

Chapter Eighteen

It was almost noon and two days after the safety meeting when Patty heard someone coming up the stairs two at a time. After her first week she learned the stride and speed of Kevin footsteps. She rushed to top of the landing. "Mr. Trask, I have some important papers to go over with you."

"Okay," Kevin replied; he was halted to a stop right in front of Patty. "You're getting to be like a mother-hen. Telling me I shouldn't eat cake the other night with the workers and now stopping me before I even get into my office."

"Sorry, but I need to get these papers into the Oregon Highway Department by the five pm deadline today!" Patty stepped to the side and followed Kevin into the office.

"You should have called the mobile phone in my car with something this important!"

"I knew you were down in San Diego spending the day with Tina and wanted to respect your privacy."

"Thanks, but call next time," Kevin replied as he moved to behind the desk.

"Is this for the contract to clear dead trees out of the Mt. Hood Highway Corridor?"

"Yes," Patty answered and then sat in the chair in front of Kevin's desk. "The rush is that they want to get on this clearing project before the first snowfall."

"When do they get snow up there?" Kevin asked somewhat perplexed because a snow issue was something he never even thought about growing up in LA.

"According to Lilly it could be as soon as Thanksgiving Day."

"Do you think there's any chance the Saxton's can get the tree clearing contract?"

"Maybe, I found another minority to put on the list. So with myself, Condi's Dad, CP and the two Native American's Lilly has there is a high minority ratio.

"CP, is that the muscular black guy always playing basketball at lunch?" Kevin asked.

"Yeah, he's Condi's cousin and he's also the person that helped pick out and deliver Gus's new three-wheeler."

"This CP guy, he would quit working for Trask Inc. and move to Oregon?"

"We're not sure of the logistics, but he said he is willing to help." Patty said while holding back a whole lot more about CP. Stuff, that Kevin didn't need to know.

Kevin signed and approved every detail for Patty and as she was gathering up the paperwork off of his desk Kevin said, "I'd like to talk with CP before he quits."

"A... Okay," Patty replied warily, nobody but Condi knew that she and CP were dating.

"I'll be down in my Dad's office if you need me." Kevin hurried down the stairs.

Fifteen minutes after Kevin went down to his Dad's office, the application, proposed contract and all other needed paperwork was rolling off the fax machine at the Oregon Highway Department. Her next task required a hard hat and safety glasses and a trip down into the plant. Some basic screaming was required to overcome the manufacturing noise, but CP said that he would come upstairs after quitting time.

Kevin spent most of the afternoon in his Dad's office vetting lawyers for two new legal positions. Mike Dugger was still in a coma and was brain dead. Sam Anderson moved all the way across the United States; rumor was that he was setting up a new law practice in the World Trade Center. It looked like sometime in the spring was when the next land-sales meeting with Mr. Hung Meng would take place. The fact that Kevin might have to be in the Vice President's position for at least a year was setting in while being disconcerting.

Back in his office, Kevin was just about to leave for the day when CP knocked on the half open door. "Hey come on in." Kevin motioned with his hand for CP to take the chair in front of his desk.

"Ms. Kelly said that you would like to speak to me." CP replied and walked toward the desk.

"Yeah, I heard that you might quit your job here."

"Well that's not the full story," CP replied as he sat in the chair. "Don't think that I want to quit working at Trask Trailers. But only getting twenty-four hours a week and not having additional medical insurance doesn't pay the bills."

"Why are you only working twenty-four hours?" Kevin asked.

"Well now that Trask Inc. is outsourcing all the wiring harnesses, my workload is reduced to just doing custom wiring."

"What do you mean?" Kevin asked.

"We're getting all these cheap wiring harnesses from China. You know the ones that are causing all the brake light failures?"

"No, I don't have a clue," Kevin replied.

"Well you should check with your legal department. There is a lawsuit for faulty brake lights that I had to give a deposition on a month ago."

"I'll do that." Kevin picked up a pen and made a note to himself. "Did we win?"

"I don't know. I think the lawsuit is a long way from being settled, a nine year old girl died." CP replied.

"Oh?" Kevin quietly replied and kept writing. "Do you know the name of the plaintiffs?"

"No, but your lawyers do. Mike and Sam are making it out like it was her Father's fault. He had a DUI on his record and some other stuff. I'm sure that Trask Inc will win that lawsuit."

Kevin quit writing but didn't look up. "Mike Dugger and Sam Anderson no longer are on the Trask corporate team."

"Oh?" CP replied. He didn't much care for either of them; especially their legal strategy to pin it all on the father of the girl that died. CP knew that it was most likely the fault of the wiring harness made in China.

Kevin prepared to start writing again. "So why don't you have medical insurance?"

"You know how that works. Hire part timers and you don't have to give them benefits." CP snapped his answer at Kevin.

"No, I don't know how that works," Kevin looked directly at CP.

CP didn't know if Kevin was being sincere or looking through him. He didn't have anything to lose so just laid it out "If you need a token black to fill some minority hiring ratio up in Oregon I'll help you out."

"I don't know if I would put it that way." Kevin replied.

"What are you trying act like, Johnnie Cochran and say that you're not playing the race card?" CP asked in a loud agitated tone.

Kevin stood up and replied, "Okay it is a race thing! They want minorities on the work crew and I asked Patty to pad the paperwork so that we might get the road clearing contract."

"Well, then I'm in!" CP replies in an upbeat tone. "I drove heavy equipment in Operation Desert Storm and I love driving heavy equipment and pushing stuff over."

Kevin extended his hand toward CP. "Thanks for the Operation Desert Storm piece... Thanks for your service," Kevin said with the utmost sincerity.

CP took Kevin's hand and looked Kevin directly in the eye and said. "I appreciate that."

There was a respectful pause after their handshake; Kevin still had a serious item to discuss. "We still need to finish our basketball game."

"Yeah we do! I think the score was all tied up." CP boosted.

"Bullshit." Kevin snapped back at CP. "I was up by three or four!"

"On your mother's ass! You might have been up one point." CP snapped back.

"As I remember I had you on your ass. I was up by at least two!" Kevin yelled.

Patty heard the conversation all the way out the door and had got up from her desk, she ran into the office. "Is everything ok?"

"Yeah, this white boy thinks that he's a basketball player." CP said when he looked over at Patty with a determined voice.

Patty was caught off guard, not sure what was going on, with all the ass calling and white-boy taunts. At least the N-word or MF metaphor wasn't being tossed out.

"Well, let's finish the game right now!" Kevin challenged.

"You're on white boy! I'll see you outside." CP busted past Patty in the doorway and down the stairs.

"Is everything okay?" Patty asked Kevin watching him grab for his car keys.

"Yeah, I just need to give CP a little lesson in one-on-one! Kevin brushed by Patty with fire in his eyes. "I've got my gym bag in my car."

The parking lot was almost empty. Kevin didn't care he kicked off his dress shoes and stripped off his slacks. CP pulled his shirt up over his head, his chisel hard physique and bulging biceps would scare off most any challenger; not Kevin muscles and bulk were a disadvantage. For being less than six feet tall it was impressive to watch CP dunk the basketball. Another mental note Kevin took.

Kevin approached the basketball hoop and CP bounced passed the ball to Kevin. "One point per basket let's play to seven," said CP.

Kevin bounced pass the ball back to CP. "Go ahead you take it out!"

CP dribbled around Kevin and drove to the hoop, hoping for an intimidating slam dunk. Kevin had planned for this bragger move and slammed the ball so hard that it rolled all the way up against the shipping dock. CP inbounded and tried the same

move again, this time Kevin didn't attack so hard. The ball stayed inbounds and Kevin retrieved it and did a simple layup. Kevin scored four points in a roll. The first game ended two to seven.

The second game started with CP charging into Kevin chests with his massive shoulder and then doing an impressive two handed dunk.

"That's a foul." Kevin yelled in protest.

"Hey, this is street ball not college ball... Suck it up white-boy!"

Kevin scored the next four points and the trash-talk ceased after Gus rode over from the guard shack on his new three-wheeler to watch. Patty had been watching from the employee entrance door and warily worked herself to stand next to Gus. The second game ended four to seven."

"Let's play another game," CP blurted and then chest passed the ball to Kevin. "I'm just getting my game on.

Kevin instantly shot the ball back and bent over and pulled off his shoe. "I think I'm getting a blister."

CP approached bent over and looked at the back of Kevin's foot. "Looks like those new fangled steel toed tennis shoes did the number on your heel."

"Not funny!" replied Kevin while looking up at CP.

"Oh yeah it is. Just wait until your next safety walk thru. The guys have been laughing about the safety shoe thing for a couple days now."

"Let's get a beer," Kevin suggested as he stood up.

CP looked over at Patty. I'd like to but I've been giving Ms. Kelly a ride home so she doesn't have to take the transit."

"Patty can come with," Kevin answered, "she knows the Mexican place up on the corner of Navy Way.

"Sounds good," CP replied. "It will give me the chance to talk you into joining our city league basketball team. We could use a ringer!"

"Okay, I'll see you up there in fifteen minutes. I have some special ointment up in my desk that I want to put on this blister."

Kevin found the small leather pouch put it to his nose and smelled the peyote laced balm. Next he rubbed it on the back of his heel and almost instantly thought he was hearing things. It was Gus closing and locking doors downstairs. For an extended

period Kevin leaned back in the executive chair and closed his eyes. *This salve from Officer Bull really makes me relax. I wonder if it is making my skin too soft, I never got blisters before... I need to get some more peyote rub from Bull...*

The words, "Mr. Kevin Trask... Mr. Kevin Trask," broke Kevin's daze; he rocked forward in the leather chair.

"You told Mr. Charles Patrick that you wanted to drink beer at the Mexican restaurant at the corner of Navy Way Road. You told Ms. Patty Kelly to show him where. Mr. Kevin Trask you said you would be there in fifteen teen minutes after you put special ointment on a blister." Gus rattles off the instruction almost exactly as Kevin had said them.

Kevin opened his eyes; it took a while to make out Gus in the doorway. "A... Thanks Gus, I must have dozed off." When Kevin stood he listed forward and put his hands on the desk.

"Are you okay Mr. Kevin Trask?" Gus asked in a more serious tone, different than his normal repetitive monotone dialog.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Kevin grabbed his car keys and staggered toward Gus. He had to use the hand rail to go down the stairs.

Gus was right behind Kevin and followed him out to his car. "Are you okay to drive?"

"Yeah, I'm fine just light headed from not eating all day." Kevin fumbled the keys and they fell onto the asphalt.

Gus beat Kevin to the keys and gripped them tight in the palm of his hand. "Kevin... Are you sure that you should drive?" Gus's voice was clear and precise and this was the first time he address Kevin without the surname Trask.

"Why don't you ride with me if you're so concerned?"

Gus froze! Riding in a car would be a huge step; it had been over nine years. "Okay, I'll ride down to the Mexican restaurant but you have to promise to go slow. I'll go open the gate." Gus walked toward the guard shack praying that the Super Hero JC would protect Kevin and anyone else on the road. Gus raised the gate Kevin pulled through and he lowered himself into the passenger seat of the SL600. The tires squealed as Kevin pulled away from the gate. Gus's put his hand on the brake handle, concentrated on the road and prayed.

Kevin noticed Gus's white knuckles and slowed down. When they turned into the Mexican food restaurant Gus released his grip on the brake handle they parked and Gus got out and started back toward Trask Inc. "Why don't you join us for a drink?" Kevin asked.

That short drive down Navy Way Road had Gus's brain in lockdown, but he had to do it. "No thank you Mr. Kevin Trask. I need to do my third walk around, check all the doors again and say a Rosary before I make dinner."

From the outside patio, Patty, CP and everyone else was doing a looky-loo. The Mercedes SL600 wasn't just a factory luxury car; it was a concept car that had all the factory race features, just no sponsorship decals and not a racing number on the hood. Kevin started toward the outside patio.

"Loser buys, what are you drinking?" CP asked as Kevin stepped up onto the wood deck.

Patty brushed by both men and headed across the asphalt toward Gus. "I already asked Gus to join us," Kevin said loud enough for the crowd to hear. "He needs to go do a third walk-around and pray before his dinner time."

"I bet Patty gets Gus to come back," CP replied and watched.

"I'll take you up on that bet. She is a real mother-hen but all her pecking won't work on getting Gus to break a routine," Kevin replied and then turned his back to the crowd on the deck to observe with CP.

Patty caught up with Gus, grabbed his hand and then pointed back at CP and Kevin. Gus started walking toward them. "Well I won that bet," CP said. Looks like the mother-hen broke Gus.

"What are you all drinking?" Kevin asked as all four of them pulled up chairs under the table umbrella.

"Mr. Kevin Trask, "I would have an orange soda first, root beer next and water is okay too." Gus nervously answered while folding his big hands on his lap and sitting up straight and rigid.

The waiter came and took their order and the conversation quickly turned to basketball. Gus knew every player on the LA Lakers team and went on about the new seven-foot-one inch center the Lakers had just acquired. CP argued that the new center had only made one three pointer with the Orlando Magic team and would be a washout. Gus stood his ground, even telling CP that he should quit trying to prove that he could slam dunk and just play the game. Kevin agreed and admitted that the score would have been closer if CP backed off the show-boating. CP hoped Patty would say how impressive his slam dunks were but she just stayed quiet. Gus changed the focus back to the LA Lakers and stated that their new seven-foot-one center would not shoot three-pointers but that Shaq would dominate under the basket.

The waiter came to the table. "Are you going to want to order food?"

"Yeah, I'm good with ordering something," Kevin relied.

Patty intuitively moved her chair closer to Gus to help him find something on the menu. Kevin made a comment about Patty not eating meat and not to make Gus eat Vegan. CP was still annoyed that no one was impressed with his dunking skill. It was payback time. "Kevin's right, don't be like a mother-hen and let Gus order meat if he wants."

Patty glared over the top of the menu directly at Kevin. "What?"

The peyote salve and now the beer made him light headed; it took a moment for Kevin to feel the intense glare. "Sorry Patty, but you are always on my back about proper names at work and didn't even let me eat a piece of cake with the workers at the safety meeting the other night."

Patty replied with an upset tone, "I'm sorry Kevin, if you think that I've been on your back too much."

"No, Patty all the stuff you have been coaching and helping me with is important. You're right, it is better for me to keep some distance from the workforce. It's not like up at Shasta Lake where you and me became more than just friends.

"I would like to try the bean and cheese burrito," Gus said breaking into the friendship conversation.

"Fill me in on Shasta Lake," CP asked after he ordered the house special.

Patty couldn't even read the menu, she held her breath. Would Kevin bring up her, 'It's not sexual relations' words with Gus at the table? What would CP think?

"Let Patty order, then I'll tell you about Shasta Lake and about the night Patty drove me home from this very bar when I drank too much."

Patty didn't even remember ordering. She wanted to get up and walk away but was frozen to her chair.

CP waited for Kevin to order than said. "Okay, I'm ready to hear the stories about Patty at Shasta Lake and drinking here with you."

"Well, it's not a good story," Kevin's tone turned solemn. "A young boy lost his life while a bunch of us were partying on a houseboat up at Shasta Lake. The sheriff came out on the lake to question me. No one would stand by my alibi except for Patty. She got hauled into the Redding jail with me."

CP had heard the story previously from Patty and didn't need any additional heartbreaking details. "What about driving you home from here? What's that story all about?"

"Well, Patty and I came up here for drinks one night after work. Patty rode up with Condi. I drank too much so Patty snatched my car keys and made sure I got home. Later, I found out that she could have gone to jail because she doesn't have her driver's license."

"Yeah, I know all about the no driver license piece," CP said while reaching under the table to squeezed Patty's leg. "She is sort of like a mother-hen watching out and looking over everything."

"No kidding," Kevin replied, "Patty's has had my back more than once."

"I will still call you Ms. Patty Kelly," Gus butted into to the conversation. "I don't like mother-hen."

"Thank you, Gus," Patty replied with a cordial smile.

When the waiter brought their food, Gus folded his hands and bowed his head. "Thank you Lord for this food and your son JC my super hero. And may Mary, his mother, protect my best friends at this table. Amen."

Kevin, CP and Patty barely had time to bow their heads before Gus finished the blessing. Next CP made the mistake of asking Gus if he liked reading comic books. Instantly, they all got a lesson about the difference between superhero and comic book genre. Gus offered up his entire collection to any of them to read. Over the years Gus had collected all the 1941 to 1950 original copies of **Captain America**. Kevin, CP nor Patty had a clue of what Gus had stored away in an old navy footlocker just down the road in his small one room apartment. But, one patron at the bar did... That patron knew that certain original copies of Captain America could fetch over forty thousand dollar each at a collector's auction.

This night Kevin didn't drink Margaritas, he just had a couple beers. But, that peyote balm in Kevin's sock had been doing its thing; by the time they finished dinner Kevin was in his own little world. Patty and CP left together out to the side parking lot; they never saw Kevin staggering to the SL600, nor did they observe Gus methodically open the door and get into the passenger seat. One of the restaurant patron's was on the phone warning the police to be on the lookout for a silver high end sports car in the Long Beach industrial area.

The moment they pulled out onto Navy Way Road Gus put his left hand on the parking brake and said, "Danny will let me know if I need to pull the brake."

Kevin didn't respond; all his effort was focused out through the windshield. He drove the short mile slow and stopped about a foot from the security gate. "Gus, could you lift the gate? I need to go take a nap in my office."

"That would be good Mr. Kevin Trask." Gus took his other hand off of the brake handle and opened the door. "Danny would have told me when to pull the brake, like when you were on Trinity Road." Gus hurried into the guard shack and the gate opened...

Kevin parked under the basketball hoop and opened the door. At dinner he didn't recall calling Danny by name and for sure he had never said anything about the racing that Danny and he had done around Trinity loop. The moment his left foot made contact with the asphalt, the car phone rang. Tina wanted to know if Kevin would come down to San Diego to be with her over the weekend. After a long on-again off-again conversation Kevin was on and agreed to meet Tina for a weekend that she promised— he would never forget.