

“Yeah, who is this?” asked the sergeant.

But Bill had already ditched the burner phone. They waited to make sure the police got to the truck and then they headed for the interstate.

According to the law, Nancy could have faced some serious charges. But Bill and his team didn’t always go strictly according to the law. In this case, they had delivered a serious blow to the drug dealers. As they headed for home, J.D. turned around and asked Bill a question.

“Did we ever find out what was in the envelope?”

“What envelope?” asked Bill.

J.D. nodded and smiled.