

Ray Ruppert

# THE VOICE OF CON

Tex Ware  
Everett, WA

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To Jesus for all you have done; the Bible says it much better than I can. Thank you.

## Chapter One

“This is a grave criminal act that has occurred in your branch,” I snap at the old guy in an expensive suit. I poke him in the chest with my index finger and he backs up to the window looking out high over Seattle and Puget Sound. It’s a perfect day with the sun shining and not a cloud in the sky, but rain is splattering on the window, obscuring the view.

“I wouldn’t keep my client’s assets here even if the president of the company assured me they would be safe. So, unless you want me to call the FBI, you will immediately prepare me bearer certificates for all of his stocks and bonds. In addition, you will provide a cashier’s check for all the cash in the account and we’ll wait right here while you do that. In addition, I will be taking this documentation with me.” I pick up a stack of papers from the desk.

The old man starts to protest, then suddenly leaves in a huff.

“Wow, Darryl, you’re getting quite assertive,” says Renee.

“I think we’re in danger. We need to get those certificates and clear out as quickly as possible. Keep an eye on the door,” I say as I look out at the snow. That doesn’t look right. I turn and make a phone call but can’t hear myself. The phone must not be working right.

The old guy soon returns with a briefcase. I go over the bearer certificates to make sure they match everything on the account documents from the desk. Next, I’m quickly moving through a maze of cubicles and exit to a lobby. Where did Renee go?

Renee is right there with me as we get on an elevator and I push a button. The elevator plunges down. My stomach feels like it’s going in the opposite direction. We stop suddenly and I get out. I go around the corner to another elevator lobby. I look for Renee but she’s gone again. A door opens and I get on another elevator. Renee is already on the elevator and we continue down.

“Where did you go?” I ask.

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“Huh?” she answers and starts taking off her clothes.

I start to watch, but the elevator door opens and we get out. This is getting too weird. I’m starting to think this is a dream, but if it were, then we would still be in the elevator and – instead we are running down the stairs and Renee is fully dressed, in a suit no less.

At the door to the lobby I motion to Renee to be quiet as I slowly open the door a crack and look into the elevator lobby. I let the door close after my peek.

“It’s all clear. No one is waiting for us. Let’s make a break for it before someone shows up.” I say.

I look out the door again and whisper, “Come on.” We walk slowly into the lobby and look around the corner. As we exit through the revolving door and head up the street, I look back and see two menacing guys following us. We hurry up the street in the bright sunshine and weave in and around people walking on the sidewalk with their umbrellas up. Why does everyone have an umbrella? I mean everyone has one; there isn’t a single person without one and the sun is shining, not a cloud in the sky. We quickly get in our old VW bug and I start the car.

I see a bright flash of light and I sit up suddenly. Oh crap, I fell asleep on the couch. I see Renee standing in front of the window with bright sunlight shining from the only crack in the clouds through our apartment window.

“Hey, Darryl, why were all the blinds closed?” asks Renee. “Were you meditating and fell asleep again?”

“Yeah,” I admit sheepishly. This meditating stuff that Joe wants me to learn just isn’t my style.

“Well, I hope you’re prepared for tonight, meditation or not,” continues Renee as she sets a small bag of groceries on the table. “This took just about all of our last five bucks.”

I think back about my dream. I was meditating before everything went weird. The Voice had told me to pay attention. Maybe it wasn’t a dream; maybe I was being shown the future. But what was the bright light? No, it was just Renee opening the blinds. However, I could certainly use a briefcase of bearer certificates; wow, what I couldn’t do with that!

After dinner, we walk the six blocks to where we left my car. It's drizzling and I'm not in all that great of a mood. Renee isn't talking much either.

We get in and drive south and east until we get on N.E. Pacific Street and drive past the University of Washington Medical Center. The hospital plays an important part in our plans to make some money tonight. We continue right and cross the Montlake Drawbridge and on up to Capitol Hill.

Renee and I slow down and try to get a better look at the Capitol Hill mansion. The windows on the 1952 VW bug are fogged, making it even harder to see through the dark night and rain. There are no parking places on the narrow street so we circle another block and find one.

"Well, I hope this turns out to be a better party than the last one," grumbles Renee. "We're going to be soaked by the time we walk back."

"Yeah, me too, if we don't find a mark soon, we'll have to go to work to pay the rent," I reply. "Let's try not to forget our umbrella this time," I say as we get out of the car.

"My source said that this party is being thrown by some rich kid by the name of Rodney. He's a nerd dropout because he's been partying too much. All his friends are mostly engineering and science students. If they are as nerdy as I hope, we should be able to find someone gullible enough to 'help us out.'" I laugh aloud at that.

So far, Renee and I have been able to make a fairly decent living conning students around the University of Washington. We've used various schemes and even some outright begging. We have a one-room apartment on the Ave that only costs \$85 a month, a bit of furniture, and a killer stereo system. Being on the fringe of the hippy lifestyle has its advantages, as we don't need much, other than food and weed.

Tonight may be a breaker, though, as rent is due in just three days, Monday to be exact, and our luck has been terrible. At our last party we almost got caught stooping to rifling through purses in our desperation. That's not something we like to do as it's too easy to get caught and even arrested. So far, our record is clean.

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After I get out of the car, I grab the umbrella from behind my seat where Renee tossed it and rush around to hold it over her but she doesn't wait for me to open the door. I don't lock it, even in this neighborhood. No one wants to steal that junker or even break in.

"I'm going to get water spots on my jumper," complains Renee.

I like her outfit but wonder if it's right for tonight. She looks like herself but I would have thought she would dress up more for an engineering party. Oh, well, ankle-length-denim-jumpered, flower-bloused hippy is what I have as a sidekick tonight. She is a good one though, a good shill but just a so-so hippy. I dig the beige shawl and headband with straight hair, but I don't think the bleach blond quite goes with it but I'm not going to make a big deal about it. I'm not that dumb.

She catches me looking at her, "What are you looking at?"

"Are you sure the hippy look is right for tonight? You know, with all the nerds that will be there?" I question her, wishing I hadn't asked when she gives me a dirty look before she gets all smug looking, sticking her nose in the air.

"You'll see."

There is nothing but silence as we walk the next half block.

Renee breaks the silence, "By the way, Darryl, where did you learn to be a nerd? Do you really think engineering students wear light blue shirts with button down collar and gray slacks to parties? You might fit into a classroom. I hope your typical male engineering student isn't that square." She shakes her head. "If they look like you, this is going to be one boring party. Hey, did you remember your pocket protector?" she teased. "I should have brought a coat though, it's cold tonight."

"Well, it is April, it is Seattle, and it is raining. Why do you think I wore the trench coat?"

We climb up the ten steps to the gate, stop, and gawk at the huge two story old Victorian house. The upstairs has a balcony over the porch with a circular entry on the left. The gate is open so we continue up the walkway and the five steps onto the broad porch. The living room window reveals a large crowd of people who have already arrived. I shake out the umbrella and fold it up.

“Whoa, this is quite a house, Darryl. The living room is huge; there must be twenty or more people in there,” exclaims Renee.

“This indeed may be our lucky night,” I reply as we turn left, and use the doorknocker to bang on the front door.

We can hear music, laughing, and loud conversations through the door but no one answers. I bang again, harder. We wait but the noise of the party must keep anyone from hearing.

Renee looks at me with upraised eyebrows and a half smile she uses when asking an unspoken question.

I shrug my shoulders and open the door. The round entry way is a good six feet in diameter with polished hardwood floor and a round oriental rug in the middle. There are other umbrellas leaning on the wall, on the sitting bench beneath the windows, and laying on the floor. I follow suit and put mine down behind the door, ignoring the puddle of water from the other umbrellas.

A closet door is open at the end of the entryway but there isn't any room for my trench coat. I take off my coat and looked around. There's another sitting bench against the dark brown wooden staircase leading upstairs. Coats are piled on it several deep so I drop mine there.

“You want me to put your shawl here?” I ask Renee.

“No, it'll get all wet; besides, I need to warm up first.”

She walks into the next room and stops in front of the huge fireplace, extending her hands toward the cheery blaze between two stone lions on the hearth.

So far, no one has said boo to us so I tell Renee that I'm going to find us a beer and head for the kitchen. It's crowded but I manage to elbow my way in and get a couple of Rainiers out of the refrigerator. It has to be the biggest refrigerator I've seen outside of a restaurant.

When I get back to the fireplace, I find that Renee has already made a contact. She's talking to another young lady who looks like she just got off the Ave, long brown hair with a headband, no less. An oversized green paisley blouse is draped over her plain brown ankle-length skirt. How did a hippy like her get the news of this nerdy party? I hand Renee her beer.

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“Hi, Darryl, I’d like you to meet Jennifer. She’s the president of Tau Beta Pi,” smirks Renee.

“So?” I gesture with my free hand with an open circular motion.

Renee rolls her eyes and shakes her head back and forth.

Jennifer explains, “It’s the engineering honor society. Where have you been?”

I grit my teeth. It’s too early to be busted and tossed out. “So what’s your major?” I ask, hoping to find a good comeback that she can’t bust.

“Electrical engineering,” she says.

Whew, I can go with that. “I’m pre-med so I don’t pay too much attention to engineering things.”

“Well, I guess I can excuse that,” she answers with smile that I really don’t know how to read. Is she coming on to me or just being nice? One glance at Renee and I know that I shouldn’t try to find out.

“So where’s our host? I went straight for the brew and didn’t see him.” Since I haven’t ever met him, I need a clue and hope Jennifer doesn’t catch on.

“Mr. Downer is over there on the couch.” She points with her chin.

I turn around to see the back of a guy’s head slouched on the couch ignoring all that is going on around him including the hot babe with the maxi-mini skirt standing almost in front of him. If I had his vantage point I wouldn’t be staring at my navel.

“What’s with him? Too much of a good thing?” I ask, not really expecting an answer.

“Got his draft call. He has to report for his physical on Monday. I can hardly blame him,” replies Jennifer.

The Voice says to me that this guy will be fruitful.

“Maybe I can cheer him up.” I abruptly leave the two ladies to finish their hippy chatting.

I make my way over to couch and walk around to see Rodney’s face which corresponds to his slouch. Man, what a sad-sack. I check him over to make sure he fits a mark. Longish brown hair, bell-bottom tweed slacks (ugh) and a flowery shirt with the top two buttons open. Good enough.

There's still enough room to sit down beside him. I plop down to make sure he can't totally ignore me. He turns to give me a half smile then looks down at his hands again. The hot babe is now gyrating to "The Yellow Submarine" but Rodney still isn't interested. This might be hard to do especially if Rodney has been using.

"I heard the bad news, Rod." I have to break the ice somehow.

Rodney just grunts.

"So what's your plan? You going to Canada while you have a chance?"

"If I did that, I'd lose everything, so it's not an option. But if I go to 'Nam and get killed then it's no better." Rodney is coherent but still looking down and shaking his head.

I lean over to make sure he hears as I lower my voice, "I may have an option for you. I've helped others get out of it and able to get on with their lives here. You interested?" I hope I haven't been too quick leading in but something about Rodney's voice leads me to believe that The Voice is right and he will bite.

Now Rodney is staring straight into my face, eyes squinted slightly and eyebrows furrowed. "You serious? It has to be entirely foolproof."

I relax; this is going to work. I can see the rent cash already. Renee has moved around now into my line of sight. I glance at her but quickly focus on Rodney, looking straight into his eyes. I slowly nod so Renee knows the hook is in.

"Do you know John Scruggs?" I ask as I drop my chin so it looks like I'm talking to his chest but keeping my eyes on him.

Puzzled, Rodney replies, "The name sounds familiar, but I can't place him."

That's because he is a fictitious guy I made up. John is a familiar name and most people have heard of Earl Scruggs the bluegrass banjo player. Put the two together and my man thinks he just might know him.

"OK, John was one of my clients. He had just flunked out of engineering after only three quarters. He was engaged to a cute brunette and was scared spittleless about getting drafted, which is exactly what

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happened.” Now I look both ways as if to make sure no one is listening and lean a bit closer to Rodney.

“I was able to make sure he flunked his physical and didn’t get called up.”

Rodney’s eyes get wide, “Really? H-how did you do that?”

Thank you, Lord, that he’s already had a few beers but not too many. This seems almost too easy and I can’t take a chance of being overconfident. I take a deep breath.

“We have a way to make it look like you’re mentally impaired without it showing up on any drug tests.” I pause to make sure it sinks in. “We provide documents that show this is a long term condition so you don’t get called back in later for any other kind of follow up. And if you do, we’ll be available to get you through that one too.” That is, if we haven’t already moved on.

“Hey man, at this point, I’m ready to do just about anything as long as I don’t end up in jail. Have you ever been caught doing this?” Rod is looking really nervous, sweating now, and wringing his hands.

I stiffen up as if insulted. “Rodney, I’m here talking to you. If I had ever been caught, do you think I’d be free right now? Let me introduce my associate.” I look over at Renee and give her a sideways head motion to come over.

Renee comes over and sits down as I get up and sit on the edge of the coffee table in front of them both. “Rodney, this is Renee. She handles the legal aspects of this operation. Renee, this is Rodney. He’s interested in our operation.”

“You a lawyer, Renee?” he asks as he looks her up and down.

I knew the hippy outfit was going to mess us up.

“Hi, Rodney. I am very convicted that the action in Vietnam is an illegal war by the United States. It is my mission to make sure that young men like you never have to violate their conscience by serving in the fascist military.” She makes air quotes when saying, “serving.”

“I want to get out of this be—”

I kick Rodney’s foot and shake my head, “no” quickly to stop him. Renee doesn’t give a hoot about why he wants out, but we have to play the

game. I wish she'd told me this was going to be her line. We need to coordinate better in the future.

Renee continues as if he never made a sound, "I make sure that we have proper documentation of your mental condition." She has been very close to Rodney and now gently puts her hand on his knee. "You must understand that there are some people in this corrupt government that would not see eye to eye with us, don't you?"

"Uh, yes."

"Good. I will do everything in my power to make sure that they will not have the slightest concern when you make your appointment. When is that?"

Good going, Renee, he has totally forgotten that you didn't respond to his question about being a lawyer and has just agreed to con the draft board.

"Monday morning."

"Oh my, that's not very much time." Renee turns to me. "Darryl, do you think we could make room for Rodney? I would hate to see him drafted just because we have too many other clients."

"I don't know, Renee, we're pretty busy and haven't had a break except for tonight." I'm looking pretty sad now as I look down at the floor.

"Hey, if you can do this then I can pay extra to get it done by Monday!"

Ah, music to my ears; he hit two of my favorite notes, pay and extra. "What do you think, Renee? We could work tomorrow on Rodney and push Higgins out since he's not up until Wednesday. But that means we have to do a data intake first thing in the morning."

Rodney looks expectantly at Renee, nodding his head, "Yes".

Renee pauses, furrowing her eyebrows to look as if she's pondering the proposal. I'm sure she's internally jumping for joy; I know I am. Finally she nods, "Yes, that would work, but – Rodney, we'll need to have \$500 cash up front and \$500 after you've – passed – your physical." More air quotes, this time around "passed."

Whoa, Renee really knows what extra means. I hope she's read him right; that's a lot of cash, the most we've ever asked.

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Rodney shakes his head, “No.” Oh man, she asked too much. Then he says, “No problem. What time can you be here?”

“We’ll be here at 8:00 sharp. You can get a good night’s sleep with no worries, Rod.” I stand up and Renee follows suit, as does Rodney. We are awkwardly close together between the couch and the coffee table. “I would like to stay but it’s getting late and we have things to get ready for tomorrow.”

Renee gives Rodney a big hippy love hug, “We’ll take good care of you.”

“Thanks so much. I can’t say how much this means to me,” says Rodney as he unwraps himself from Renee and wrings my hand.

We make a couple of more lame comments as Rodney walks us to the door. I grab my trench coat and umbrella. Renee still has her shawl on. It’s still raining so we hustle on the way back to the car. Darn VW will still be cold before we get it parked and walk back to our apartment.

As soon as we’re out of sight, Renee squeals, “Alright! We did it.”

We hug and have a really long smooch before moving on to the car.