

CHAPTER ONE

Michael Neilly ~~put~~ placed the phone back in its cradle and ~~sat~~ ~~wondering~~ wondered what the call from Calvin Greves, ~~an old FBI colleague~~, might mean. Greves, an old FBI colleague, was minutes away and, wanted to meet "...on issues important to both of us," ~~he'd said~~. ~~This was~~ Not something Neilly had planned ~~on~~ or wanted on ~~this~~ a bright ~~Spring~~ spring morning when ~~he'd~~ he was finally satisfied ~~himself~~, ~~finally~~, that the sketches of the St. Alban's remodeling ~~project~~ were right. He felt a knot of anxiety rising in his stomach. ~~But~~ Greves had hinted of something linked to Jack Sutton's death, ~~It~~ something that had to be heard.

When Jack had been killed, Neilly felt as if a door had closed suddenly on a favorite room, sealing it off forever. The gritty noncom had ~~once~~ been his ears and eyes in the ways of military staff politics. Sutton, ~~made~~ the low-level Intelligence section they'd manned in ~~early 80's~~ early '80s Korea effective in ways the twenty-three-year-old Neilly could not have conceived, much less managed. Their mutual ~~Respect~~ had grown into a friendship that ~~had~~ outlasted twenty ~~years until~~ years until that windy, ~~rain~~ ~~rain~~ sodden, October night when someone put a bullet through Jack Sutton's head.

Never accept the official attitude. It doesn't belong to anybody. Value anyone who knows that. Sutton's voice ~~still~~ reached him even now, a year after the murder, The crime ~~unsolved~~ remained unsolved, ~~Neilly's loss and the hurt done to Jack's wife's and son's grief~~ ~~still~~ remained unaccounted for unrequited. It had been Sutton who had drawn him to Morton City when he'd had quit the Bureau, ~~and~~ ~~when~~ his first marriage ~~had~~ failed, The two crises ~~seemingly were seamed~~ bound together in his memory.

Neilly had longed to settle somewhere among honest, ordinary people, ~~He~~ wanted to put his neglected architecture degree into practice against ~~the~~ his continuous disillusionment ~~of his~~ with his post-army years. The small town in central Washington State had seemed the right choice. He'd met Trudy Smith, a hazel-eyed blond, whose easy smile and sharp wit ~~had~~ captured him at a town meeting ~~he'd promised to attend~~ ~~but~~ ~~had actually~~, ~~wanted to avoid~~ he had not succeeded in avoiding. They'd ~~been~~ were married a year before Sutton's murder, and the happiness they'd ~~found~~ shared had softened the shock. Still, ~~at about the time of when~~ Sutton's death, was killed ~~a~~, Neilly

~~noticed that a~~ -feeling of anxiety ~~had become general in~~ began to permeate the town ~~itself, seeming as though~~ to parallel his own loss, ~~though unrelated~~ while apparently unrelated to its immediate cause. Few people had really known Jack Sutton. He had been ~~an a~~ an humble man of good works without popular recognition. Neilly sat quietly, wondering what umbra shadowed the public spirit as if it were bound to his own.

He broke ~~the~~ his reverie and finished the check of his sketches, and then closed them into a vinyl folder. The larger altar platform, the new baptistery, and the redesigned social hall would satisfy ~~father~~ Father Sims and; assure the assent of the building committee. It was ~~Not~~ the sort of thing he'd ~~he'd had much to do with~~ done before, but it was a good contract. He set the folder aside as the doorbell summoned. ~~and~~ h Shortly, he opened the ~~to~~ door to welcome Calvin Greves.

"Mike, I'm glad you were home." Greves stepped inside. ~~as~~ Neilly shook the proffered hand, ~~spoke speaking and spoke~~ as warmly as he could.

"Glad you called, Cal, it's been a while. Come in." Neilly led Greves through the living room into the study he'd fashioned from an extra bedroom at the rear of his small house.

"Take the armchair, ~~what~~ What can I get you, coffee?"

"Coffee is fine, thanks. Sugar, no cream." Greves sat down, ~~laid~~ laying his jacket and briefcase on a small table. He looked around the room. "Not bad, Mike, maybe I ought to retire, too."

"My life's been better here, Cal. Maybe they *could* get along without you."

"Sure, but I'm not ready to let them. There's too much facing us now, both at home and abroad, ~~all~~ all the troubles that have sprung up since Waco, you know."

Neilly knew all right.

"I was about to arrange a design conference this morning, Cal, but it can wait," he said. ~~as~~ h He left to get the coffee.

His life had been good in Morton City, and he wanted to keep it that way, keep doing the work he'd been schooled ~~for~~ for and had abandoned for years: work he had now finally reestablished. He was glad Trudy was busy at school. Whatever Greves had to say, he hoped he'd be done with it quickly. He poured two cups from the coffeemaker

he kept going most of the day, got out sugar and the non-dairy creamer ~~he used,~~ and returned to the study.

Greves was thumbing through one of ~~the~~ a his design magazines.

“Must be a satisfying profession, Mike.”

Neilly nodded, sipped his coffee, and waited for the other to declare himself. The clatter of someone delivering a load of lumber across the road carried through the open window, ~~and~~. Neilly stood, closed it, ~~and gave up on waiting~~ got to the point.

“Is this really a social visit, Cal, or are you here on Bureau business? What is it you have to say about Jack Sutton?”

Greves looked sharply over his raised cup.

“Just a hunch I have, Mike. ~~L~~ Let me get to it in my own way. Besides, can’t we just be friends for five minutes after all ~~years~~ these years?”

“Sure, but is this really about you and me?”

“In one way, if it weren’t, I wouldn’t be here, Mike. But yes, I need your help on something. I think if you’ll listen I can convince you there’s a human duty involved. If it’s not yours, it’s still mine and someone else’s. But I know you, Mike. I hope we’ll be together on this.”

“It’s not just the Bureau, then? Something personal?”

Greves shrugged. “Will you listen?”

Neilly knew the man. ~~He K~~ new he’d would have to wait for whatever the hunch was that involved Sutton. He ~~took~~ calmed the edginess ~~out of~~ from his voice.

“I know you’re a good man, Cal. I’ll listen, but I have to tell you my attitude hasn’t changed toward what I saw the Bureau turning into—a paramilitary force with the powers of a secret police agency.”

“Neither has mine, and I think I know more about your anger than anyone else’s s in the organization, ~~Mike. How~~ and how it affected your family. I know you had a hard time with the Bureau’s background, COINTELPRO and all, when you first started. And I know the Waco mess seemed ~~to you~~ like the last straw to you. That’s the human aspect of the organization, ~~;~~ ; people screw up. You can’t just ignore all the things that have gone right ~~—~~ ...”

“I missed the Murrah ~~building~~Building bombing. I’d already quit,” Neilly said grimly.

“So you ~~had~~did,” Greves said. For a moment his face reddened, ~~he~~He shifted restlessly, leaned forward as if about to retort, then relaxed, ~~and~~and settled back again. “I didn’t come here for an argument, Mike. I need your help in this town: ~~;~~: Morton City, Washington. Right here. Right now.”

There was muted desperation in his words. Sympathy and curiosity weakened Neilly’s resistance. He regretted mentioning the Murrah Building.

“Okay. I’m listening. ~~What involves me so importantly~~ How does this involve me?”

“It starts with the project at Yellow Butte. What do you know about that, Mike?”

“I’ve heard things about it. Nobody’s heard much more than gossip.”

“It’s being built by a loosely organized consortium of industry and ~~is~~government ~~it is~~ it is controlled by the government through the Pentagon. The Eramond Corporation is the main contractor.”

“Eramond—~~Computers~~computers and electronics?” Neilly began to sense what Greves was worried about. “How do you mean loosely organized?”

“Congress has too little effective oversight on directed energy technology. You can count the congressional experts on the fingers of one hand. Without careful oversight, Eramond might dominate more than the project. I’m disturbed by the man representing Eramond; here. If what I suspect is true, we’re dealing with people likely to abuse power.”

Outside, a group of children shouted over their street game. Their voices brought Neilly a sudden memory of other children’s voices; his daughter, Lynette’s, and her playmates’ in the early twilights of other years. She was fourteen now, with a fragile prettiness that made his heart ache to see her again, a privilege he’d denied himself for too long.

This possible detour in his simple life could make it impossible to bring ~~her~~his daughter out for a the visit he had been planning. He ~~wouldn’t want any more hurt for her or her mother.~~ would not put Lynette or her mother in harm’s way again. He remembered the mixed surge of anguish and anger he’d felt one hot summer night when Lynette was

seven. He'd been lying awake, unable to sleep, when ~~s~~Suddenly, the child's scream of terror had sent him instantly out of bed and halfway up the hall stairway. He hadn't finished the climb. Adrenaline and fear had urged a leap upward to pull himself over the rail of the landing and into Lynette's bedroom. There ~~—, she—huddled~~she huddled, trembling, against the corner of her bed and the wall. She had heard a strangled, growling sound loud enough to ~~awaken~~wake her. Mike had heard the same sound: ~~;~~ it seemed ~~t~~The sound of someone struggling to breathe through a cut throat. With the lights on, Lynette's "nightmare" was gone, but not his own. To his wife, Jennifer's, sleepy questions he had said the obvious, "...a nightmare." She's okay." What else was there to say?

?

~~—~~And now there was Trudy. Could he keep her clear of ~~danger~~this?

~~_____~~What ~~did~~ could ~~—~~Yellow Butte have to do with Sutton's death? Greves ~~—had spoken of~~spoke of anger. ~~Somewhere in his own—~~Neilly knew from experience ~~that it was more than that:~~ it was also fear. What ~~had been~~Greves said ~~of~~about directed energy and Eramond reminded ~~him—~~him of ~~his own s~~Sleepless nights, listening to ~~whispering~~angry voices that no one else would hear. If he had not understood what radio wave technology could ~~do,~~ those ~~at~~ episodes would have sent him to a psychiatrist.

Whatever he had done in the military, ~~or~~ in the Bureau, to attract abuse, he had understood the moral ground of what was happening: ethical promise twisted by arrogant stupidity. ~~Twisted by people with the cover of national security, surely, and~~ ~~twisted surely with the cover of national security.~~ He ~~had waited.~~ had decided to wait. ~~It had to come out,~~ ~~It had to come out and~~ become public knowledge sooner or later, ~~so~~ he'd ~~thought~~had thought. It hadn't. His own nightmares had come and gone, but he ~~couldn't be~~ wasn't convinced ~~they were~~it was gone forever. What was Yellow Butte ~~designed~~ to be? ~~Was it~~ ~~A~~ a legitimate defense system? Directed energy as light or sound waves translated into ~~what—~~humanity's benefit, ~~—~~or ~~was it~~ some new proof of inhumanity? He sympathized with Greves's concern, ~~—~~alright. He balanced a question ~~between~~ that sympathy and ~~his own~~well-experienced caution.

"Is it the Yellow Butte project ~~itself~~ you're worried about, ~~it's~~ the product, or ~~the~~ people in control?" ~~Neilly allowed himself to be drawn further in.~~

“All three, but what’s your guess about the product?”

“The Eramond Company leads me to guess that -it might be part of an electronic anti-missile shield or a ground defense system.”

“I thought you’d guess that much.” Greves nodded.

“Is it operating?”

“No, the planning is complete, - though. I can give you more detail on what I’m immediately worried about, if ~~we can~~ I have a deal.”

“You’ll have to tell me more,” Neilly insisted.

“Okay. I’ll tell you about the Bureau’s interest, the *official* reason I’m here.”

~~The ironic~~ His caustic emphasis told Neilly that Greves was pushing beyond his orders and probably getting catching heat ~~on it~~. He’d done that before, and been reprimanded, even when it turned out well. But ~~it~~ Greves’ willingness to risk for a just outcome Greves’ commitment to outcome was one of the characteristics of the man ~~that~~ Neilly liked most.

“Okay, fill me in.”

“We can’t pin it down to formal charges yet, but it involves a tip we’ve had from the Treasury on a flow of money into the local bank. The source is an investment company, but the amounts are sometimes large enough to be suspicious as dividends. The funds seem to be staying in town or going out slowly, so it’s tough to follow through the reporting system.” Greves reached inside ~~the~~ his attaché briefcase ~~he carried~~, pulled out a manila envelope, and dropped it on the table between them.

“You’ll recognize someone there.”

The photo was of two men standing on a boat landing. ~~An~~ an obscured sailboat ~~recognizable by the~~ rising rose up behind them. The visible shore suggested a vacation place. Smiling into the camera was Dr. Morris Reiger, Chairman of the Morton City School Board. The doctor’s taller companion held his arm about the doctor’s shoulders in a way that ~~almost~~ seemed almost threatening.

“What about the other guy.” Greves asked. ~~“d~~ “d Does he seem at all familiar?” Greves asked hopefully.

Neilly stared at the tall, unsmiling figure, and then shook his head.

“He’s not anyone I know. What’s this about? How is Reiger connected to this?”

“I’m not sure. That’s the problem. The big guy is Alden Kornwith. He and Reiger got chummy about six years ago over at Port Haley on the Sound. He’s *my* problem because he’s here. He was here about two years ago. Now he’s here again. He keeps showing up in places where there’s trouble brewing, or where the Bureau expects trouble.” Greves paused. “Right now, the Bureau’s concerned about the political climate here. This new environmental group, the Terra League, for example, and the ranchers’ group, the Sunset Union, ~~is-are~~ headed by some troubling reactionaries.”

Anything threatening the status quo would be troubling to some FBI people, Neilly well knew. Greves was suggesting the Terra League and the Sunset Union were more the Bureau’s concern than his own. His concern was over something else ~~over which he was being given trouble. that had turned up the burners.~~ “Resistance from Washington,” he’d said. Neilly was beginning to surmise it involved a political agenda connected to Eramond. ~~W~~ What Greves feared would be the subversion of a troubling, though legitimate Defense project.

“We thought ~~your being since you are~~ on the scene here, ~~and being~~ part of the town life, that you might help us to cover this guy, Kornwith. Your position on the School Planning Commission, for example, ~~puts you next to h~~ His pal Reiger, ~~is an~~ ex-officio on the Commission as school board chairman, right?”

“That’s right. He’s irritating, but good at it.”

“It’s a connection.” Greves paused again. “I should tell you, Mike, when I suggested bringing you in, nobody upstairs objected. It seems you still rate pretty high with the Special Agent in Seattle, ~~and~~ with the Internal Security section chief, too.”

Beyond the flattery, mention of the SAC and the IS chief meant big doings were afoot.

“You mentioned this suspicious money flow ~~you’re suspicious of~~ in the context of the Yellow Butte project. Are they connected?”

“I think so, Mike. I think the Eramond Company, the money and, the potential for trouble are all there together. But I can’t guarantee Washington will see it that way.” Greves stood, ~~paced~~, paced his side of the small room once and sat down again. ~~and began the pacing the room.~~

“I do know that Yellow Butte is a legitimate and necessary national defense

project.”

“It’s the people involved you’re concerned about.”

“It’s the people involved and the dangerous power Yellow Butte—can put into their hands. Can we deal, Mike?”

“We can deal. I don’t know much about the project, but I can guess you’re talking about the abuse of electronics as internal control. ~~Somebody~~, that there is somebody setting up to manipulate people for purposes you’re suspicious of.”

Greves put the photo back in its envelope, ~~and then~~ the envelope back in his briefcase. With the briefcase ~~shut, shut and~~ glasses readjusted from their ~~slip~~ droop down his nose, he finally answered. “Security concerns turned into control by electronic manipulation, yes. That *may* be what we’re talking ~~about~~. If that’s the case, it can become governmental by wrongful authority, ~~Mike~~. It can be ~~Control~~ controlled by people who hide in the shadow of national necessity.”

Greves paused as if to settle his feelings, ~~and~~ went on.

“Covert work is what I do. Still, how and why it’s done have always been my measure of it, Mike. I’m here talking to you because I know your measure—you’ve proven it. We’ve talked about the troubles brewing here. If people are manipulating conflict to serve private agendas, that threatens all of us. With all the advances in equipment and weapons, we’re a long way down the road from Tesla’s making lightning with machines. Technology won’t go away. Its uses and abuses have become crucial.”

No doubt about that, ~~or about~~ the sincerity of the man saying it. He understood Greves by the gold wedding band, the slightly frayed shirt-sleeve, and the conservative tie under the square jaw. Neilly nodded ~~agreement~~, agreement and probed Greves further.

“You suggested being held out on by the Bureau . . .”

“I said Washington. That *could* be the Bureau. There’s power by influence that even the Bureau has to be wary of. Politics has sharp teeth, strange weapons.”

“I understand.” Neilly wondered if he did understand or only accepted the sad fact that ~~“necessity,”~~ whether real or politically convenient, rarely lost its war with democratic values. Neilly caught himself fingering the skin above his right ~~ear, where~~ ear where a boyhood accident had left a sensitive spot. ~~He~~ stopped when he saw Greves’s smile.

“I used to see you doing that when a case was going badly,” Greves said.

“I guess one is now, Cal. I can’t think of any way of turning -you down.”

Greves pulled the briefcase onto his knees, and reached for ~~the~~ his windbreaker on the table.

“Okay. What else do you want to know?”

Neilly repressed a moment’s irritation.

“Jack Sutton,” he said. “What is it you have on that? Sutton and I were in the Army together. We were close. The shooting happened three years after I got here. Sutton retired about the time I left the job. Is there something new on the shooting?”

“Nothing solid, but my hunches have a pretty fair rating. Between you and me, I’m not convinced Jack Sutton was killed in what the police called it, ~~a robbery gone wrong.~~ ‘a robbery gone wrong.’ -I have a feeling it was something different, maybe something connected to what we’ve talked about.”

Neilly was somehow not surprised.

“How?”

Greves gave a shrug of helplessness. “I can’t say. It is just a hunch involving Kornwith’s comings and goings. Maybe I shouldn’t have said anything at all. But Sutton’s son, Glen, doesn’t accept the robbery story either. He’s angry, ~~and he~~ could make trouble for himself. If we could discover a link, that might do the young man and his mother a real service, ~~not to mention the rest of us~~ if I’m right about Kornwith.”

Neilly felt both ~~disappointment~~ disappointed and hopeful. He swallowed the disappointment. “That it might, ~~;~~” he said. If Kornwith was the key, he had to know more. ~~More~~ about both Kornwith and Reiger.

“You think this Kornwith is a troublemaker with the connections to make it nasty and that could explain the resistance you’re feeling in the Bureau?”

“Right.”

“But how is Reiger involved? He’s practically the citizen activist personified.”

“What I’ve said about Kornwith is based on observation more than ~~information,~~ information and ~~not anything~~ nothing I could act on. But if we can uncover part of his line, maybe we’ll be able to follow it and, know how Reiger’s involved. You don’t like the doctor much, do you?”

“No. But it’s mainly just his lining up with Roy Severs at the School Planning

Commission meetings. The Reverend Severs is a real pain in the ass—he wants a course called “Social Values for a Christian Nation” in the schools. You get the idea.” Greves chuckled.

“Yes, but that’s his right, isn’t it? —Reiger’s supporting him is interesting, though. Keep your eye on how that develops. I won’t contact you this way again. If it gets difficult, we’ll set up a contact code for meetings. You know the drill. If you want to phone or write me, use this number and address and I’ll get back to you.”

He handed Neilly a card, extended his hand in thanks, and turned to leave. As he closed the door, Neilly was thinking that it wasn’t like Greves to express mere hunches about crimes like the Sutton death. Neilly deduced that he must know more about Jack Sutton, Eramond and Sutton’s connection to Kornwith than he’d said. It would have done little good to push him to reveal what he wouldn’t or couldn’t reveal. Still, it suggested a different, more personal kind of evil than Neilly had considered. If that evil had already touched not only Jack, ~~but~~but also young Glen Sutton, how many others would it threaten?

* * *

Father Joel Sims was pleased with the plans Neilly brought him. He rattled on as Neilly tried to shake the upheaval of uncertainty and strange hope his meeting with Greves had evoked.

“You’ve done a fine job, Michael, ; I like the sense of airiness and space you’ve provided. Churches should be welcoming, open, not closed and barricaded in the way ~~the past has made them seem.~~ they have seemed in the past”

They sat in Sims’s office in the parish house attached to the church. Sims looked up from the pages of Neilly’s design and grinned.

“How about a little drink to celebrate?”

“I’ll take the drink, but isn’t the celebration a little premature?”

“You mean the Building Committee’s response?” Sims took a bottle and two glasses from the cabinet behind his desk and poured a short, straight Scotch for each of them, ~~indicating offering Neilly~~ water for mix. ~~if Neilly wanted it~~

“They’re good people Michael. They’ll support my approval.” Neilly wished it weren’t so easy.

“I’d like to discuss the design with them, of course.”

“Oh yes, no question about that.” They fell silent for a moment, sipping their drinks. Finishing his, Sims broke the silence.

-“You’ve got a sense of what I mentioned, Michael, being bold with a religious space; ~~yet~~ while maintaining a sense of its sanctity. I know the committee will feel the same. That puts me in mind of a question I’ve had about you, ~~too~~. I know you’ve been a Catholic—do you ever think of coming back?”

Neilly had known this would be coming sooner or later. “I think of it, but not often and not with any conviction that I should. I think the Church’s answers are too easy.”

“Do you believe in God?”

“I believe in the gGood. If ~~the~~ gGood has a mysterious source and that is God, then I believe in God.”

“You’ll do it all by yourself then. I could call *your* answers easy. No help, no community to share the terrible burden of seeking out God?”

Neilly was growing weary. He’d been over this ground too many times.

“I know good when I experience it. I try to support it. If that is seeking out God, the burden is not always terrible. But I have to have some sleep tonight, father. Thanks for the drink.”

He stood to shake the priest’s hand and went out into the night wondering how heavy thate burden might be.