

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

Chapter ~ Twelve

The brilliance of the early morning sun rays striking the side of David's tent woke him. He laid there somewhat stiff with a few more aches and pains than he would admit to. He told himself that he wasn't too old to travel cross country on a cycle. He had put on over 400 miles Sunday and planned to make it into Reno, Nevada by dusk Monday, in time to get a motel room for a shower and sleep in a bed for a good night's rest. He broke down his small orange tent and was on the road before nine. The sun was seasonably warm for fall and penetrated through his black leather jacket into his back. The 1340CC shovelhead engine purred without missing a beat. The massive Harley carried David west on Highway 50 toward Reno. The pleasure and solitude of carving along the winding mountain road was pure freedom and David's mind harmonized with the ride. It felt as if new blood flowed through him or a new spirit dwelt within him. Whatever it was, David was on top of the world with his new mission.

While David focused on changing his records so that he could buy Bill's business and then ask Marcea to marry him, he was unaware that the further he got from Castle Rock the closer Kirk was to locating the computer infiltrator. Kirk's mission was to find, verify and remove the threat—ASAP.

Kirk stood up from his chair and paced while looking at the clues he had written on the chalkboard. *If someone had been freezing, it makes sense they'd misspell words. But then, why a half hour later are all the words spelled correctly and this guy now changes his name to Paul?* Kirk prided himself on his cleverness, but he was at a dead end. He checked phone books for all the David McClintock's but the few he found led to nowhere. He needed Mr. Henderson to get one of his politician friends to get a Social Security printout of all the David McClintock's. Kirk decided to do that after lunch.

Lunch meant a hangout where girls danced and other things; if the money was right. Kirk hated it when he had to pay for sex. If he had his way, all women would be at his beck and call. In addition Kirk was growing tired of the two women he was blackmailing that worked in the warehouse above DOS. They unwillingly took care of his needs, but it had become too easy. They didn't even fight back anymore. Kirk had his eye on Scott's wife. Sue would be his next video starlet.

In the parking after a two hour lunch of entertainment, Kirk reached over and opened the glove box. He pulled out a map of Colorado, unfolded it, and scrutinized the surrounding area. After a few minutes, he found what he was looking for. About sixty miles west of Pueblo, was a 14,000 foot mountain peak named Mt. Antero. Kirk refolded the map and hurried toward the building.

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

When the glass doors parted, Henry the security guard stood and greeted Kirk. "Good afternoon, Mr. Smith. How are things going with the guy you beat up in the parking lot last week? I noticed he still is coming to work."

Kirk did not have time to chat. "We seemed to have gotten him straightened out. But if you keep your eye on him, I'll remember you."

The security guard anxiously replied, "Sure, Mr. Smith, anything to assist you."

Kirk stopped and looked at the guard's name tag. "Henry, you were the one who helped me apprehend Scott in the parking lot weren't you?"

"Yes sir, that was me. I just want to let you know that I'm on your side. If a promotion comes up and you need help, I'm your guy."

Kirk liked Henry's subservience. "I might need someone for a special assignment. Would you be interested in some extra work on the side?"

Henry stood and actually saluted. "Yes sir!" To become a real cop was his one and only dream. He had been the door guard for eight years at the Government Printing Office. Just like everyone else in the printing and distribution warehouses, he was not sure what really went on below ground. Henry wanted to put his six weeks of training at security guard school to use. Maybe finally he'd draw a gun. Even better, maybe he would get a shoulder harness with a nickel plated nine millimeter revolver just like the one Kirk wore.

"If I give you an assignment, it will be top secret and you will answer to no one but me. Do you think you can handle that?" asked Kirk.

"Yes sir," answered Henry, still standing at attention.

Kirk knew he could use Henry and would not have to blackmail him. He turned and started across the tile floor, slapping the Colorado map in his hand. At the elevator he passed his security card through the slot and the door opened to go down. Once again at his computer monitors, he pulled up some information. The second ground floor contained all the information that D.O.S. had compiled for over a decade. All the true statistics were stored there along with voluminous data on hundreds of people. Almost every politician or important person had a file in the huge data base. Kirk pulled the file up for Scott Thomas. While reading it off the screen, he picked up the phone and dialed the extension for the front security station. "Henry, this is Kirk. I have a special assignment for you already."

"I'm ready, sir."

"Remember that guy you helped me apprehend in the parking lot last week? Well,

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

it's not really him that we're after; it's his wife. The Department thinks she might be a spy."

"Wow!" said Henry. The palms of his hands started to sweat and he moved the phone to his other ear.

"Henry, I'll need you to do this job on your off hours and no one is to know about this special assignment. Do you want to help? You know, if we find her out, there could be one big promotion. I already put in your file how you helped with the apprehension last week," Kirk lied.

"Yes, I want the special assignment," he said nervously.

"Good, Henry. Later today I will bring up her sheet, where they live, where she takes her kids to school, and all that stuff. What I need you to do is to follow her and log when she is alone. Find a time and place so that I can pick her up to interrogate her."

"Yes Sir, Mr. Smith. I will be ready to start stalking this traitor woman as soon as you give me the word. Is that all, Sir?"

"Yes, for right now. And remember, this is top secret." Kirk hung up.

Henry sat at his security station excited, his adrenaline rushing. He was finally a real cop. Even better, he would be working undercover.

Kirk sat at his desk aroused, the blood rushing toward his manhood. He would soon have full control over Sue. He'd show her how inferior women are. The thought of her screaming was a sick titillation that Kirk had to video tape. When the Stockholm syndrome would often kick in, it made him feel powerful and like a real man. Sometimes his victims even showed empathy toward his dismal manliness.

Mr. Henderson sat impatiently at his desk one floor below. He had to eliminate whoever tapped into the DOS computer system. If the public found him out before he reached the pinnacle of his great plan, his dark vision would be destroyed. He had worked too hard and was so close to let anybody get in the way. Like many men in power, he would decide who should die so to build his ideological world. Getting out from his chair with a grunt he left the office and was determined to get answers from Kirk.

The elevator startled Kirk when he heard it stopping on the second basement floor. No one was allowed on his floor. He started to move his hand toward the gun in his shoulder harness. Mr. Henderson emerged and walked toward the command center of security monitors and keyboards. "What have you got on that guy that busted into our computers?" he yelled over the hum of all the old open reel tape backup

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

machines.

Kirk unfolded the map and laid it out over all the switches and controls at his command center. He had resolved another clue and hoped he could appease Mr. Henderson with the new information. "Look here," said Kirk while he pointed at the center of the map. "Look at this. About sixty miles west of here is a peak in the Rocky Mountains called Mt. Antero. What's also interesting is that it's within the two hundred mile radius of the computer hacker's calling zone."

"So what's your point? No computer hacker lives on a mountain in the Rockies. The guy is just stringing you out."

"I don't think so. One of our microwave sites, where we download the changed information onto the wire service, is on that mountain."

"Kirk, I don't care about all the computer, microwave and download stuff. What are you trying to tell me?"

"I think somehow somebody tapped into our computer at this microwave site up on Mt. Antero. I don't know how or what anybody would be doing up there, but I'm going to go up there first thing tomorrow morning and look around."

"Why don't you get up there right now?" Mr. Henderson asked firmly.

"It'll be dark up there in a few hours and I could get lost or stuck up there." Mr. Henderson accepted his excuse for not going right then. What he didn't know was Kirk still had Scott's wife on his mind and wanted to get Henry, his new confidant, on her trail.

Mr. Henderson looked at the chalkboard where Kirk had written down all the times and clues about the infiltrator, then back at the map. He was fairly confident that Kirk would soon have his man, or kid, so he headed back down to his office without saying another word. It was too bad that an innocent person had to die. However, Mr. Henderson continually told himself that a great leader has to push on and tune out all collateral damage.

Tuesday morning, Kirk started out early for Mt. Antero. He had almost forgotten that years ago an engineer had taken him up there to finalize the installation of the microwave transceiver for the Department. Ahead he spotted the weather beaten sign: **MT. ANTERO SUMMIT 3 MILES**. He turned onto the gravel road and within a short distance the road leading up became a forty degree incline. The white, government issued sedan spun its tires. Kirk tried several times but finally had to back down the steep gravel incline. He'd need a four wheel drive, so he headed directly back to Pueblo to check one out from the motor pool.

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

It was past two before Kirk was back on the gravel road, moving slowly up the grade in low 4WD. He parked the truck, crawled under the gate and walked toward the concrete radio building. About ten feet in front of the steel door of the building Kirk saw the remains of a small fire. He then went to the concrete bunker, but could not get in because of the padlock on the door. Snooping around the site a little more, he noticed how pallets had been broken and burned and a big cable spool pushed up, probably to reflect the fire toward the bunker. He picked through some of the burnt charcoal and put some pieces in a plastic Ziploc bag. Now looking up at the three antenna towers, he realized one microwave dish was aimed toward the GPO distribution buildings in Pueblo. Everything was plausible but Kirk wanted to look inside the bunker for additional clues.

Returning to the truck to find something to pry off the lock, Kirk found a tire iron. Back at the door, he tried to break open the padlock but was not strong enough. Frustrated by his weak physical strength, he pulled the gun from his shoulder harness and shot the lock off. He opened the door and looked around. Nothing seemed abnormal, except for a torn blood covered piece of cloth on the floor. Picking up the hunk of blood covered cotton material, he examined it and determined that it was a torn up undershirt. Kirk had another clue. He dropped the piece of cotton cloth into the Ziploc bag that also held some pieces of burnt wood.

Kirk just barely made it to the FBI lab in Denver before they closed for the day. He wanted them to test the charred wood to determine when it had been burnt and insisted that they do DNA testing on the blood on the piece of cloth. They needed authorization, so Kirk tried to contact Mr. Henderson, but it was too late. Kirk left the Ziploc bag of evidence, knowing one phone call back from Mr. Henderson in the morning would have the whole FBI lab testing wood and blood.

It was past five when Kirk left the lab. He decided not to return the 4WD to the motor pool garage in Pueblo that night. Besides, it was a good excuse to go check out a couple of kiddy porn shops he knew about in Denver.



Reno had turned out to be too much temptation for David. He went out gambling and drinking past midnight. With only five hours of sleep, he spent most of Tuesday riding and then stopping to nap so to get to the central part of Oregon on schedule. Ten hours on a bike was too much for even a diehard biker. David found a motel for a much needed good night's sleep in the small town of Bend.

After checking into the Deschutes Riverside Motel, David walked across the street to a Chinese restaurant for dinner. As he sat by himself, he kept thinking about what to say to Mr. Miller. David never did get along and Paul's father. David empathized with

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

Paul because his own parents had distanced themselves when he started living with Marcea. But the difference was; David had a whole lifetime to patch things up with his parents.

The waiter brought over the check and asked, "Is everything okay?"

"Yes, just fine." Then David started thinking about how important families were. *A big family reunion at a wedding bringing everyone together would be great. Everyone there will be happy. Paul will be my best man! Or, maybe he could perform the ceremony, since he's a priest? We would invite Paul's parents and they would be so proud of their son. Hopefully, Paul's father will listen to what I say tomorrow and be big enough to forgive him so that he can truly see the man Paul is. Marcea's mother would be there, happy that we are no longer living together unmarried. Even my parents would be happy about that. It won't be a big wedding, but the ceremony would be wonderful with everyone celebrating family love with friends.*

David finished his dinner, paid the check and walked back to the motel. Inside the room he went right to the phone and called directory assistance to get the phone number of Paul's dad in Portland. The phone rang five times before someone picked it up. "Hello," a pleasant voice said.

"Is Mr. Miller there?"

"Yes. This is Mrs. Miller. May I tell him who is calling?"

"This is David. I'm an old friend of Paul's."

Now the voice on the other end of the phone was excited. "Is this David McIntosh?"

"Yes, it is." Paul felt the enthusiasm thru the phone.

"It is so good to hear your voice. It's been over twenty years since we talked. Paul just sent me a letter telling me that he visited you. He sure thinks a lot of you. He told me about the beautiful girlfriend that you have, the wonderful dinner he had with you, and her children, and how his weekend ended with his baptizing her son Danny. He said it was one of the best things about being a priest. I'm so proud of him. I will go get Mr. Miller. Otherwise, I might go on forever."

There was a long pause before Paul's father picked up the phone. "Hello, this is Dean Miller."

"Mr. Miller, this is David McIntosh. Do you remember me?" David asked nervously.

"Yes, I remember you. You were a friend of Paul's. What do you need?"

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

"I would like to come and talk to you about Paul. I'm in Central Oregon now and plan to be in Portland tomorrow."

"Whatever you have to tell me about Paul, I'm not interested. I hardly even consider him my son these days. Don't waste your time coming to see me!"

"I am sorry you feel that way. Maybe if you give me a chance to explain things, you might feel differently. I can come to your business or home, whichever you prefer."

"Don't be coming to my home!" warned Mr. Miller.

"Okay, then I will come to your business. Do you still own Ace Electrical and Plumbing Wholesale?"

"Yes! But don't bother coming by there either. I will be too busy!" Mr. Miller screamed into the phone and then hung up on David.

David was mad and dialed back only to get a busy signal. He tried several more times and finally called the motel manager to see if he had a Portland phone book. The manager did and was able to give David the address of Ace Electrical and Plumbing Wholesale. David was on the road early Wednesday, determined to get to Mr. Miller's business before closing time.

As David traveled toward Portland, Kirk asked Mr. Henderson to call the FBI lab to get them started testing the charcoal and blood on the cotton. The fire and bloody piece of shirt, hopefully, would be more pieces to the puzzle. Once the FBI determined blood type and did DNA testing the perpetrator would be much closer to being caught. Kirk informed Mr. Henderson that he was almost positive that the fire was fresh and most likely had been built the Friday night of the first breach.

Returning to the second floor, Kirk went to the chalkboard and added clue number 5 to the information already written.

1. Friday night message: **MY NANE DDAVID MCLINTOCK PLESSE HELP I"M TRAPD ON MTANTREO. EMERGENCY.**

2. Message one hour later: **NEED HELP! MAN IS FREEZING. MY NAME IS PAUL. I NEED HELP IMMEDIATELY!**

3. Message Monday afternoon: **IS MR. HENDERSON THERE?**

4. **Thursday went to Lowry Air Base: Airman Green admits to selling Clipper Chip to someone in a white truck with a business name on door.**

5. **Tuesday 11 days after first breach found blood covered torn shirt and**

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

evidence of a fire on Mt. Antero. Waiting for results.

Kirk put the chalk down and stepped back to think. Let's see. This guy gets hurt up on the mountain and can't get down. That explains the bloody shirt. It gets dark and cold and he starts to shake so he decides to tap into the computer line for help. He is shaking as he is typing on his keyboard. That explains all the misspelled words. Then he builds a fire, warms up, and tries to change his name to cover himself — especially since he has the stolen Clipper Chip. This guy has to be a technician for the phone company. Who else would be up there and know how to tap into the equipment? This David McClintock is no match for me.

Walking back around his console of computers and security monitors, Kirk dug into a drawer and pulled out the phone book. He flipped open the front cover and called the number for Telephone Service. He asked if they had a David McClintock working for them but was told that employee names were not given out. After being transferred to several different Departments, the Personnel Manager said she would see if she could release the information and that she would call back after lunch.

The electric latch buzzed and Kirk opened the red steel door. Mr. Henderson was looking over some false information Scott had put into the Wednesday morning papers. He was pleased with how Scott was chipping away at Christian good works and pedophile clergy. The Department was so close to controlling the news and polls. Congress had just approved a bill funding access to the Super Information Highway for the poor and elders. This would make spinning information and statistics even simpler. Mr. Henderson wanted to polarize and split public opinion right down the middle, so to destroy from within.

Kirk strutted over and sat in the chair in front of Mr. Henderson's desk and proudly revealed his synopsis. "I should have the computer infiltrator soon. I think I know what the bloody piece of shirt and fire are all about. The blood is probably from a phone company technician who got hurt up on the mountain and couldn't drive down." Kirk looked down at his notes.

"What mountain?" asked Mr. Henderson with alarm in his voice.

"Mount Antero." Kirk looked up from his notes. "I checked the weather report for the Friday of the breach and the freezing level was at 14,000 feet, the same elevation of the antenna site. That explains all the misspelled words. The guy said he was freezing and probably could not type. Then he built a fire and tried to use a different name because he knew if he got caught with the Clipper Chip, he would be in big trouble. Then somebody came up and got him. I noticed two different tire patterns by the gate."

Mr. Henderson leaned back in his chair, pleased with what Kirk had pieced together. "Do you know where this technician lives?"

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

"No, not yet. But, I am waiting for a call back from the phone company for that information."

"I thought you told me you would have the guy soon!" yelled Mr. Henderson as he rolled forward like a beached whale. "It's been over ten days. I've had enough of your excuses. What phone company maintains that equipment up there?"

"Midstate Bell," Kirk answered.

Mr. Henderson picked up the phone and ordered his secretary to connect him with Midstate Bell Phone Company. In less than ten minutes and after dropping a few key names, Mr. Henderson had the vice president of the Midstate Bell on the phone. After talking and waiting and more talking and waiting Mr. Henderson wrote something down and then hung up.

Kirk had sat silent for nearly half an hour not moving or saying a word, hoping that his hunch was correct and that this David did work for the phone company. But there was one piece of all the clues that just did not fit... How or why would a phone technician know or care about Mr. Henderson and DOS?

The phone rang. Kirk thought that it must be the vice president of the phone company calling back. Mr. Henderson picked up the phone. "Jack Henderson here."

"Mr. Henderson, I checked our personnel records and we don't have a David McClintock working for us," came thru the phone.

"Did you check your old records to see if he was ever employed by you?"

"Yes, I did, and we have never had a David McClintock working for us as far back as I could check the records. But one of our technicians who maintains the Mount Antero microwave site told me that there are some television translators up there and the guy who repairs them is named David. That is all I can help you with."

"Did your technician know this David's last name?"

"No, but he said he drives a white pickup with the name Bill's Electronic Shop on it."

Mr. Henderson grabbed a pen and wrote down BILL'S ELECTRONIC SHOP and then said, "Thank you." He then slid the paper across his desk to Kirk.

Kirk picked up the piece of paper and knew not to ask more than what Mr. Henderson wanted to offer. "I will go check this out right now."

"You'd better hope that this David is the guy we're looking for. If it is, take care of him by tomorrow before sunset or I will get somebody who can do the job. You sold me

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

on all this high security computer equipment and it didn't work."

Taking the piece of paper, Kirk returned to the second floor. He dialed directory assistance and they had the phone number of a Bill's Electronic Shop in Aurora, a small town east of Denver. Kirk hung up and then dialed the number. The phone rang three times. "Bill's Electronics. Bill here."

"Bill, I am looking for David McClintock. Is he there?" Kirk asked while holding his breath and hoping the lead panned out.

"No, he's not here right now. And his name is McIntosh, not McClintock. Can I help y'all?"

"No, I just needed to talk with David. That was McIntosh, right?"

"Yeah right, David McIntosh." Bill hung up the phone.

Kirk called directory assistance again and jotted down the phone number and address of a David McIntosh that lived in Castle Rock, Colorado. He immediately left the building and headed north on Interstate 25 and sped for almost two hours. Turning off at the Castle Rock exit, he pulled into the abandoned gas station, got out of the car and went to the trunk. Across the road was a small store, but nobody was watching, no witnesses that might have to be eliminated. Kirk opened the trunk, pulled out a shotgun, and pumped a shell into the chamber. He threw the rifle onto the seat, got back into the car, and studied a map. He mentally prepared to meet his opponent face to face at least for a brief moment.

Kirk drove by the brown and yellow mobile home. Out of the corner of his eye he caught the white pickup truck in front of the carport. He slowed to read the BILL'S ELECTRONIC SHOP decal on the door of the truck. He drove up the road, turned around and then stopped where he could watch the house undetected. He needed to wait, to track and then kill his prey.

It was only a matter of half an hour before the door opened and Marcea bounced down the ramp to check the mailbox. Wearing a leotard and a sport bra, her hair was pulled up on her head. She opened the box, grabbed the mail and sorted through it while walking back toward the house.

Kirk waited ten more minutes but didn't see any more activity at the house. He needed to do something. Mr. Henderson would not be pleased if he came back empty handed. The truck in the driveway was a good indication that David was there. Kirk got out of the car and paced. *I wonder if I should kill her too? I don't want to screw up again like I did with Senator Buck.*

Marcea was reading and rereading the postcard that David had sent. It was short

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

and sweet and said how much he missed her. Marcea had just taken the postcard into the bedroom and put it with her special things when the doorbell rang. Running down the hall and almost expecting it to be David or a surprise, she whipped the door open. "Can I help you?"

"Yes, I'm looking for David. Is he home?"

"No, he won't be home for a week or more."

"Is there any way that I can get in touch with him?" Kirk smiled wickedly, looking Marcea up and down. Her leotard accented her firm athletic body; her frazzled hair didn't distract a bit from her natural beauty.

Marcea felt the unwelcome gaze, and now realized that she may have volunteered too much information. "That's all I know. Why don't you check back then?" she said and shut the door. Her heart raced, from her short exotic dancing career she recognized that sick gaze all too well.

Standing on the porch, Kirk said to himself, "No bitch slams a door in my face." He was just about ready to kick in the door when a small yellow school bus stopped right in front of the house. The driver got off, looked at Kirk and then went to the back of the specially equipped bus. Kirk knew he had been noticed so he turned his head to the side to hide his face.

After the bus driver lowered Danny on the liftgate, Danny unlocked his wheels, and started pushing himself down the walk toward the ramp. When the two met, Kirk put his foot out preventing Danny from moving. Kirk looked down at Danny and very loudly asked, "When is your Daddy getting home?"

Danny knew the loud talking only showed Kirk's ignorance of the disabled. But he also sensed evil as well. Danny let his head slump like he always did to anyone that talked loudly, slowly or would not bother bending down and at least make eye contact with him. Danny played his deaf and mute role for a while and when he rolled his eyes he caught a glimpse of a gun through Kirk's opened jacket. Scared and worried for his mother, he rammed the footrest of his wheelchair into Kirk's ankle.

The chair tore some skin from Kirk's ankle, causing him to jump out of the way. "Stupid deaf mute can't even walk," Kirk yelled as he limped toward his car.

When Danny got to the porch, Marcea quickly opened the door, she was white with fear. Turning his chair, Danny memorized the license plate. "What did he want?" Danny asked.

"He was looking for David," Marcea said in a shaken voice. They went inside and

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

Danny immediately went back to his bedroom to enter the license plate number into his computer. He also typed in a description of Kirk: FIVE FOOT TEN, ONE HUNDRED FORTY POUNDS, WHITE HAIR PULLED BACK INTO A PONYTAIL, HAS SILVER GUN IN SHOULDER HARNESS.

Kirk stopped back at the abandoned gas station to check his ankle. It had quit bleeding but was bruised. He thought about going back, dumping Danny out of his wheelchair and making him watch as he taught Marcea a lesson. But he remembered that the bus driver had gotten a good look at him, so he changed his plan. Kirk looked at the map and decided to go check out Bill's Electronic Shop for a possible clue.

He headed north on Interstate 25 to Aurora, a small town just south of Denver. The vision of Marcea bouncing out to the mailbox in her leotard excited Kirk over and over as he drove. *When the time is right, I'll show that broad not to shut a door in my face. She will never have another man like me. She won't admit it, but she'll enjoy everything I do to her.*

The sky-blue building with Bill's face under a big cowboy hat painted on the side was easy to spot. Kirk parked out front and then strutted inside. Bill was at the counter. "Can I help y'all?"

"I called earlier about David McIntosh. I need to find him."

"I told you he's not here right now," Bill said. "Can't I help you?"

"I need to know where he is or when he'll be back." Kirk demanded and answers.

"Well, I don't see that it's any of your business. But I can help if you need one of those mini remote microphones. "

Kirk was confused, but prided himself for getting information from people. "Maybe you could help me out. Does David work on those television translators up on Mt. Antero?"

"Yes sir, we both do. We have a contract to keep them TV antennas on the air. What is it to you?" Bill asked, getting somewhat perturbed with the business questions.

"Hey, don't give me any guff, you big Texan ox. If I want answers, I can get them by pulling all your background data. You don't know who you're dealing with!"

All six foot four, two hundred fifty plus pounds of Bill came around the counter. He grabbed Kirk by his coat collar and headed him for the door. With one push, he shoved Kirk out of his shop. "It must be y'all who doesn't know who you are dealing with!"

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

Kirk was stunned and scared. He thought about pulling out and showing Bill his nickel plated gun, but he had a better idea. He would come back with a fake search warrant and a person in uniform.

Just about a thousand miles away, David had also been kicked out of a business. He had ridden all morning across Mt. Hood and thru the Cascades to Mr. Miller's business. He located the big two-story warehouse in an industrial area of Portland. Inside the door a stairway led up to the offices. David was stopped by a secretary and she told David to wait in the hall outside Mr. Miller's heavy and secured office door.

While David waited, he examined all Mr. Miller's awards and pictures displayed on the hallway walls. He had become a very prominent citizen. There was even a picture of the governor presenting him with the Businessman of the Year Award. As David paced and patiently waited, he observed over twenty salespersons busy on the phones taking and placing orders. It was a hectic place. After forty minutes, David reminded the secretary that he wanted to talk to Mr. Miller and asked her to relay the message again. She did so reluctantly and then informed David that Mr. Miller was too busy and that if he did not leave the building she had instructions to call security.

That was enough! David went back down the stairs, walked out to his Harley, swung his leg over and while pulling on his helmet rationalized to himself. *At least I tried. Paul never talked much about his father and now I see why. Dean is too busy setting the business world on fire. I wonder if all the awards and accolades were worth selling out his family for? Lots of successful parents screw up their kids by putting themselves first.*

Just as David was about to jump on the kick starter, he noticed the green phone company junction box next to him on the side of the warehouse. Without a second thought, David casually got back off his bike, bent down, and took out his tool-roll from the compartment under the seat. Now armed with a pair of pliers he twisted the phone company security seal off and opened the green metal door. Counting seventeen incoming pair of wires from the trunk line, he looked for some markings to identify which pair went to Mr. Miller's office. Only a few of the seventeen pair were marked. *What the hell!* David started disconnecting one wire of each pair on every telephone line. In less than four minutes David closed the green metal door, went back inside and up the stairs to the offices. There was a pleasant stillness, not a single phone rang. Even the babble of sales conversation had ceased, the sales staff sat dazed.

Mr. Miller busted out of his office door and yelled, "Someone get to a payphone and call the phone company. I'm losing thousands of dollars." Two employees bolted from their desk and ran past David as he casually strolled up the stairs and started down the hallway.

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

"Dean, could you spare me a few minutes?" David asked loudly in front of the sales/order taking room. Twenty plus heads turned and looked at David. Who would dare call Mr. Miller by his first name?

"Can't you see I don't have the time? I've got a disaster here," Mr. Miller yelled.

"Yeah, and if your time wasn't so valuable, maybe your son wouldn't be facing a disaster himself."

Nobody even breathed. You could have heard a pin drop. Ever since Mr. Miller removed all Paul's trophies and medals from his office, the rumors had been circulating. And he never did display the recently commissioned painting from a photo of Paul being ordained a priest.

"We'll talk in my office." Mr. Miller motioned for David to come in. He closed the heavy office door to shut out all twenty plus pair of inquisitive eyes. Mr. Miller had become even more difficult since Paul walked out of his office a few months back. Privately that was day that he disowned his own son. The recent change in Mr. Miller made it even harder to work at Ace Electric and Plumbing Supply. At least two employees had quit due to the work tension and many others had their feelers out.

Mr. Miller stood behind his desk. Looking out into the parking lot, he saw David's Harley parked there with baggage and a sleeping bag lashed to it. Without even turning he said, "You never will grow up, David? I see you're still riding one of those damn motorcycles."

"It's a Harley," said David, walking across the large office to behind Mr. Miller's desk and then plopping down in the executive chair. Some things never change; they were already at each other. David leaned back and put his boots up on the desk. Mr. Miller still hardly acknowledged his presence. During the entire drive to Oregon, David had been rehearsing what he would say to Paul's father, but he still didn't have the words to go to battle with.

"Take your feet off my desk! And hurry up with whatever you think that you need to tell me. My time is valuable, unlike your laid back time riding all over the country and sleeping who knows where."

"Just traveling from Colorado on this ride and headed down to California to get some records straightened out," David replied.

"That's why you'll never amount to anything. How'd you let your records get screwed up in the first? You're a lazy nobody, just like my son."

David put his feet down, stood up and headed for the door. He could see he was wasting his time. With his hand on the door knob he looked back over his shoulder

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

with a despicable glare. "You know, Dean, you never did like me. At one time I wanted to grow up and be a big success just like you. But now that I really see you, you're the one that's nothing."

"What do you mean nothing?" Dean said with force. "David, you will never have one tenth of what I do. You're the one that has nothing."

David boldly walked over and was now eye to eye with Mr. Miller. "You're wrong, Dean. I have something all your success and money can't buy. I have your son for a true brother. There might be blood between the two of you, but there is something more than blood between us."

Mr. Miller now thought that David and Paul were more than friends. The thought that they were lovers turned his stomach. It all added up. Now it was easy to pin the blame someplace else. Deep down Dean Miller needed to justify all the hours, over all the years, he had spent at work away from the quality family time he let pass by. He needed a rational reason not to accept any fault. Now he pegged David as the root of all Paul's problems. "Go on and explain this hideous sick bond between you and Paul."

"Sure, okay." David was a little confused and it took a moment to gather his words. "I don't care for the lifestyle Paul had chosen to live before he became a priest. I can't hold it against him because I'm currently living in deceitfulness."

"So you're homosexual too?" Dean asked.

"No, but anyhow," David replied and struggled to bring sense to the conversation. "I'm living an adulterous life with ex-dancer."

"You mean like a stripper?"

"Yeah sort of," David responded, knowing he chose the wrong words. "Anyway, what about you, Dean? That night we won the State Football Championship and Paul caught you with your secretary? Did he ever hold that against you? Hell no. All he did was love you. You were never there for Paul. Although it looked like you were the perfect family. The truth is you're just another defunct absent father. What's really twisted is that your son needs you now more than ever and all you can think about is yourself." It wasn't eloquent but David said his piece the best he could.

The eminent and prominent Mr. Miller had never allowed anyone to talk to him like David just had. But he was too stunned to be combative. "You know about that affair? Did Paul tell you?"

David shook his head side to side in disgust. Dean was petrified that someone was on to his not so spotless reputation. "Hey, don't worry about it. I knew you were

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

cheating on your wife before Paul ever did. I used to see your car parked behind that motel on Burnside Street when I was a junior. That was my business, nobody else's. I never shared that info with Paul."

Now, Dean valued David for his silence. All he could think to say was, "Thanks, I owe you for never bringing that out into the open. You could have destroyed my business and family. Do I need to pay you for your continued silence?"

"Dean, you just said business before family. You've still got your priorities in the wrong order. But you're right. You do owe me," David replied to the offer.

Mr. Miller swallowed hard. "Just tell me how much I owe you."

Now David was in charge. This was the first time he ever had the upper hand on Mr. Miller. "The price I am going to ask is more than you will want to give. And if you are as big a man as you want people to think you are you'll pay it."

Being a good entrepreneur, Mr. Miller knew he could barter. He pulled up a chair to the front of his desk and faced off David. "Okay give a figure."

David leaned forward in the leather executive chair ready for the challenge! "Did Paul ever tell you about his sexual experience with Judy, the older neighborhood girl that was tutoring him in math?"

"No, I didn't even know Paul was having problems with math in high school. I didn't know any of the kids in the neighborhood."

"Did you know that his senior prom date told everyone that he tried to date rape her?"

"No!" Dean rocked back in shock. "I never heard anything about that. Sex was something Paul and I never talked about. I left that responsibility to the school system and his mother."

"That's great Dean, leave everything up to the teachers and your wife. The school was teaching us all about sex, but that was all they could teach. They couldn't teach the moral side of it or all the complications that came along with having sex too early. That was left up to the parents. Maybe you failed Paul by not talking with him. My Dad told me that if I got a girl pregnant he would kill me and then make me do the right thing and get married. Did you ever give any of that fatherly advice to Paul?"

"No, I never did! I just couldn't do that father and son sex talk thing. Plus, I was too busy." Dean stopped. This was the first he heard anything about Paul's high school sex life and was more confused. "What has Paul told you? That the reason he became a fag is all my fault because I didn't explain the facts of life to him?"

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

"The correct word is homosexual. And your answer is no, Paul is too big a man to blame anyone for his life. But, I do think that you let Paul down, being you were never there for him."

"What do you know about our relationship? I built this entire business for him. He could have taken it over if he wanted. I worked day and night to get all this." Dean motioned with his arm around the large office. "Plenty of sons would give their eye teeth to have what Paul could have had."

"All Paul ever wanted of you was to be there once in a while. I remember how we would run on the football field and he would search the stands for you. Building this business was important to you, not Paul."

Mr. Miller continued in his denial, "True, I may not have made it to many games, and maybe I should have spent some time explaining sex and women to Paul. But we were close as any father and son need to be."

"Dean, you were never close to Paul. You were always too preoccupied with becoming somebody or something. You always thought you were so important, above everything and everyone. I can't understand how the rest of your family has stood by your side all these years."

Mr. Miller had had enough. "Let's cut the small talk. Name your price!"

"I'll name my price when I finish. This is not another one of your business deals where you can buy out of your responsibility." David paused to get back on subject. "You say you and Paul were so close. Did you ever talk with him about his tour in Vietnam?"

"No, I never had time." Mr. Miller's tone reflected some shame.

"You don't have the faintest idea about the ugly side of war that Paul lives with every day. About the combatant Paul shot, how while dragging the adversary to the side of the road a picture of this man's family fell out of his pocket. How would you like that image staring back at you, burning away at your conscience for over twenty years? Sure, Paul was a decorated war hero and he fought bravely for what he believed in. But, Paul needed support when he came back home. Everyone turned their backs on us when we came back. Paul needed to talk and work thru the horrific stuff he experienced. Did you ever think maybe he needed your help?"

Mr. Miller's guilt was surfacing. This war had been different. When the soldiers returned there were no parades, no honor or respect for the peacemakers. Some media sources blamed the foot soldiers and grunts for the war. Dean had remained neutral, but there was no excuse for not even thanking his own son. Paul and David were part of the thousands who offered their lives so that individuals around the

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

world could experience freedom. It went beyond the war and being right or wrong. It was about brave men and women who served and sacrificed without their personal beliefs or conditions. On the battlefield, it is do or die—not do and die.

Silence filled the office, enough had been said... Dean stared at his wall of accolades. He could not deny that his small empire was made possible by the soldiers of honor, who served for freedom and justice for all. Dean felt empty with the realization that freedom isn't an entitlement—it is paid for by bloodshed.

Without another word David got up and was at the door before Mr. Miller cleared his mind for the right words. He never found the correct words. "You still haven't named your price. What do I owe you for your silence?"

With his hand on the doorknob, David turned halfway around and answered, "You don't owe me a thing. If you ever talk to Paul again, please don't tell him we had this conversation. If you can keep your silence, so can I." David left and as he walked across the sales office he could feel the gaze from the workers. He held his head high knowing that he spoke the truth—ugly as it was.

Mr. Miller sat numbly at his desk in the unfamiliar stillness of the usual hectic office and sales floor. After a long peaceful calm, one phone rang, then another, and then another. Dean got up from his desk, walked to the window and saw David standing in front of the telephone equipment box. It took about ten minutes before David had all seventeen lines hooked back up. As David shut the green phone equipment box, he glanced toward the electrical and plumbing supply building. Mr. Miller was watching from the second story window. Dean stepped back and gave a salute just as David mounted his Harley and rode off.

Mr. Miller returned to his desk and buzzed for his secretary. Helen was plain looking but very efficient. She had replaced Elaine years ago, after Elaine's affair with Mr. Miller ended. "Yes, Mr. Miller," Helen said, standing in front of his desk with a pad and pencil in hand.

"Helen, could you have the maintenance man bring up that box of my son's trophies and war medals that I had you store a month or so ago?"

"Yes sir," she replied, hiding a smile. Mr. Miller had not been the same since he had removed those icons from his office and the foyer.

"Also, that painting of my son being ordained as a priest, I want it put out in the waiting area. Take down some of my achievements to make room. I want that painting right in the center."

"Yes sir," Helen replied again, bursting inside. "Is that all?"

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

"Yes, one last thing. Tell all the employees to take the rest of day off. I'd like them to spend some time with their families."

Helen left the office with Mr. Miller's instructions. The phones were switched over to the answering service. The maintenance man brought up the box of Paul's items and hung the oil painting in the reception area. Thirty minutes later, almost everyone was gone; time off for family was unheard of at Ace Plumbing and Electrical.

Helen was the last employee in the building. She knocked on Mr. Miller's door, entered and then said, "Paul's items are right out the door. Would you like me to stay and help?"

When Mr. Miller stood up from his desk it was like an enormous weight had just slid off of him. He walked over to Helen, put his hand on her shoulder and together they walked out of his office across the reception/sales area to the top of the stairs. Mr. Miller thanked her and told her to go home. When he turned back the oil painting of Paul's ordination was now hanging in the center of the wall amongst his other accomplishments.

Helen looked back from the bottom of the stairs and saw Mr. Miller standing and weeping like a grieving parent. The entire office and warehouse was now silent and Helen quietly locked the door behind her. Mr. Miller took out each object he had of Paul's life and put them back on display, his soul being cleansed and purged as he found a place for each piece. No matter what, Paul was his son and he was proud of him. After more than an hour Dean went back to his desk and picked up a pen.

Dear Son,

I don't know where to start, but I can't go on with the hate that is taking over my life. I'm truly sorry for the way that I reacted the last time you were here. I'm also sorry for not being there many of the important times in your life. While I was convincing myself that working all the time was for my family, the truth was that I was satisfying my own ego.

Paul, I was never the great athlete you were nor the war hero you became, but I was a good businessman. I had always hoped you would want to take over the business I had built. When you showed no interest, I was hurt. I then dove in further, building even a bigger empire that could have been yours.

When you told your mother and me that you were going to study to be a priest, I didn't say much because I was hurt. Instead of working to gain financial prominence, you chose to lead a simple life and dedicate your life to others. I

In The Silence

James Andrew Edske

remember, at your ordination, the glow that radiated from you. That day I was so proud of you, but at the same time I was jealous and envious. It is hard for me to admit but I think that I resented you for always being a better man than myself.

Paul, I have to be honest. When you told me you were homosexual, I was hurt. My disappointment overshadowed my grief over your testing HIV positive. Now, I must live with how I responded. I have asked myself what kind of father I am. I'm a man that can't even forgive his own flesh and blood. God knows, I've had plenty of indiscretions in my life and you never held them against me. It is time that I leave all the judging to God. I'm sure that He has forgiven you and so do I.

Paul, you have always had a special grace about yourself that made me proud so many times. I don't really know what it is. It wasn't necessarily the fact you were an all star athlete or a war hero. Maybe it was your feeling toward others. Whatever it is, I am still very proud to have you as my son.

There is so much I need to say and so much I should have done. The one thing I want you to know is, I am here for you now and will be later. Please forgive me for all that I have failed to do. I would very much like to see you soon.

Love,

Dad

Mr. Miller set the pen down, read over the letter. He then called a florist and ordered flowers to be delivered to his wife and then called and made dinner reservations. He felt like a new person—almost as being reborn with an option to do things differently.