

STAY ON THE LINE

A Cyber Thriller Short Story
A Soft Targets story

Lennan Carver

STAY ON THE LINE

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Lennan Carver is a pen name.

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STAY ON THE LINE

The script said to cry first and talk second, so Daniel cried. He had gotten good at it. Marcus timed the first sob on his phone and you lost a point if it ran past four seconds, because after four seconds the old people stopped answering questions and started asking them.

"Nana," he said. "Nana, it's me."

On the other end, in a kitchen he would never see, a woman said the name taped to his monitor, and the clock in the corner of his screen began to count.

"Cody? Cody, honey, what's wrong? Where are you?"

He let the second sob go shorter than the first. The box took his breath and gave it back a half second later in a voice that was not his, a young man's voice from Ohio with a catch in it, and he had learned to wait for the delay the way you wait for an echo off a wall.

"I'm in trouble, Nana. I did something. I was driving and there was a woman in a crosswalk and I didn't see her, and they said she's pregnant, and they put me in a car and I'm at the county, and my nose is broken, that's why I sound like this. They took my phone. This is the phone they let me use. Please don't tell Mom. Please. She'll never talk to me again."

Every sentence was on the card. He had said them nine hundred times in eleven weeks and the box had said them back in nine hundred voices. The card also said *pause here*, and he paused, and in the pause he heard a kitchen: a tap running and then not running, the small clink of something set down on a counter, and a woman breathing through her nose the way people breathe when they are deciding not to panic.

"Are you hurt?" she said. "Cody. Is the lady hurt?"

"They won't tell me anything. There's a lawyer, he's the one who let me call. He said there's bail. Nana, I don't have anybody else."

"How much," she said.

Marcus, standing behind the next desk with his arms folded, gave him the thumb without looking up from his phone. The number on Daniel's screen said 5:12 a.m., which was 6:42 in the evening in Wooster, Ohio, where Marjorie Bell, seventy-four, widow of Walter, grandmother of Cody, was making dinner for one and had just been told that the person she loved most in the world was sitting in a holding cell with a broken face.

"Hold on," Daniel said. "He's coming. The lawyer. He wants to talk to you. Nana, I love you. I'm so sorry."

He pressed the button that put her on hold, and the box went quiet, and for three seconds he was only himself.

* * *

The floor was called the American room because the American shift ran there, ten at night until eight in the morning, forty desks in five rows, one grey box on every desk with a cable running to a headset, and on the far wall a whiteboard with forty names and two columns of numbers. The column on the left was the week. The column on the right was what you had brought in. His name was in the third row. The left said 12,000. The right said 3,000. It was Thursday, and the week ended at eight.

Above the whiteboard, in English and Chinese and Thai, on a printed sheet that had been laminated so it would survive the humidity, were the rules. There were only four, and the first one was the one Marcus said most.

STAY ON THE LINE. A mark who hangs up is a mark who thinks.

The box was the reason the American room existed. It did not need much. You fed it ten seconds of the grandson, taken from whatever he had posted, and it gave you the rest of him. Whatever Daniel said into the headset came out the other end in that voice, a half second late, with the accent and the breath and the age of a boy who had never left Ohio. There were forty grandsons in it tonight, and a lawyer, and two police officers, and a woman from the clerk's office, and you switched between them with a key.

Benjamin, who usually closed for him, was not on the floor. Benjamin had ended last week red and had gone upstairs to the training room, and had come back Tuesday with two small round burns on the inside of his left wrist, the size of a shirt button, and had sat at his desk in a way that kept his back from touching the chair, and this morning his chair was empty and Marcus had said Daniel would close his own calls today. That was not a favor. A closer took a share of every close. Today Daniel got the whole number and the whole risk, and he understood by now that Marcus, who had been on this floor for two years and had bought himself from the fourth row to a phone with a stopwatch on it, did not give anyone anything.

Eleven weeks ago Daniel Otieno had been in Nairobi answering an advertisement for a customer service position in Bangkok, twelve hundred US dollars a month plus housing, English speakers preferred, flights paid. He had a diploma in business administration and a sister in her second year at Kenyatta University and a mother who did not need to know how the fees were being paid. There had been a real hotel in Bangkok for one night, with a real breakfast. He had sent Achieng a photo of the breakfast. Then there had been a van, and a long road, and a river at night with a boat on it, and a man on the far bank who had said one word to the driver, and Daniel had kept that word

the way you keep a stone in your shoe, so that you never forget where it is. Myawaddy.

His passport was in a drawer in an office on the fourth floor. His debt was eight thousand dollars for recruitment, transport, and food, and it went up every week by the cost of the food. On the employment form he had filled in at the hotel, under next of kin, he had written his sister's name and number, because that was what you did on a form.

He took her off hold.

* * *

He switched the box from Cody to the profile the floor called the Lawyer, a fifty-year-old man's voice with a Midwestern flatness that had been built from a real public defender's voicemail greeting, and he sat up straighter, because the body does what the voice does whether you ask it to or not.

"Mrs. Bell? This is Harlan Pierce, I'm with the public defender's office here in Franklin County. I've been assigned to your grandson. First of all, he's all right. He's shaken up and he's got a fracture to the nose and they've had him seen, and I want you to know I'm going to do everything I can for him. Are you able to talk for a few minutes?"

"Yes. Yes. What did he do?"

"I'm not going to sugarcoat it. He's being held on a charge of vehicular assault, and because there's a pregnancy involved, the judge has set bail at nine thousand five hundred dollars. Now, there's a gag order on this case, Mrs. Bell, and I have to be honest with you, that's the part that's going to be hard. It means you can't discuss it with anyone, not his mother, not a friend, until the arraignment. If it gets out, it hurts him. Do you understand?"

"I understand." A pause. "Nine thousand five hundred."

"Yes ma'am. Cash. The court doesn't take cards on bail after hours. Is that something you might be able to manage tonight?"

He typed while he talked, because the notes field was the second rule. Every call got notes, live, and Marcus read the notes from his phone. Under Marjorie Bell he typed: Widow. Believes. Asked *how much before asked why*.

"Walt kept cash in the house," she said. "He didn't trust the banks after 2008. I've got six thousand in the freezer, in a coffee can, God help me. I can get the rest in the morning when the bank opens. I can drive down to Columbus myself, Mr. Pierce, I'd rather do that. I'd rather see him."

"I understand that, and I wish it were that simple. The judge won't release him on partial bail, and he's not going to let him sit in county overnight either, not with the injury. What I can do is this. The court has a bonded courier service for exactly this situation. A man named Ray will come to your house tonight, with a receipt from the clerk's office. You put the cash in an envelope, you put the envelope inside a book, any book, so it's not visible, and you hand it to him. He brings it to me, I walk it across to the clerk, and Cody sleeps in his own bed. Six thousand gets him released to my custody tonight and the balance gets paid at arraignment. I'll make that work."

He typed: 6k cash in house. Freezer. Agreeable. Then, because it was true, he typed: Kind.

He looked up and Marcus was no longer at the next desk. Marcus was at the whiteboard with his phone to his ear, speaking Twi, which he spoke only to the dispatcher in New Jersey, and Daniel understood that Ray had already been sent.

"Mr. Pierce," Marjorie Bell said. "Can I talk to him again? Just for a minute. I just want to hear him."

The card said the answer to this was yes. The card said a grandmother who has heard the voice twice pays faster than one who has heard it once. He pressed the key.

"Nana."

"Cody. Honey. Listen to me. I'm going to help you, all right? I'm going to help you. But I want you to do something for me first. I want you to say the thing you used to say to Biscuit. When you'd come in the door. You remember."

The lead sheet said: *Dog, Biscuit, deceased 2024. Posted a photo. It did not say what Cody Bell used to say to his dog when he came in the door, and the forty seconds the box had been built from were a young man in a driveway shouting at a truck about a part that had not come.*

He cried. It was the only thing on the card for a question you could not answer, and he made it long, longer than four seconds, and he said, "Nana, I can't, my face, I can't," and he listened to the kitchen.

The tap did not run. Nothing was set down.

"Cody is in my kitchen," she said, and her voice had not changed at all, which was the worst part. "He drove up this afternoon from Columbus. He's eating my meatloaf and he's looking at me right now because I put my hand up. He's fine, honey. Whoever you are, he's fine."

He reached for the key that ended the call.

"Don't," she said. "Stay on the line."

* * *

Rule three on the laminated sheet was that a dead line was dead time. When a mark said the word *scam*, or the word *police*, or laughed, you logged it and you were on the next number in under a minute, because the box had forty more grandsons in it and the night was short. He had done it a hundred times. His finger was on the key.

He did not press it, and he was honest enough with himself, even then, to know why. The clock on his screen said 14:22 and was still counting, and Marcus, at the whiteboard, could see the clock and could not hear the call. A fourteen-minute call on the American room floor was a live one. A fourteen-minute call was money on the way. As long as the clock ran, nothing on this floor would happen to him. That was the whole truth of it. He stayed on the line because staying on the line, with a woman who knew exactly what he was, was the safest place he had been in eleven weeks.

He slept on the sixth floor, twelve to a room, with a guard on a plastic chair at the top of the stairs and razor wire on the roof, which someone had climbed anyway in his second week, and had not been talked about since. The windows of the American room looked east, over the river, and on a clear morning you could watch the lights of Mae Sot go off one by one as the sun came up over Thailand, a country he had been in for a single night and a breakfast. He had thought about the wire more than once. He had never thought about it while a call was live.

"Are you still there?" she said.

"Yes."

"I want to ask you something, and I'd like you to answer me in your own voice, not his. Can you do that?"

"No." The box said no in Cody Bell's voice, with Cody Bell's small Ohio vowel in it, and he heard it come back a half second late and felt something go over in his stomach. "The voice is on the machine. I can't turn it off. Only the supervisor."

"All right. Then just tell me. Is somebody making you do this?"

He looked at the whiteboard. He looked at Benjamin's empty chair.

"Yes."

"I read about you," Marjorie Bell said. "In the magazine that comes with the membership. There was a man from Ghana. They told him it was a job in Thailand and they drove him across a river and took his passport, and if he didn't bring in enough money they put him in a room. I read it twice. I thought it was the saddest thing I ever read, and I thought, well, it's over there, and it isn't anything I can do anything about. And then the phone rang."

"Yes," he said. "That's it. That's where I am."

"What's your name?"

Rule four was that you did not have a name. You had the name on the card. He had said Cody nine hundred times, and Tyler and Brandon and Josh and Michael and Ethan, and he had said Harlan Pierce and Robert Kessler and Officer Dan Whitlock, and none of them had cost him anything.

"Daniel," he said, and the box said it in Cody's voice, and it was the only time in eleven weeks he had wanted to break the thing with his hands.

"Daniel. Where are you, Daniel?"

"I don't know the town. It's on a river. The other side of the river is Thailand. The drivers said a word when we crossed." He had never said it out loud. "Myawaddy."

"Say it again. I'm writing."

"Myawaddy. M-Y-A-W-A-D-D-Y. I'm from Nairobi. Kenya. There are a lot of us here from Africa. Uganda, Ethiopia. And from everywhere. There are Chinese boys who have it worse than we do."

"And what happens to you if I hang up?"

He told her about the whiteboard. He told her about the two columns, and Thursday, and eight o'clock, and about the training room, and about Benjamin's back. He did not make it long. It felt strange to say it plainly, as facts, the way you would give a statement.

While he was saying it, Marcus came past the row and put a printed sheet on the desk beside his keyboard without breaking stride, the way a waiter puts down a check. The next number. Daniel read it because he could not help reading it. Dolores Kraus, 81, Sarasota, Florida. Grandson Ethan, 19, University of Florida. Calls him *Bug*. There were three grandsons after that. The sky was going grey over Mae Sot, and in Sarasota it was a quarter to seven in the evening, and Dolores Kraus was, at this moment, alive in a house with the phone on the hook. He turned the sheet face down.

She was quiet for a moment. He could hear a chair pulled out in Wooster, and the small effort of a woman sitting down. Then she said, in the same voice she had used to ask how much, "Then how much do they want for you?"

* * *

Every man on the floor knew his number the way you know your own weight. Eight thousand dollars was what it had said on the form at the hotel. It was twelve thousand now, because the number moved. Families paid it. That was known. A family in Kampala had paid for a boy in the second row, and the boy had been walked to the gate one morning and had not come back, and everyone had decided to believe he was home. Other families had paid and the boy had been moved to a different building, and the number had started again.

"Twelve thousand," he said.

"I have six in the freezer."

"Mrs. Bell."

"I have six thousand dollars in a coffee can and I was about to give it to a man who doesn't exist for a grandson who's eating my food. So I'd like to give it to you instead. You tell me how."

He sat very still, and the clock said 21:40, and he understood exactly how.

He would switch to the Lawyer. He would tell her the court had made an error, that the bail was in fact posted, that the courier was already en route and should be paid regardless, some words, any words, it did not matter what the words were, because she had already decided. Ray would come to her door in Wooster in an hour and she would hand him a book with six thousand dollars in it, and in New Jersey the dispatcher would count it, and in the morning the number beside Daniel Otieno's name on the whiteboard would say 9,000 instead of 3,000, and Marcus would put his hand on the back of his neck the way he did, and Daniel would not go upstairs this week. She would have given it to him. That was the difference. She would be the one person in nine hundred who had known what she was doing.

And it would not buy him. Not one dollar of it would touch the number on his form, because the six thousand would not be a payment from a family. It would be a close, a mark's money, the compound's money, and the man on the fourth floor would keep it, and it would prove to the man on the fourth floor that Daniel Otieno was worth keeping. A good week did not shorten anyone's stay. A good week was the reason you had one.

He thought about Achieng. He thought about how she had answered the phone the day he sent the breakfast photo, laughing, telling him not to eat everything.

"If you send it," he said, "it doesn't buy me. It buys the man upstairs another week of me. It goes on the board as money you gave a lawyer named Pierce for a grandson in jail, and they will think you're a fool, Mrs. Bell, and they'll call you again in a month with a different boy. That's what the six thousand does."

"Then what do I do."

"Two things." He was speaking quickly now, and quietly, though the box did not care how quietly he spoke. "The first one is a phone number. It's my sister. Her name is Achieng. It's a Kenyan number." He gave it to her, slowly, twice, and heard her pen. "They have that number. I wrote it on their form. When my week ends red, if it ends red enough, they are going to call her, and it's going to be my voice, and it's going to be crying, and it's going to ask for twelve thousand dollars. You need to tell her that it isn't me. Even if it is me. Tell her not to pay. Tell her to go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nairobi and say the word I gave you, and my name, and my passport number, which she has, and to keep saying it to anyone who will listen. People have come out of here. The government has sent planes. It happens when someone outside keeps saying a name."

"I'll call her tonight."

"It's two in the morning there."

"Then I'll wake her up. What's the second thing?"

"There's a man coming to your house."

He heard her go still.

"I typed the notes," he said. "That's a rule. The supervisor reads the notes. He read that you have six thousand in cash and he sent the courier before you asked me about your dog. His name is Ray, or that's the name he'll give. He'll say he's from the court, and he'll have a receipt with a seal on it, and he'll be polite. He is not from anywhere. He's the only one of us who's in your country, Mrs. Bell. He's the only one who can be arrested."

"How long?"

"An hour. Maybe less. Don't open the door. Call your police before he comes, not after. Tell them what time. Tell Cody."

"Cody's already got his phone out," she said. "He's been listening. He looks like he wants to drive to Myawaddy." A

sound that was almost a laugh, and then wasn't. "Daniel. What can I do for you? Not for your sister. For you."

He looked at the clock. 26:05. He looked at the rules.

"Hang up on me," he said. "Not now. Every time. Every time it's a voice you love and a story that can't wait and a man who says don't tell anyone. Hang up, and call the real number, and let it be rude. Rude is the only thing on this floor that hurts. Nine hundred people didn't hang up on me. If ten of them had, the man upstairs would have sent me somewhere else, and I'd be in a different room, but the room would be smaller."

"I'm not going to hang up on you," she said. "I'll do everything else. But I'm going to stay on the line until you have to go. Is that all right? Is that safe for you?"

"Yes," he said. "That's the safest thing there is."

* * *

So she stayed. She talked about Walt, who had driven a bread route for thirty-one years and had kept cash in the freezer because his own father had lost a farm. She talked about Cody's truck, and about the meatloaf, and about the magazine, and she asked him about Nairobi, and he told her about the matatus and the way his mother made ugali, and the box took every word of it and handed it to her in her grandson's voice, and after a while neither of them seemed to hear that anymore.

The clock passed thirty minutes, and then forty. Marcus came back from the whiteboard and stood behind Daniel's chair, and read the clock, and read the notes, which said 6k cash in house. Freezer. Agreeable. Kind, and put his hand on the back of Daniel's neck, warm, and squeezed once, and went away.

At 5:58 the dispatcher's line on Marcus's phone rang, and Marcus answered it in Twi and walked to the window

with it, and stood at the window a long time with his back to the floor.

At 6:04 Marcus came back and did not say anything. He took the mouse from Daniel's hand and scrolled up in the notes to read them again from the beginning, slowly, the way a man reads a document that is going to be used. Then he scrolled the call log, and looked at the clock, which said 52:11, and at the number under it, which said 0.

"Ray's not answering," Marcus said, conversationally, to the room. Then, to Daniel: "Fifty-two minutes. Kind."

He reached past Daniel's shoulder and pressed the key.

The kitchen in Wooster, Ohio went away. The box went quiet. There was a moment in which Daniel could hear the whole American room, forty headsets, forty grandsons crying in forty voices at once, and under it the hum of the air conditioning that never quite kept up.

"Come," Marcus said.

He stood. The whiteboard still said 3,000, and would say it at eight. In Nairobi it was half past two in the morning, and a phone was going to ring, and it would be his voice, and he would not be the one speaking. He had done what he could about that, in the voice of a boy from Ohio who was standing at his grandmother's front window right now with a telephone in his hand and the police already on the way.

Daniel walked toward the stairs.

Behind him, the clock on his screen stopped counting.

WHAT'S REAL IN THIS STORY

Nearly all of it. The parts I invented are at the end, marked.

The grandparent scam call center. On April 30, 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice announced charges against sixteen people in a "grandparent" or "family in need of bail" scam run from call centers in Santiago, Dominican Republic, against hundreds of seniors in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. The court filings describe the floor exactly as Daniel knows it. "Openers" called and impersonated a grandchild, typically claiming an arrest after a car accident involving a pregnant woman. "Closers" then came on as defense attorneys, police officers, or court staff and set the price. "Dispatchers" managed U.S.-based couriers who drove to the victims' homes, used false names, and handed over fake receipts. The calls were spoofed to look domestic. Defendants were extradited from the Dominican Republic through 2024 and 2025, and couriers in New York pleaded guilty. A separate case in the District of Massachusetts, with pleas entered in 2026, describes a second Dominican network that took more than five million dollars from over four hundred seniors using the same opener, closer, runner structure. (Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, press releases of April 30, 2024 and subsequent extradition and plea announcements, District of New Jersey and District of Massachusetts.)

The compound. Myawaddy is a real town in Myanmar's Karen State, on the Moei River across from Mae Sot, Thailand. In August 2023 the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) reported that credible sources put at least 120,000 people in Myanmar and around 100,000 in Cambodia in

situations where they were being forced to carry out online scams, most of them foreign nationals lured by fake job offers. Its February 2026 follow-up report, built on interviews with survivors from Bangladesh, China, India, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere, describes fortified compounds the size of towns, passports confiscated, targets enforced by beatings and electric shocks, people who missed monthly targets being held for hours in water tanks, and people being made to watch or carry out beatings of others. It lists impersonation scams among the work victims were forced to do. The rule that a mark who hangs up is a mark who thinks is my phrasing. The practice is theirs.

Kenyans, specifically. In February 2025, Kenya's Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs confirmed that 24 Kenyans had been released from Myanmar scam compounds on February 12 as part of a group of 261 people from 18 countries, and that 46 more were freed a week later. In December 2025 the same ministry announced it had repatriated 119 Kenyans after raids on compounds around Myawaddy and Shwe Kokko, with roughly 200 more still stranded in military shelters and Thai detention. Daniel's instruction to his sister is the only instruction that has been shown to work: a government that knows a name can sometimes get a person out.

The men upstairs. In 2025 the U.S. Treasury designated the Karen National Army (May 5), the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (November 12), and the Cambodia-based Prince Group (October 14, 146 targets, expanded again on June 23, 2026) as transnational criminal organizations for running or protecting scam compounds that target Americans. In November 2025 the Justice Department announced a Scam Center Strike Force focused on Burma, Cambodia, and Laos. (Sources: U.S. Department of the Treasury press releases; Department of Justice.)

The money on the other end. The FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center reported that in 2025 Americans aged 60 and over filed 201,266 complaints and reported losses of 7.7 billion dollars, up 59 percent in one year, with an average loss above 38,000 dollars. More than 3,100 of those complaints mentioned AI, and IC3 specifically describes voice cloning being used in "distress" scams that mimic a loved one in trouble. (Source: FBI IC3 2025 Internet Crime Report and 2025 Elder Fraud Report, April 2026.)

Marjorie's question. Asking for something only the real person would know is what the FTC has told families to do for years. It is the cheapest security control in the world and it worked on the first try.

What I invented. Two things. First, the box. Voice cloning from a few seconds of audio is real, and IC3 has logged it in grandparent-style calls. A device on every desk that converts a live caller's voice into the grandson's in real time, mid-conversation, with a lawyer and a police officer a keystroke away, is one step past what I have seen in a court filing. I do not expect it to stay that way for long. Second, the room. The grandparent-scam floors that U.S. prosecutors have documented were in the Dominican Republic and staffed by people who were paid. The compounds in Myawaddy that the UN has documented have run mostly investment and romance fraud, though impersonation is on the list. I put the Dominican script on a Myanmar floor. The two have not, as far as I can verify, been found in the same building. I would not bet on that either.

Every figure above was checked against the named source before publication. If one has moved, the source is where to look.

The other end of this call is Book 1 of this series, *Grandma, It's Me*, at cyberz.pro.

SOURCES

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- U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Massachusetts. Press releases on the Dominican Republic elder fraud call center prosecutions, 2025 and 2026.
- UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR). "Online Scam Operations and Trafficking into Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia: Recommendations for a Human Rights Response." August 29, 2023.
- UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR). Report and press release on abuses against people trafficked into scam centres, based on survivor interviews 2021 to 2025. February 2026.
- Republic of Kenya, Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs. Statements on the release of Kenyan nationals from Myanmar scam compounds, February 19, 2025, and on the repatriation of 119 Kenyans, December 22, 2025.
- U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control. Press releases: Karen National Army designation, May 5, 2025; Southeast Asian scam network designations, September 8, 2025; Prince Group designation, October 14, 2025; Democratic Karen

Benevolent Army designation and announcement of the Justice Department Scam Center Strike Force, November 12, 2025; Prince Group expansion, June 23, 2026.

Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internet Crime Complaint Center. 2025 Internet Crime Report and 2025 Elder Fraud Report. April 2026.

Federal Trade Commission. Consumer alerts on family emergency scams and AI voice cloning, 2023 onward.

U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime. National Elder Fraud Hotline, 1-833-372-8311.

IF THE VOICE IS YOUR GRANDCHILD'S

This page is for the kitchen. Tear it out or photograph it.

1. **Hang up.** Not "I'll call you back." Hang up. A caller who loves you will not be hurt by that. A caller who is lying is counting on you not doing it.
2. **Call the real number.** The grandchild's own phone, or their parent's. Not a number the caller gave you. If it goes to voicemail, that is not proof of anything. Keep going down the list.
3. **Ask the question.** Before it ever happens, agree on one thing only the family knows. A dog's name is not enough anymore; it is on the internet. What the dog was told at the door is not.
4. **Nobody from a court comes to your house for cash.** No courier, no bonded agent, no receipt with a seal. If a stranger arrives and asks for an envelope, keep the door shut and call 911 while he is still on the step. He is the only person in the chain who can be arrested.
5. **"Don't tell anyone" is the tell.** Real emergencies want more people involved, not fewer. A gag order on a bail call does not exist.
6. **Report it, even if you paid nothing.** [ic3.gov](https://www.ic3.gov), or 1-833-FRAUD-11, the Justice Department's elder fraud hotline. The report is what turns a phone call into a case.

If someone you know took a job abroad and has gone quiet: do not pay a ransom in his voice. Take his name, passport number, and the last place he was to your country's foreign ministry, and keep taking it. Keep a written record of every contact, and share it with the ministry and with an anti-trafficking organization such as International Justice Mission.

START THE SERIES

Soft Targets, Book 1: *Grandma, It's Me*

A retired teacher gets a 2 a.m. call from her grandson, arrested and terrified, and wires the bail before she thinks to check the guest room where he is asleep.

Book 2: *Out of Office*. Book 3: *The Hospital Can't Help You*.
All at cyberz.pro.

THE NEXT ONE, WHEN IT'S OUT

You have this story because you left your email at cyberz.pro/next. That is the whole arrangement: one message per story, the day it is released, and nothing else.

If this one did its job, pass it on. It is free, and it is meant to be.

ABOUT LENNAN CARVER

Lennan Carver is the pen name of a working security professional. He writes short fiction because the reports do not get read, and the stories do.

ALSO BY LENNAN CARVER

The Soft Targets series

Grandma, It's Me

Out of Office

The Hospital Can't Help You

Nonfiction for families and older adults, and the full catalog, at cyberz.pro.