

Excerpt from

THE GRANDFATHER CLAUSE

A Novel by Philip A. Genovese, Jr.

Aaron Lincoln, as the proprietor of Air Services Corporation, had taken a lease on an old red brick building, which formerly housed military airport emergency crews and vehicles at the end of runway North 1A. He had selected the site due to its distance from any of the other buildings, assuming correctly that no one would visit him without specific purpose and not without using the only road that ran parallel to the runway, giving him plenty of warning. His landlord, the New York State DOT, was a bureaucratic dinosaur headquartered in Albany that took eight months to sign his lease and, so long as the rent was paid on time, had no interest in the business of their tenant in Building EM North.

Amidst the comings and goings of the other airport tenants, Air Services' aircraft, a Bell 206L-4 Long Ranger helicopter was rarely noticed. And, as it was wheeled into the garage on an erratic yet keenly orchestrated schedule, the occasional observer could never be sure if the helicopter was flying or at rest behind the huge wood sliding doors of Building EM North. It would be safe to say that the same observer probably didn't care either way.

Lincoln was satisfied with the arrangement but it was not his nature to be comfortable. It was seven o'clock in the morning and he had just finished his daily electronic sweep of the entire building. No internal eavesdropping devices were detected. All incoming communications and electrical lines were free of significant impedance fluctuations. And the sensors located on all four sides and the roof of the building verified that neither lasers, thermal imaging equipment, nor infrared scanners were painting his headquarters.

Lincoln had just settled behind his desk when his pilot and crew chief walked into his office wiping their hands on shop rags. Randell, the pilot, was the first to speak.

"The bird's fueled and we repaired a small hydraulic leak we found during the pre-flight. We can be ready to fly in ten minutes."

"We still need to PM those rotor bearings," the crew chief added. "Nothing critical yet, but we shouldn't push her more than another 10 or 15 hours."

"I'll see that you get the downtime soon," Lincoln said. "But I need you both and the chopper on standby until further notice. I've got a developing situation and . . ."

The satellite telephone on Lincoln's desk was ringing.

"Excuse me," he said as he motioned to the two men with his forefinger to leave the room.

"You know where we'll be," the pilot said as they headed for the door.

When the door closed behind them, Lincoln answered the phone. "Have you reached the correct number?"

Lincoln heard three familiar tones, his signal to switch on the encryption device connected to the satellite telephone. While he waited the required 8 seconds for the encrypting software to cycle, he glanced at his watch.

"It's exactly seven hundred hours, New York time," Lincoln said, after ten seconds had passed. "Your timeliness assures me of your serious intent."

"We are in a serious business, my friend." The caller's English was heavily accented - Middle Eastern with a touch of French, Lincoln thought.

"Serious yet profitable," Lincoln replied.

"Aaah, is that to say our profits are secured?"

"I take it your buyer is interested in the item."

"Yes. Are you positioned to offer delivery on schedule?"

"Unfortunately, there may be an unavoidable delay. But the item is as promised."

"Unavoidable delays concern me. For me, this speaks of complications. I am now feeling uncomfortable. Please, put me at ease." The caller spoke in the deliberate rhythms of a well-educated person conversing in a second or third language.

"Our agreement doesn't require me to make you feel good. But, as a gesture of goodwill, I will confirm that within the last twenty-four hours the item has been diverted from its intended delivery path and I shall soon have possession."

"I am overwhelmed by your generosity, but I'm afraid our benefactor will seek a more exact representation than 'soon'."

"Soon will have to do, for now. If that's not good enough tell him I've got other buyers ready to step up to the plate."

"The thought of sharing a meal with you is a most unpleasant one."

"What?"

"Never mind. I will relay your message and contact you again according to our schedule. Hopefully, you will have more definitive information for me at that time."

"Since you haven't made me suffer through the usual haggling over my fee, shall I assume you have finally grasped the meaning of non-negotiable?"

The caller sighed. "You may assume all eight figures are agreed to and that your terms are acceptable. The down payment, as you call it, will be deposited today in Luxembourg according to your instructions. But, my friend, it will do you well to know that we have a very clear understanding of the term 'non-negotiable'. Know, too, that we have a strong distaste for compromise and a complete lack of tolerance for failure. We will act with extreme prejudice in that event."

Lincoln clenched his teeth but spoke calmly. "You should know better than to threaten me, so I'll pretend you forgot who you were talking to just now. Forget again and I'll find you, maybe asleep in your bed, and wake you up with your heart in my hands."

The caller laughed deeply. “You are most colorful, my American friend, and very funny. But it is you who have forgotten. I have no heart! Remember that!. Now enough of this nonsense. I will contact you again as planned. Please make every effort not to disappoint me.”

The phone went silent and Lincoln hung up smiling. He loved the game but hated the players, which for him made the rules clear and simple to follow. Trust no one. Fear no one. And never let them think you can’t deliver, on a promise or a threat. When this deal was done, he thought, after delivery was made and payment received, he was going to find this sand-monkey son of a bitch, visit him in the middle of the night and wake him by stuffing a pig’s heart in his mouth. A little prank, but these things get around quickly. It would be good for business.

He leaned forward to speak into the intercom. “Randell.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Roll out the bird. I wanna be airborne in ten minutes.”

“Where to, sir?”

“FirsTech.”

Lincoln double-locked the office door as he headed toward the private bathroom he had built off his office. Inside the bathroom, he pushed the lock on the door handle and slid the deadbolt locks at the top and bottom of the door into place. He then pulled exactly ten sheets off a roll of paper towels, the fluffy quilted brand, and laid five on the floor in front of the toilet. The remaining five he folded and placed mindfully on top of the toilet seat. Removing the wood hangers from the back of the door, he began disrobing, neatly hanging his clothes until he was completely undressed except for his shoes and socks. Carefully, he slid off one shoe and sock and then the other, letting his bare feet step only on the paper towels in front of the toilet. Then, after he had fitted disposable latex gloves on both hands, he seated himself gently on the paper towels and began his daily bowel movement - naked and bent over, gripping his ankles with his head between his knees.