***Sand Crane***

I'm an investigative reporter for the local newspaper, and I was sitting at my desk going over the final changes I was making on my article for tomorrow’s paper. It was an article that dove deep into the dealing of a shell corporation called Sky Holdings. On paper, it was a trade business, but according to my source, it was just a front for what she called a shady business transaction. Up until this point, I had no idea what she meant by that. It took every persuasive tactic I had to convince her that I wanted to help her. She finally decided that she could trust me. We decided to meet for coffee at the Starbucks that was down the street from my office. I looked at my watch and saw that it was time to get the final piece to the puzzle I needed. I Locked my computer and stood up from my desk. I grabbed my jacket from off the hook by my office door and left for the coffee shop.

I walked into Starbucks and waited in line to get a drink. When I got to the counter, I ordered a Trente size dragon fruit drink. I hung around the counter, looking for my source. The barista at the counter called my name right as I saw my contact sitting in the corner booth. I thought to myself as I grabbed my drink. “Why is it always the corner booth?” I made my way over to her booth. she looked up at me and asked. “Gus Vanderbelt?”

I nodded at her and took a seat across from her. I smiled a reassuring smile. ”Thank you for meeting me here, Harley.”

”You’re welcome. I’m just glad you’re willing to run the story.”

”Harley. What exactly are these shady business dealing Sky Holdings are into?”

”Well, as you know, I’ve been the dock manager for five years, and in that time, everything has been above board. It wasn’t until recently that I’ve noticed containers that have been cleared to be shipped, but I haven’t signed off on them.” She explained

”Do you know what’s being shipped in the containers?”

”No, not at first, but just recently, I found out that guns and drugs are being shipped.”

“Do you have any evidence?”

“I do. It’s right here on this flash drive.” She said as she handed me the flash drive. I dropped it into my jacket pocket and told her that I would take a look at the files and then contact her to let her know if I would run the story. I stood up and walked out of Starbuck. I walked back up the street the way I came and went to my office to see exactly what was on the flash drive. I plugged the flash drive into my computer and clicked the download button. While the files were being downloaded, I leaned back in my chair and closed my eyes. The next thing I knew, I was being yanked out of my chair and handcuffed by two burly men in dark gray suits. The only thing they said was, “You’re coming with us.”

“I didn’t do anything. Where are you taking me?” I questioned

They ignored what I said and escorted me out of the building and threw me in the back of their black SUV with tinted windows. Once I had been seatbelted in, they pulled a black hood over my head and drove away. It seemed like we drove forever. When we finally stopped, I was taken inside an air-conditioned building. Once we got to the room, I was sat in a chair, and the hood was pulled off of me. The lights momentarily blinded me. Once I could see, again, I noticed that I was sitting at a table, and there was another gentleman who was sitting across the table from me, and he looked at me for a couple of minutes before he spoke. “Mr. Vanderbelt. Do you know where you are.”

“I don’t. How could I since I had a hood covering my face the entire time it took us to get here.”

The man that sat across from me smiled. “Do you know why you are here.”

”I have no idea.”

“Mr. Vanderbelt. Or should I call Mr. Chang? You are here because you are in possession of some files that belong to me.”

”I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

”Did you not receive a flash drive from a young woman earlier today?”

I didn’t know what to say at this point, so I stayed quiet.

”I take it from your stunned silence that you have the flash drive.”

” I’m not this, Mr. Chang and I don’t have your flash drive.”

”We shall see.”

”What are you going to do?” I asked, not wanting the answer to that question.

”If you don’t have my flash drive, then where is it?”

”I never had your flash drive.”

”Now now, Mr. Vanderbelt. Lying doesn’t become us as businessmen. We saw you take the flash drive from the young woman, and we know for a fact that you started downloading the files. Tell me where is the flash drive?”

”It’s on my computer at my office.”

”That wasn’t too hard now was it.”

”Now, can I go? I told you what you want.”

” You are a reporter. You make a living at telling people what they want to hear, so I’m going to make sure you are not lying before I let you go.”

I lowered my head. I knew if he wanted the flash drive, then he must be the one who was shipping the guns and drugs. I wasn’t sure how I was going to get myself out of this alive, but I needed to do something. It was then that the phone rang on the table I was sitting at. The man sitting in front of me looked a little confused and then reached over and picked up the receiver. “Hello?”

”...”

”I understand.”

He then handed the phone to me, and I put it up to my ear. “Hello?”

”Mr. Chang, the time is now for you to remember.”

”Remember what.”

”Sand Crane.”

As soon as I heard the phrase, Sand Crane, my consciousness went black. When I came back to reality, I was standing over the man who was trying to get me to tell him where the flash drive was with a 9mm handgun in my left hand, and it had a silencer on it, and the man was on the ground with two bullet holes center mass and one in his forehead.