

Chapter Thirty-six

New Years is the day for goal setting and reflection. The majority of people should look at their past goals and just say the hell with this year. Eating better and exercising more is an important goal, same as getting better organized; but the truth is, life just gets in the way for most common people. Kevin had only one goal—to be done with the family business, so that he could be a common person. Beholden to wealth and powers that is not earned is a horrible burden—lottery winners are usually destroyed within five years.

Mr. Hung Meng's goals were not annual every new year; they were long term and were always meant to harm and destroy. The April 26, 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power plant was a goal that he worked on for over six years. Recruiting a plant worker to lower the fuel rods into the cooling pool of reactor 4 did cause a steam explosion. Reactor 3 was damaged and leaked radioactive fallout; but an unexplainable wind from the southeast blew the fallout away from any major cities. A total of 31 people lost their lives, a fraction of what the entire world was expecting.

Three suitcase nuclear bombs going off in Los Angeles within the first six seconds of Y2K, would take millions of lives. While the populace would be focused on bringing in the New Century, a boot sector virus would be working itself into every business and home computer using the Unix, Windows, Linux and iOS operating system. Hung Men's long range goal was out of sync with the United States drive for technology; connecting everything and everybody to each other could deliver free speech to every corner of the world. Propaganda to suppress and control the common individual would be threatened. Communist China, North Korea and some Middle Eastern countries would lose their foothold. What kind of place would the world be without the United States? That was Hung Meng's only goal—to destroy anything that worked for the good of all people.

Augustine Watt never set goals; everyday of his life was to do good and then die. Gus's faith was so strong that he didn't fear death. He was the last in his family to be left behind. Someday he'd be pulled into the open arms of his mother. She had only held him in her womb. Death is not feared by the righteous that serve others—the self righteous are legalists that profess to know God's will. Autism made Gus want order to earthly things but all the rules and doctrine of all religions physically hurt his head. Gus adhered mostly to two conventions— to love God and to love your neighbor.

The Trask building sitting across the empty parking lot looked eerie on the first day of the New Year. The morning winter fog had rolled in to the Long Beach Harbor and slowed Gus's ride back from church. Kevin had called Gus on his cell phone; 10:30

was the time they planned to meet at the security gate. Kevin was standing on Navy Way Road looking east when Gus emerged out from the gray wet haze. *I need to go slow with Gus. This could throw his life off track. But, hopefully it will give him a reason to move off site.*

Gus started peddling full speed when he saw Kevin. "I'm sorry Mr. Kevin Trask," Gus said as he caught his breath. "Church was extra long and the fog made me late."

"No problem, Gus. We have only been waiting a few minutes."

Gus immediately looked toward the passenger side of the Range Rover. He didn't understand the "we have" statement.

"Push your three-wheeler over there by the guard shack. I have something to show you."

"Okay, Mr. Kevin Tra Tra Trask." Gus was shocked when Kevin opened the lift gate on the Range Rover. There laid Missy on a dog bed that was four times too big for her. The small blue eyes blinked at Kevin's silhouette and then turned and tried to see Gus.

Kevin picked up Missy and gently handed her to Gus. There was a long silence as Gus shifted from unwavering, to relaxed joy. "I feel Missy's heart beating against mine." Missy started licking Gus under his chin.

"She likes you Gus." Kevin pointed to the back of the Range Rover. "She comes with a night crate, some toys and food."

Gus didn't hear Kevin; he was looking down at Missy. "She's like me. Missy is not perfect."

"Yes, Missy doesn't see very well and she is hard of hearing. But just like you, she has her special talents." Kevin replied.

"What do you mean?"

"Put her down and start walking toward the basketball hoop."

Gus put Missy down and took three steps. Missy followed and then stopped. Gus took about five steps and stopped; Missy stopped about a foot from Gus's left pant leg. This time Gus walked all the way to the basketball hoop and Missy healed. Kevin had figured out that lacking sight and hearing made Missy a great dog for walking with; she would not leave your side and was not distracted by sounds. At the basketball hoop Gus bent over and picked up Missy and put her to his chest.

Kevin got the keys from Gus so that he could open the guard shack and push the

button for the security gate. It looked like a circus act as Gus walked in different directions and circles and Missy following at his heels. Kevin slowly pulled around to the back corner of Trask building. His plan was working well—even though Kevin had an alternative motive. He unloaded a dog crate, at least ten different puppy toys, an oversized bed and three different types of puppy food. The stainless personalized water and food bowls had Missy name engraved into the rim as did the gold plated collar. Kevin neatly stacked everything in front of the door of Gus's apartment and it looked as though his plan was on track.

A sharp high pitch whine followed by three sharp barks got Kevin's attention. When Kevin ran around the front corner Gus had put Missy into the large rear basket on his three-wheeler. Missy's front legs were smaller than the wire spacing on the basket and she was trapped. Gus was rocking back and forth not sure what to do...

Kevin approached and gently lifted Missy's out of the basket and her tiny front legs were free. "Gus that's not your fault. You didn't hurt her. She just got scared." Kevin handed Missy back to Gus and Missy started licking Gus under the chin.

It took most of New Year's Day for Kevin to layout, cut and weld together an aluminum carrier to replace the basket on the three-wheeler. Kevin even shaped and curved a top out of aluminum to act like a sun or rain roof. The retrofit aluminum dog box took over five hours to build, but it felt good for Kevin, to be operating all the metal working tools again. All the machinery noise and flashing from the TIG welder didn't even draw a whimper from Missy.

Gus spent the time walking Missy all around the plant, the parking lot, the back lot and finding places for all of the things Kevin had placed at the door of his apartment. Kevin sent Gus to the receiving department to find something for the bottom of the dog carrier. Missy stayed at Kevin's side when Gus headed off with a measuring tape in hand. "This is going to work out good for you and Gus," Kevin said to Missy, who was now sitting about two feet from his pant leg.

After about twenty minutes Gus came walking back with a square piece of blue packing foam. "Will this work Mr. Kevin Trask?"

"Let's see." Kevin opened the hinged top that acted like a roof and placed the dense blue foam in the bottom of the aluminum box. "Yeah it looks like it fits fine."

"Missy will like the windows you made." Gus pointed at the two inch holes all around the top that Kevin had bored for ventilation.

"Go ahead and put her in," Kevin said to Gus.

"But, Missy cried last time Mr. Kevin Trask."

Kevin bent down and handed Missy to Gus. "Go ahead and put Missy in the box!"

Her tiny legs won't get stuck this time."

With great apprehension Gus gently place Missy in the aluminum box. Her tiny claws gripped into the dense blue foam; she laid down and rested her head on her front legs. Both blue eyes glanced upward at Gus and Kevin and then started to close. "Missy looks tired," Gus said.

"Go ahead and take her for a ride." Kevin closed the lid.

Gus peddled around assembly line three times. Kevin was putting tools back when he stopped. "Missy didn't cry at all."

Kevin lifted the curved lid. Missy was balled up in a corner sleeping. "Why don't you go put Missy to bed in your apartment?"

"Oh no Mr. Kevin Trask! Oh no... I can't keep Missy overnight." Gus started canting front to back.

It took almost an hour for Kevin to help Gus to find just the right place for the oversized dog bed in his apartment. Kevin told Gus that he would go get them something for dinner and then come back. When Kevin returned with Italian take out he didn't expect to see an old Navy cot set up in the far corner. It was late, Kevin was tired, the going home holiday traffic was thick, but most of all Kevin wanted to make sure his plan to get Gus focused on something different was working. It must have been... When Kevin laid down on the cot for a short nap he watched Gus pull a chair next to Missy's bed. That was the last thing Kevin remembered...

"What happened to you?" Condi asked. "It looks like you slept under a rock."

"I slept on an old Navy cot," Kevin answered. "I think sleeping under a rock would have been more comfortable."

"You're about forty-five minutes early. The land sale meeting is at 9:00 am."

"Is there anything we need to go over before Mr. Meng and his team shows up?"

"Not really. He's good with a June first closing date. I'm going to make him sign a million dollars, non refundable earnest money deposit."

"Wow, how did you swing that?" Kevin asked while running his fingers through his messed up reddish blond hair.

"Mr. Meng is powerful and wants everything his way. I had to put him in his place! I told him that the uncertainty of outsourcing wasn't fair to our workers. I told his team to put up or shut up."

"Wow, Mr. Meng must respect you now!"

“Mr. Hung Meng doesn’t respect women! He wouldn’t even acknowledge I was on the conference call during the demand for a good faith earnest money request.”

“Should I, or do I even need to be at this meeting? I’m thinking of heading to the club for a shower.”

“Of course you need to be there Kevin!” Condi somewhat glared over the top of her glasses from behind the large ornate wood desk. “We’ll need your signature on some of the documents.”

There was a knock on the door of the office. “Come in!”

One side of the heavy door got pushed open and Patty held Missy through the opening. “Look what Kevin brought to work!” Patty stepped all the way into the room.

“Puppies should not be at the workplace.” Condi said with zero emotion.

“Well, this one is going to be allowed to be here.” Kevin informed Condi.

“Okay, but if there is an accident from a dog running all over... There could be a huge fine or a lawsuit.”

“Missy won’t run all over. She’s almost blind and can barely hear.”

“Oh...” Condi replied with a softer tone. “By the way, since you two are here. Condi swallowed hard. “I want to thank both of you for getting my parents together. I talked to my Mom yesterday and she wants to take Ali for a week to play in the snow and stay in some old A-frame cabin up in Oregon.”

“Oh that sounds fun!” Patty said after rubbing her nose against Missy’s pink and black nose. “Has Ali ever played in the snow?”

“No,” Condi quipped. “But, I think it might be good for him. Mom said something about a winter run or fishing or something like fishing and running.”

“If you want me to drive Ali up to Oregon, I can. I’m waiting in line for a fishing trip myself,” Kevin offered.

“I’ll let you know,” Condi looked at Missy and almost smiled. “Right now we need to get ready for our meeting. We have less than twenty minutes.”

Patty handed Missy to Kevin and immediately headed back to the reception area. Kevin went down stairs and headed across the parking lot to the guard shack. “Where’s your three-wheeler?” Kevin asked.

“Oh, a couple of guys took it and said that they would paint the dog box you built to match my bike.”

“Can you watch Missy? I have an important meeting.

“Yes, Mr. Kevin Trask. I was just about to do a back lot inspection.” Gus took Missy from Kevin.

As usual Kevin was the last one to enter the conference room. Condi was already sliding the million dollars earnest contract to Mr. Meng’s team. Patty was ready to write down anything that was spoken in Chinese. There was some back and forth discussion about the closing date and Mr. Meng’s team was pushing to move the June 1 date to May 1.

Kevin jumped in. “Gentlemen, I think we need to stick to the June first closing date. I have a Trask insurance bond on a logging site up in Oregon and a person died on the Helicopter site about a month ago.”

Condi was clueless to what Kevin just said. Patty had some details but didn’t think it would matter. Mr. Hung Meng knew all about the death of Officer Bull Elk. He ordered it.

Kevin continued, “I’m currently in conversation with the Warm Springs Police department. Since it was a Native American girl that was murdered the case is going to take some time. They found a rifle hidden in the logging helicopter. That’s all I know.” Kevin drew a long deep breath. “I just want to have everything out in the open.

Mr. Meng was trying to hold a straight face. He suspected that Tim had gone rogue but didn’t know he killed more than one Native American.

Condi jumped into the conversation. “Patty and I will start working on this last minute item immediately. It should not affect or jeopardize the sale of Trask Inc.”

Mr. Hung Meng pushed the earnest money document back toward Condi. “Make deal on May one or I don’t sign!”

“No!” Condi replied and shoved the paper back to Mr. Meng. “June first is what we agreed on. It is only fair to the workers. We can move the date back to April one, if you agree to keep the plant open for at least five years.”

“Not agreeable! Bad deal.”

“Trask production numbers are up and we are more profitable than ever. You should be happy making more money. How about agreeing to not outsourcing two years, if the rate of return on your investment stays above eight percent?”

Mr. Meng sat silent and then whispered to his team. The conversation was too low for Patty to interpret. One of Mr. Meng’s members spoke. “Mr. Meng will agree to

April first and he will keep the current workforce for at least one year. But, all the salaried managers will have to go along with the security guard.” Mr. Meng finally gave Condi some recognition with a sinister smile that was more like an up yours.

“We can probably work with that.” Kevin said. I just got our security guard a new puppy that I hope will give him something else to focus on. ”Gus has been fixated on a submarine and training tunnel, superhero story that happens at the Y2K for way too long.”

Mr. Hung Meng head reeled from Condi at one end of the long conference table all the way to Kevin at the opposite end of the table. “We must make deal now. Security guard must go today.”

“I’ll keep working on Gus. But he stays until Trask Inc. is sold.” Kevin replied to Mr. Hung Meng in a firm and defensive tone.

“Mr. Augustine Watt is not part of or is even mentioned in the contract that we have been working on for almost a year now!” Condi added in defense of Gus being singled out. “Sign the contract, or we can start all over! With our current production levels and record profits, I’m sure there are other investors out there.”

In a contained rage Mr. Hung Meng signed the million dollar earnest money contract He looked directly at Condi and said, “You bitch, drive hard bargain.”

“I’ll take that as a complement, Hung.” Condi got up from her chair walked down the side of the table and leaned over Mr. Meng’s shoulder. “Don’t forget to date the contract right there, you old bastard,” Condi pointed next to Hung Meng’s signature.

Mr. Hung Meng dated the contract threw the pen on the conference table and stormed out of the building with his team. When the security gate went up for the limousine Mr. Meng instructed the two Middle Eastern men sitting across from him to have Tim Baylor take care of Gus.

Kevin left the conference room shocked, amazed and dumbfounded. Condi just got a non refundable million dollars contract signed and It looked that by summer he’d be free to start trekking all over the world. It felt good!

Elated and at the bottom of the stairs he wandered out the double doors into the plant. Immediately a worker started toward him. “Hey did you use my tools yesterday!”

“Yeah, I welded up a dog box for the back of Gus’s three-wheeler.”

“That’s what Gus said. This morning we pulled the box off and it’s being painted to match the three-wheeler. You know how things have to be just so for Gus.”

“That sounds good.” Kevin replied. In high spirits that the land sale was finally going to close Kevin decided to celebrate privately.

Gus held up Missy when Kevin pulled through the gate and headed for his favorite lunch and drinking place. Tina would be one person that would be happy the sale was happening. Kevin shared with her that his trust would expand to over thirty three million dollars. Tina did not like the fact that Kevin couldn't draw any money out of his trust until he was thirty.

“Cutty Sark or a margarita today?” The bartender asked while wiping off the bar.

“I'll just have hot coffee today. I want to sit out on the deck after I order lunch.”

“It's kind of cold out there. But it does look like the fog is lifting.”

“I got a ski jacket in the SUV. I'll take that pulled pork burrito that you have listed for the special today.”

Kevin got his jacket and was the lone soul on the deck. He drank the hot coffee and through the fog could make out an outline of a super tanker anchored out in the Harbor. It wasn't a crisp, clear view and neither were the thoughts anchored in the fog inside his skull. *Maybe using a puppy to steer Gus off subject was the wrong thing to do? Maybe all the Trask managers being out of work is wrong? Maybe I should have stood my ground and negotiated the plant had to stay open for five years? Maybe...?*

Tim Baylor just got off of the phone with Mr. Hung Meng's interpreter and he was also searching for answers. He had forgotten about the 223 rifle that he had hid in Chinook helicopter. He'd shot Aiana with a 38 revolver but completely forgot about the rifle he had used to shoot the eagle. The interpreter reminded Tim about what happened to Kang Chan when fingerprint evidence was left behind. Tim was ordered to take care of the security guard at the Trask manufacturing plant as cunningly as he did Officer Bull Elk. This mission had to be completed within the week with zero evidence left behind.

By Friday evening Tim was staking out the Trask plant with a high powered spotting scope from a door, inside of a railroad box car. He watched the last employee leave the parking lot and then watched Gus put Missy into the freshly painted box on the back on the three-wheeler. *If this guy doesn't drive I can't do him in with carbon monoxide. Hung Meng's interpreter said he lives in an apartment on the northwest corner of the building. Tim watched Gus pedal down the dock and lock doors. I could pick him off of that trike with my hunting rifle. It would be like shooting the moving ducks at a carnival. That would be fun! But, I need to do a good kill to get back on Mr. Meng's good side. Tim watched Gus pedal around the corner of the building. It was getting dark.*

Saturday morning Tim took up a new post where he could watch the west side of the building. There was the one single door to Gus's apartment; further south on the cinder block wall double doors that had **KEEP OUT** signs on them perked Tim's interest. *Keep out, usually means danger; a possible place to make a killing look like an accident. I'll have to check out what's behind those doors. Those stacks of metal and trailer axles, maybe Rohypnol then push a pile of steel onto the security guard. This rail yard is another possibility. Probably just pop one into the guy and make it look like a break in?*

Kill and leave nothing behind was the task that had to be completed before Monday—per Hung Meng. Tim observed Gus come out a couple of times to have Missy do her business. *Somehow if that dog got out into the street a car running over both of them would work. But that pup never moves more than two feet from that guy. Talk about a well trained dog. If I used Rohypnol a railroad track accident...*

The third time Gus came out of the building, he placed Missy in the dog box and headed across the parking lot. Tim rushed back to his car and saw Gus about half a mile east on New Dock Road. Gus puts out his arm to signal a left turn; it didn't really matter about signaling because Long Beach industrial area was like a ghost town on the weekends. Tim was doing about sixty miles per hour before he squealed around the corner. Gus was standing on the pedals and pumping hard. The bridge over the man made water channel was arched so high that ships could get under it to be dry docked for repairs. The channel was dredged out the same time the tunnel was put in under Navy Way Road, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

On the north side of the bridge, the industrial area turned to residential housing and kept rising in elevation. Two turns and about ten blocks uphill, Gus stopped in front of a church, school and rectory complex that occupied an entire city block. Tim pulled to the curb and watched Gus get Missy from the red box and go up and knock on the rectory door. An aged, gray haired priest opened the door and shook his head side to side. Even from half a block Tim could see that the priest was saying no to Gus. Gus returned Missy to the box on the three-wheeler, wheeled around one hundred and eighty degrees and pedaled right past his BMW. Tim acted like he was adjusting the car radio so to avoid any eye contact.

Gus followed the same route but mostly coasted, it was almost all downhill back to his apartment. When he was almost to the crest of the arched bridge, Tim sped up and lined Gus up with the BMW emblem on the hood. *I'll do a pit maneuver using the metal box. That three-wheeler will flip up and over the railing and crash down in the dry dock! At the last moment Tim yanked the steering wheel to the left. Someone could get my license number!*

The hunting rifle was back to being the best option. When he and his brother went to Africa to trophy game hunt with their dad, they would attract Lions by drawing the big

cats in with bloody meat. Missy could be the bait; it's easy to shoot a target that is eating or not running. Hung Meng wanted it to look like an accident but also wanted Gus taken out as soon as possible! Monday Long Beach would be occupied with thousands of workers. Tim was also tired of wasting a weekend just to bag something as easy as a human—the smaller target could prove to be more of a challenge, but could throw a spin on the shooting.

After midnight, Tim stole a pickup with a canopy. He was vigilant to leave on latex gloves. Even with gloves on, he could pick off Gus from the railroad yard. In the early morning Tim pushed small pieces of ground beef through the bottom of the parking lot fence. When Gus would bring the puppy out to do its business, the pup would stop to sniff or eat the meat. Tim would have a stationary target and then be home in time to watch the football playoff games.

Early Sunday morning Tim was in position. He parked the stolen truck between some train cars; they would help to muffle the gunshots. The half canopy would also muffle the sound; along with conceal him from any security cameras. The tailgate was down and Tim was in the prone position looking thru the high power scope. The cross hairs started to vibrate and then the truck bed was shaking. Tim lifted one side of the ski mask off his ear and heard rumbling. A long freight train slowly pulled through the train yard. It blocked his hunting blind for more than twenty-five minutes!

When the caboose finally moved past the pickup, Tim immediately noticed that the three-wheeler was gone! He jumped out of the truck bed, slammed up the tailgate and pulled off the camo ski mask. The heavy screw driver that was jammed into the ignition fell out and rolled under the bench seat. A train yard security guard was headed toward Tim! Finally back behind the steering wheel he jammed the screwdriver back in and started the pickup and tore out onto Navy Way Road.

Tim's hunch was right. The three-wheeler was parked in the parking lot of the Holy Family Church. The church had a bell tower and would make a good place to pick off Gus. But without a silencer the loud pop from a M24 cal would give him up. There were many small homes around to take a shot from the street. A dumpster tucked back between the church and school could be like shooting from a duck blind. Tim lifted the lid on the dumpster and the garbage and smell dropped that spot from his list. Half a block away was a huge food locker warehouse with a flat roof. Tim walked around the entire building and there were three different access ladders to the roof. He climbed the ladder on the west side of the building. All the refrigeration equipment on the roof made for good cover and noise suppression. There was an open vent pipe that would be the perfect place to drop the M24 down.

Before he had time to fit the scope and bipod legs to the M24 people started coming out of church. It was like Gus had a guardian angel warning him to go. Gus got on the three-wheeler and started peddling like there was an emergency. Before Tim got

the rifle, bipod and scope back into the black foam cutouts in the gun case Gus had already turned the corner and was peddling hard downhill in a rush.

Tim was doing at least fifty miles an hour before the bumper on the pickup made contact with the dog box. Gus gripped hard on the handlebars brakes; it didn't do any good! Tim steered them toward a corner sidewalk and then stepped on the brake. The front wheel on the big trike hit the curb at full speed! Gus flew over the handlebars and hit a telephone pole straight on. Tim heard the cracking thud sound of Gus's head hitting the black creosote wood pole when he turned right and vanished into the Long Beach fog. Gus died instantly.

Kevin was on the phone with Tina when the operator broke into the call. Being Gus didn't have any next of kin, Kevin and Condi were the only two emergency numbers in his wallet. "Mr. Trask this is Officer Wallo of the Long Beach Police department. There has been an accident..."

Kevin went into full distressed shock! He called his parents in Florida first; Robert and Linda were equally shocked and felt terrible that Linda's treatments would keep them from coming home for a week or more. Robert informed Kevin that Grandpa Trask had purchased a grave site many years ago when Gus's father had died. He left the funeral arrangements up to Kevin. They both agreed to have a celebration of life service at Trask Inc in the future. The next call was even harder. This was the first time he ever heard Condi cry.

Identifying the body was surreal. It just looked like Gus was sleeping. The coroner had no reason to show Kevin the back side of the skull where it was crushed in. The coroner did say more than once that Gus died instantly and felt nothing. Kevin made it back home just before dusk. Marie had been by and dug out the prepaid burial plot paperwork and left it next to a vase of flowers and a sympathy card. There was also a message on the whiteboard next to the phone to call Tina.

Kevin read the card, wiped a tear off his cheek and then dialed. "Like, Kevin what happened? I've been waiting all day to hear back."

"Gus, our security guard was killed on his way home from church this morning."

"Like are you talking about that guy that rides that handicap three wheel bike?"

"Yeah Gus, it looks like he was coming down a hill too fast, hit a curb and went over the handlebars."

"Like, that would kill someone?"

"Gus hit a telephone pole straight on, with the back of his head."

"Oh..."

"I just got done with making tentative funeral arrangement for next Saturday."

"Like, did you forget the Super Bowl is next weekend?"

"Yeah, but the game is on Sunday. Saturday is what the priest suggested."

"But, like Kevin people will be partying all weekend. Those priests don't know anything. Plus..." *Beep beep* rang out from the intercom next to the wall phone; the noise cut Tina off mid sentence.

"Tina, I need to go check and see who is at the gate."

"Like okay. But don't try to call me until tomorrow evening. I start my onboard training for the Red Cross. They offered me a six figure salary. Like, I'm so excited."

"Good for you. I'll call you tomorrow night." Kevin hung up the wall phone.

From the marble front porch Kevin spotted CP standing on the other side of the iron gate. Kevin went back into the foyer and hit a button on a security touchpad. The heavy gate slowly opened.

"Hey Bro, I'm so sorry." CP said as they approached each other. They hugged for the longest time. CP stepped back and scanned over the Trask home set in the middle of two acres and impeccably landscaped. The property was bigger than he imagined. "Why don't we go get a drink in Gus's honor?" CP suggested.

"That sounds good." Kevin went back up the marble stairs and pulled the massive door to the mansion closed and then followed CP out to his truck. They shared Gus's minute by minute routines. They laughed about how Gus could out granny-shoot even the best free point shooters. But the one thing that they kept coming back to was that Gus had resolute faith in Jesus and that he loved helping people more than helping himself.

It was past midnight when CP dropped Kevin off in front of the iron gate. The security system had automatically armed the main house; Kevin meandered around the grounds for a while, steam was rising off the heated pool; the underwater lights made for a blue aqua glow. The outline of the tennis courts brought forward thoughts of playing with his mom. It was good news that Linda's treatments were working. If dealing with the loss of family member was what Kevin was feeling with the loss of Gus, he wouldn't ever recover from the pain.

Kevin stopped at the top of the outside stairs over the garage and gazed toward Los Angeles. The city of angels would start a new day in less than five hours. The freeways would fill and the rush would be on. Kevin went into his room and set the alarm for 6:00 am. He would need to lift the security gate so the workers could get into the parking lot... *I wonder what happened to Missy? No one said anything*

about a puppy. If Gus was coming from church, maybe?

It was too late to call the coroner. Kevin did have a card for the Holy Family Church. From the phone on the nightstand he called the rectory phone number.

The phone rang at least ten times. “Father John Murphy, how can I help?”

“Father John, this is Kevin Trask.”

“Yes Kevin, what’s on your mind this early in the morning?”

“John, when we talked at the morgue this afternoon you said that Gus was going home from church.”

“Yes he was. He didn’t stay for coffee and donuts today neither.”

“Did he bring a puppy to church?” Kevin asked anxiously.

“No, he came by Saturday with Missy and I told him that it would not a good idea to bring a puppy to Mass. I think he was in a hurry to get home after mass to tend to Missy. Why do you ask?”

“Thanks John, I’ll see you Tuesday when we talk about the Gus’s service.”

Kevin ran down the stairs and was on Interstate five headed toward Long Beach doing almost ninety miles an hour. This was the fastest he ever made it to the manufacturing plant. He busted through the security gate with the Range Rover; one of the blue high intensity exploded and glass hit the asphalt. Kevin parked so that the one remaining light shined on the apartment door. In a panic he tried the door. It was locked! He looked through the small window just next to the door it was dark inside. He put his ear to the door and listened. All he heard was one of the tires on the Range Rover leaking air.

He’d left his cell phone at home and now the right front tire was all the way flat. Kevin got the tire iron out from the rear of the SUV and ran up to the steel door and hit it once with the tire iron and then heard a whimper from inside. The door was the same door that was build after Pearl Harbor was bombed. *A tire Iron isn’t going to work on a door built by a **Rosie the Riveter***, Kevin concluded. *Roger* that echoed in the still cool night.

Kevin looked through the window that Grandpa Trask had installed. The window was cut out of the cinder block wall so that Gus would have sunlight in the old converted Navy training room. “Thank you Grandpa!” Kevin screamed out into the darkness just as the tire iron busted out the window.

Kevin crawled across a small dining table and found a light. There in the oversized

dog bed Missy looked up at him with the same look she did as when he looked down on her in the cardboard box at the ranch in Madras. Kevin picked up Missy and could feel her tiny heart beating against his chest. "I'll never abandon you," Kevin affirmed to himself and Missy." The walls or something in the cool air seemed to say, "Roger that."