

Chapter Thirty-eight

February, March, April, and May or about 120 days and Kevin would have his freedom. A summer of trekking all over the world might have to wait. Fifty thousand dollars of trust fund money won't go far for international travel. Tina might be the breadwinner now, with her six figure salary. But first things first, Gus's last wishes had to be carried out precisely; even the slightest deviation could put things into probate court for years. The superhero magazine collection only brought in a hundred and two thousand dollars—that could present a big problem.

Although Kevin now had the entire third floor to himself he told CP to close the door. "What do you think? Can we finish the remodel for less than a hundred and two thousand dollars?"

"Depends on the price of concrete when I get to the final pour. If Gus's calculations are correct we're talking about forty five yards of concrete just to plug the lateral tunnel. Then another eighty yards to fill the training pool."

"Can't we just start dumping concrete into the existing training pool and let it harden up?"

"And where do you think all the water is going to go?" CP asked.

"Back out into the Long Beach Harbor."

"How about all over the manufacturing floor! The concrete would never harden, plus all the lime in that much concrete would pollute most all of Long Beach Harbor."

"What are you telling me? That the remodel can't get done?" Kevin asked with panic.

"No, I'm not saying that. I've been following Gus's plans and so far everything looks good."

"Is there something you can do to speed things up?" Kevin asked with less panic.

"Gus might have repeated some steps. You remember how he doubled checked most everything. Maybe he made things too complicated."

Immediately CP replied, "Gus's plans are simple and absolutely brilliant. Think of it like a giant toilet bowl. You stuff something like an orange down the toilet to plug it up. Then you pump the water out and bang! Now you fill the entire toilet bowl with concrete. If you can think of a better plan let me know." CP said in a firm reassuring voice.

"So, that is what the first forty five yards of concrete is for? To plug up the side tunnel." Kevin asked.

"You got it. The huge rubber bladder that Gus had the all the details of who and where to have it made, will be put in place next week during an outgoing tide. It will

work like the orange stuffed down a toilet. During the slack tide we'll pump concrete into the bladder and then wait a week for the concrete to set."

"Gus was brilliant." Kevin said.

"No kidding." CP agreed.

"I recall that Nick Icorn said a young boy drowned in that tunnel at the beginning of World War Two."

"That's probably why Gus wrote out detailed instruction to use the outgoing tide to suck the bladder into the lateral tunnel. Whoever drowned way back when, in some strange way, is still helping today."

"That's probably true." Kevin replied and paused to show respect. "CP, it's important that this project gets complete ASAP and for under a hundred thousand dollars."

"I'll do my best." CP replied

"I know you will. Any money left over Gus wanted it to go toward Autism research."

There was a knock on the door and then the door opened. Patty stuck her head in the office. "What are you two doing up here with the door shut?"

"Oh, we're talking guy stuff. You know building things and stuff like that," CP answered.

"Oh." Patty smiled. "I thought you two would be up here lying to each other who was the better basketball player."

"We already know who that is," Kevin quipped with a smile.

"Kevin, a congressman from Florida called twice. He knows Lilly and said he'd like to ask you something." Patty walked all the way into the office and handed Kevin a post-it note with a private number on it.

"Thanks. I'll call him tomorrow. It's past five in Florida." Kevin stuck the post-it on his desk lamp.

"Did you tell Kevin?" Patty looked toward CP, glowing with unspoken joy.

"No, I thought you wanted to keep it a secret until our next doctor's appointment."

"Oh, I'm sure Kevin can keep a secret." Patty had an ear to ear smile and then blurted out, "We're pregnant."

"Wow! That was fast. Congratulations."

"We'd like you to be a godparent." CP extended his hand toward Kevin.

"It would be an honor." Kevin shook CP's hand. "You know, Kevin would be a good baptismal name."

"It would be okay for a boy," Patty replied. "But we like Augustine; that name works

for a boy or girl.”

“That’s cool,” Kevin replied. This somber moment only added to the joy of a new life. The three shared hugs up in the third floor office. CP and Patty shared about their commitment of raising children and family. Kevin reached down and picked up Missy. “It not that hard raising a child.” They all laughed.

The next morning Kevin made two calls to the east coast. His first call to Tina went to voicemail on the cell phone that the Red Cross had issued to her. Tina’s voicemail message made it sound like she was second in charge. Executive assistant to marketing and fundraising. Kevin left a message asking her to call back.

The second call was answered by an aide for Congressman Lyle Haskell. The congressman returned Kevin’s call within five minutes.

“Mr. Trask, thanks for calling. Lilly told me that you hike all over the world.” A deep masculine voice came thru the phone.

“Not yet. But I plan to start trekking this summer. My hiking might be limited to North America at first.” Kevin replied in the deepest voice he could force thru the phone.

“Well, I’d like to make a proposal to you. The same as I did to Lilly with her fishing guide service.”

“Okay, I’m listening.” Kevin listen to the ex Army Ranger explain a new organization to help men and women that served in combat to focus on outdoor activities like fishing, hiking or camping. Kevin’s part could be called, **walk off the war** or something like that. Kevin immediately bonded with Lyle and committed to doing something as soon as Trask Inc. was sold. Kevin never served in the Armed Forces but this sounded like a good way to give back to the country that gave so much to his family. It was hard to admit but Kevin could see why Lilly was involved with the congressman. As Lilly put it Lyle Haskell was the real deal.

An hour later and still no call returned from Tina. Kevin went on a short trek with Missy out back to the steel yard around the side of the building and up to the new automatic gate. The guard shack was still there but a new key lock system was now used to raise and lower the gate. Automation and outsourcing puts more money on the bottom line. Family and a good job is what the average working man lives for. Truth be told, if Robert Trask had not automated to an assembly line some twenty five years ago, Trask Inc. would be one tenth the size. Outsourcing is a different monster—it sends jobs out of the country.

All the air tools and loud sounds in the plant didn’t faze Missy. She just followed two steps behind Kevin. Not seeing and hearing very well made Missy the perfect dog for trekking. She wouldn’t run off and get lost. Kevin was already planning his first trek on the Timberline Trail, around Mt. Hood. Deep down he somehow hoped to run into Lilly but Kevin would keep his distance. Earlier that morning, he’d already decided never to book a Steelhead fishing trip with Lilly. It wouldn’t be fair to a

decorated combat veteran, now serving as a congressman.

By March, all the rumors of what was happening in the old Navy training room was sending production numbers up to record levels. The consensus and speculation was that Trask Inc. was expanding. The first week of March, when a fleet of concrete trucks took turns being hooked up to a portable concrete pumper the event sent speculation off the scale. “Where the hell is all that concrete going?” was the question going around the assembly line. The training pool was a secret fifty years ago and still was only known to a few people. Mr. Hung Meng was one of those people.

The custom twelve by twelve foot bladder got filled with forty five yards of concrete, exactly to Gus’s calculation. There was a two day wait and see period, followed by an additional two days to pump the salt water out of vertical pool. Two employees had snuck thru the safety fence and CP caught them trying to open the double doors. CP didn’t want to rat out fellow workers, but he had to. He called Kevin on his cell phone. “Hey Bro, can you come down to the training room?”

A few minutes later. “What’s up CP?”

“A couple of employees were sniffing around. Trying to see what we’re up to. Do you want Condi to get involved and maybe fire them?”

“I don’t know?” Kevin answered and rubbed at his head. “Terminating someone for being curious is kind of harsh.” Kevin walked toward the empty training pool and ducked under the yellow caution tape. “Wow! That’s a long ways down.”

CP followed, but didn’t cross under the yellow caution tape “Yeah that’s one deep hole.”

Kevin noticed something in the bottom and pointed. “Look down there!”

CP got down on his hands and knees. “I see it. Looks like a flattened can or putty knife.” CP moved back from the pool lip.

“You got a flashlight?” Kevin asked.

“Yeah!” CP pulled one from his tool belt. “Here.”

Kevin shined the light on the flat shiny piece of metal and the light flashed back. “You got a ladder in here?”

“Not long enough to go way down there.”

“I’ll bring in a climbing rope tomorrow and repel down there.”

“You’re nuts!” CP said.

“Hey it could be a coin from 1942 when the tunnel was put in. It might be worth a million dollars.” Kevin handed the flashlight back to CP.

“Bro, I still would not climb down there. I’m don’t like heights!”

“You need to go mountain climbing with me.”

“Hey Bro. I don’t have that do or die gene like white folks. Plus, I’m going to be a dad.”

“I get it.” Kevin replied and headed for the double doors where Missy had stayed put. Animal instinct warned her of the danger of the mammoth dangerous hole.

First thing the next morning, Kevin squeezed thru the temporary safety fence panels. Both doors were locked. Kevin hung his climbing rope on one door knob and his climbing harness on the other. A few of the workers stopped and peered thru the chain link fence. “What’s going on in there?” one of the workers yelled.

Kevin came back to the safety fence and squeezed out. “We’re cleaning up in there. With all of the mold problems these days we decided to seal up an old water hole.”

“I thought I sometimes smelled mold from the break room. Glad you decided to seal it up.”

Kevin’s reply satisfied the small group of workers. They now had another accolade to spread around. “That Kevin was a boss that cared about the welfare of the employees.”

Back upstairs Kevin called Tina. It was just past noon in New York. “Oh... Hi Kevin. Like, I can’t talk too long. I got an important lunch meeting.”

“It sounds like you have really found your fit there at the Red Cross.”

“Yeah, like it’s going great. Next weekend I’m flying down to Puerto Rico to see the damage from Hurricane Hugo.”

“Hurricane Hugo? Didn’t that happen some five years ago? I was a freshman at Gonzaga way back then.” Kevin asked with skepticism

“A like, I’m not too sure. It must be a follow up check to see how the Red Cross money helped the natives. I’ve been doing PR stuff, not technical stuff.”

“Hey sexy, you ready for lunch?” Tina immediately put her hand over the mouthpiece.

“Who’s that?” Kevin asked.

“Oh, it’s one of the guys on my team. Like Larry, is always kidding around. Like Larry, is old enough to be my dad.” Tina waved her arm at Larry to go away.

“Kevin, I’ll call you when I get back from the weekend check up in Puerto Rico,” Tina abruptly said and hung up.

Kevin headed down the stairs and led Missy behind the half circular desk. Patty was a dog person, unlike Condi. Patty already had dog treats in her desk. “Could you watch her for a few minutes?”

“Of course.” Patty lifted Missy onto her lap.

Kevin knocked. “Is it a good time to go over a few of the contract line items?”

Condi looked up. “Sure Kevin, come in.”

Kevin and Condi discussed the line items in the pending land sale contract. The first item was that there were to be no last minute capital improvements that could be expensed on the last profit and loss statement. There was another line item that every salaried manager’s compensation be frozen the last ninety days. Mr. Hung Meng’s accountant was diligent at protecting the bottom line. There would be no extra unforeseen expenses the last ninety days or the contract could be voided. A courier service delivered the million dollars note made out to Kevin Trask. It also had a seventy two hour endorsement period starting on June first. Something just didn’t feel right about the terms, but Kevin was good with it. At the next land sale meeting in April Condi planned to have the seventy two hour endorsement clause extended to thirty days.

Kevin picked up Missy and headed down to the training room. CP had a crew winding up pump suction hoses.

“Looks like the plug they installed is holding,” Kevin said from the edge of the pool.”

“I would hope so with all the concrete they pumped.” CP replied.

Kevin tied off a climbing rope to a forklift, uncoiled the rope and threw the other end into the empty pool. Then he snapped a seat harness up between his legs and around his waist. “I can’t remember if I tie a Munter hitch or a Clove hitch. One of those knots is known as the death knot.”

“You’re crazy!” CP said.

Kevin tied a Munter hitch into the carabiner and lowered himself to the bottom of the empty pool. The shiny metal tag had a chain attached to it. Kevin shoved it into his pocket then yelled, “Pull me up!”

CP raised the forks on the forklift and then slowly backed up until he saw Kevin’s hands on the lip. Kevin pulled himself out of the hole and unsnapped the harness. He pulled the dog tag and chain out of his pocket and rubbed at the stainless steel with his thumb. The letters **B-A-Y-A-N-I B-I-A-N-C-H-I** slowly started to show thru.

“Wow I wonder what kind of name that is.” CP said while he watched Kevin’s thumb remove more green slime.

“Filipino.” Kevin replied. “I’ll fill you in someday. But I got a red-eye flight to catch.”

Patty had Bayani Bianchi’s family’s address in the Philippines. Kevin wrote on a card about how the reflection caught his eye and how he climbed down in the training pool to retrieve the tag. He also wrote that God knew the name Bayani Bianchi before he even created the universe.

On the six hour red-eye back to Florida, closure was something Kevin was struggling with. Hopefully, vacationing with his parents for a week would help. Guilt was another thing he was dealing with... *If Hung Meng decides to close down the plant, four hundred men and women will be out of work. But the productions numbers are at an all time high. So it might only be the salaried managers that lose their jobs. A few months back Condi was looking for work and now that Patty is pregnant she'll be gone by the end of summer. CP can log up in Oregon...* Kevin reclined his first class seat. *I'll be glad when this is all over.*

The week with his parents helped with closure and the guilt. Kevin had an appointment to meet Congressman Lyle Haskell and now jealously was showing its ugly head. Lilly was right he was the real deal. A decorated Army Ranger, dark brown hair and eyes, and in rock hard shape. Lyle was to men what Tina was to women—almost perfect to their gender. Kevin had enough class not to ask Lyle about his relationship with Lilly; Lyle didn't offer either. After their meeting Kevin thought, *hell I could fall for a guy like Lyle.*

At the beginning of the second week, Robert finally put his foot down and it had nothing to do with the pending sale of Trask Inc. Robert was adamant that taking a four month old puppy to New York was wrong. He even played the service dog card, although Linda had been just given a clean bill of health. Missy had her own bunk in the class A motorhome and there were lots of other dogs in the park. Kevin could be just as adamant as Robert. Missy could stay but only if both his parents quit feeding Missy people food.

Kevin's first stop was the regional office of the Red Cross in New York. "What are you doing here Kevin?" Tina asked from a small desk just outside Larry Larkin's office.

"I thought I'd surprise you. I just spent a week in Florida with my parents and since I was on the east coast I thought I'd stop by."

"Like, you should have called Kevin. I really have a busy schedule this week."

"How about I stay around for the weekend?"

"Like. A. Like." Tina already had plans to go to Larry's cabin in Vermont for some spring skiing. "Like, I might have to work this next weekend."

Kevin glanced around the small lobby. The sterile waiting area was half the size of the area Patty had back at Trask Inc. "Wow, you work a lot of weekends."

"Yeah the Red Cross is all about disaster relief." Tina replied.

"But there's no disaster happening now is there?"

"Like no, but this is a PR fundraiser retreat. I'm in charge of trying to improve the bad image and bad press the Red Cross has been getting."

Kevin wasn't stupid. He felt the brush off... He flew back to Florida and took Lyle

Haskell up an overnight hike into the everglades. The overnight campout with veterans turned out to be just what Kevin needed. Sitting around a campfire and listening to some of the soldiers share what they were dealing with was humbling. By the end of the weekend Kevin was in full support with helping combat veterans' walk off the war.

The two week detour was part of a bigger plan—Kevin had a new meaningful mission on the horizon. Tuesday morning was the first land-sale meeting which Kevin was in the conference room before anyone else. He was standing at the window and watched the chauffeur's arm punch in numbers at the keypad; the new automatic orange bar went up. The black limo parked and Mr. Hung Meng's squad of four followed. *I'm glad that all this will be over in six weeks.*

"Good morning, Kevin." Condi said as she entered the conference room and walked down to the far end of the table.

Kevin turned from the window. "Good morning. How is Ali doing?"

"He's doing okay. He wants to go camping or hiking this summer but since I will be looking for work we probably can't."

"Good morning, Kevin," Patty said as she entered the room. She immediately started placing copies of the land sale contract around the table.

"How are you feeling? Are you eating for two these days?" The frown Kevin got from both Patty and Condi clearly let him know not to ask that brainless question again.

Mr. Meng entered followed by his interpreter, accountant and two other men. "You save money with no idiot at gate."

Kevin, Condi and Patty all turned. "What did you say?" Kevin demanded a clarification.

"No guard at gate. Save money by outsourcing." Mr. Meng replied and puffed out his chest. "He was idiot. A mute. Not good brain. That guard defective."

The interpreter jumped in. "There's no good Chinese word that translates to the mentally ill."

"Yes there is, Patty jumped in. The word would be 天才"

"Are you saying that, that dead, security guard was gifted?" The interpreter asked.

"You bet he was! Kevin slid the red binder across the table. "Take a look at these remodeling plans. The sub contractor can't believe how Gus came within a half yard of concrete for filling the tunnel and training pool.

The word *tunnel* exploded in Mr. Meng's dense head. "No money spent on remodel. Can't do! Look in contract. No remodel allowed."

"Too late!" Kevin fired back. "Gus the guy you just called an idiot left these plans to

remodel the old musty training room adjacent to his apartment.”

“Can’t remodel. Waste money. Against our deal. No work on building!”

“If it were not that Gus left a will and his own funds for the remodeling, I would have never done it. You’re going to end up with a hundred thousand dollar improvement that Gus paid for!” Kevin walked over to the red binder and opened it to a page that had the notarized signature: **Augustine Donald Watt**. “By probate law, I had no choice.”

There was now a loud heated discussion in Chinese. Patty was writing down the conversation as fast as she could. Even not knowing Chinese Kevin and Condi could tell that there was a serious problem with Mr. Meng’s accountant pointing different pages in the red binder.

“Kevin, why don’t you show Mr. Meng the cleaned up old Navy room while Patty makes copies of all the remodeling invoices. The invoices clearly show that all the expenses were paid from proceeds from Gus’s will,” Condi said breaking into the heated and serious Chinese dialogue.

“Show remodel now!” Mr. Meng demanded.

Kevin led Mr. Meng and his entourage down the stairs out the front of the building around to the west side and thru the safety fence panels. CP had left the double doors wide open. The finale pour of ninety four yards of concrete was curing. The sunlight shot rays of light across the new concrete floor. There was not even the slightest bump or mark where an open pool once was.

“You know this room would now make a great full sized basketball court or maybe some tennis courts. You could work on your tennis game Mr. Meng.” Kevin said in a more agreeable tone wanting not to blow their land sale deal.

Mr. Meng glared inside! It did look like a huge gymnasium with a solid new concrete floor. To think that he was beaten by an idiot sent him into a rage of words that not even his interpreter could understand. He had been out matched by Gus, a simple person who lived and died for the good of people. Mr. Hung Meng’s evil plan to tunnel in suitcase nuclear bombs was now covered with two thousand tons of concrete. His squad of terrorists fell in line and marched back to the black limo. A different diversion was now needed for Y2K—maybe something on the east coast.

To forfeit a million dollars, would be an immense setback. On the black market this kind of money could purchase two dozen shoulder fired heat seeking missiles to bring down commercial aircraft. Since the Gulf War, suicide bombers could be found for as little as five thousand dollars. Some Middle Eastern families were offering up children as young as twelve to be martyred.

Hung Meng understood the dark card of revenge and how to play it. Just like a festering boil, human nature is to poke at it and push on it until it explodes. North Korea, China and the Middle East were current places on the verge of spewing their

hot smelly, bloody pus on and into the United States. Freedom has a heavy price. One man's blood had already been shed for all mankind—but it wasn't revenge that he cast out with his last breath—it was forgiveness.

Tim Baylor could never forgive Kevin for being the good guy, the boyfriend that Tina would always go back to. It was the same way on the Duke Basketball team; the players respected Kevin even though Tim was the captain. Kevin could have most anything or anybody. That is what Tim resented most about Kevin. It didn't take but one visit from Hung Meng's goons to convince Tim Baylor to do away with Kevin. The instructions were specific, leave no trace, leave nothing behind and the task had to be completed the last week of May and absolutely before June first.