

Chapter 1

The stranger came into the office a little after midnight. He looked around and spotted Vin. As Vin walked up to him, the guy shifted his feet restlessly.

“Hi. Do you have your clearance?” Vin asked politely.

“Don’t need clearance, dude,” the guy said carelessly. “I’m just here to update some code.”

“Well, I need to see your badge,” Vin said.

“See!” the guy said with attitude. He thrust a badge toward Vin’s face. The back of Vin’s neck burned.

The guy walked over to a desk. He opened his laptop. He looked about twenty-two, not

much older than Vin. He was tall, with spiky hair and heavy black eyebrows. Vin had never seen him before. No surprise there. Working the graveyard shift, he hardly got to meet anybody. Almost everyone worked during the day.

Vin began reading a newspaper. He glanced over at the stranger every few minutes. The guy said he was updating code. Why now? The code was basically set. Websound was due to launch its new service in just three days. It didn't make sense.

Vin walked over to the fridge at the back of the big room. He grabbed a soda. Catherine, the boss, made sure that the fridge was always well-stocked. Items were free for everyone. It was one of the great perks that came with a job at Websound.

Another great thing was the Websound building itself. It was actually an old high school. When Catherine bought it, she had kept the building as it was. So employees

had meetings in the auditorium. They used the pool for parties. And everyone played basketball up on the roof. Small departments used classrooms. The main coding room, where Vin was now, had once been the gym. All of the engineers usually worked here.

Vin stared at the stranger's back. As if the guy could feel his eyes, he turned around. Vin quickly looked away. He sipped his soda like he didn't have a thought in his head.

“Nobody can know what we're doing. It's that simple.” That's what Catherine had told Vin when he was hired. “This is our biggest product. If it doesn't succeed, the venture capital money will dry up.”

Websound's new program was called SoundUp. With it, you could stream music across all devices. Download music. Buy music. Add music to your social media posts. People could even make and sell their own music. Its uses were endless.

Vin knew several companies were racing to produce a program like it. Billions were at stake. Whoever reached the finish line first had it made. SoundUp could be the winner. Its launch date had been set. It would be in three days.

Vin walked soundlessly back toward his chair. He studied the stranger. The guy was hunched over the keyboard. His mouth hung open. Even at a distance, Vin could see the slight rise and fall of his shoulders. The guy was breathing hard.

Vin's thoughts whirled. What was going on? The guy looked excited or scared—or both. Something wasn't right. He bent over the paper, pretending to be completely absorbed in the sports page.

After a few minutes he heard a faint but unmistakable sound. The guy was putting a flash drive into a USB port.

“Anyone bringing in a drive from outside

is fired—period,” Catherine had said. “We can’t afford the risk.”

Vin got up noisily. Crumpling the newspaper, he headed toward the restroom. Once inside, he closed the door with a slam. He texted security.

“Terrell,” he texted. “911. There’s a guy in here with a flash drive. When he leaves, I’ll follow behind. You catch him at the door.”

“Right,” texted Terrell. “Keep your distance, just in case. Leave the heavy stuff to me.”

Vin thought he heard a soft noise outside the door. Opening it quickly, he was about to look around. But just then the stranger charged at him. His arm was raised over his head! Vin swerved. But something scraped his ear. Then it struck him heavily on the shoulder. He grunted with pain and went down.

Chapter 2

Vin lay on the floor, his shoulder throbbing. The stranger's feet were in front of his face. Then Vin reached out and grabbed the man behind the knees. It was one swift move. The guy fell over on top of him.

Before his attacker could right himself, Vin rolled over hard. He pinned the guy to the floor. His head went down with a solid thump.

“Freeze, man! Hold it right there!” Terrell was standing in the doorway. “Don't you even blink!” The security guard ran up. He bent over the stranger. The cold metal of his gun was against the man's cheek.

“Terrell!” cried Vin. “I didn't even hear you come up here.”

Terrell grinned. “I’ve got cat feet,” he said. “Nobody hears me when I don’t want to be heard.”

Vin saw a bronze paperweight shaped like a dolphin lying on the floor. He touched his wounded ear. His fingers came away bloody.

Terrell waved his gun at the stranger. “Get up!” he ordered.

The man slowly staggered to his feet. He rubbed the back of his head.

Terrell’s strong arms reached out for the stranger’s chest. It was like he was about to frisk him.

The man held up his hands. “No way! You don’t even have the right to touch me!” he said. “I want a lawyer. I’m not saying anything until I have a lawyer.”

“Stay with him, Terrell,” said Vin. “I’m going to check out his desk.”

Vin jogged back to the desk where the stranger had been working. He opened the