

## Chapter Twenty-three

**Private-eye** work was something Kevin was ready to cross off his list for a career change. After three hours of sitting in the rain in a rental car he was done with this type of work. The retrofitted plywood ramp over the porch stairs along with the caravan with a smashed up front end, parked at the curb, was a sure bet he was staking out the right house. One casual stroll up and back in front of the house confirmed the insurance report; it was correct. The tires on the caravan were almost bald and Kevin didn't notice a child booster car seat inside. Kevin wanted to lift the curbside garbage container lid and look for beer cans but couldn't make himself go to that level of violating someone's privacy.

When the small yellow school bus pulled up in front and the driver helped a little girl with a walker off of the bus, the stake out caused more heartache than impatience's. Kevin almost got sick to his stomach, watching the tiny child work the rocker up the plywood ramp and into the house. Ann Marie was her name—Kevin knew it from the folder that Condi had been keeping about the bald tires, wrong type child booster seat and drunk driving accusations. It took another forty five minutes for Kevin to knock on the door. A young boy pulled open the door. Kevin bent over and asked, "Is your mom or dad here?"

"Mom a man wants you," the boy yelled back into the small house.

A short, dark haired woman holding a baby came to the door, "Can I help you?"

"I'm the Vice President of Trask Trailers and was hoping that we could talk." This was the first time that Kevin had introduced himself as Vice President; it was more the Trask name that he was taking ownership than the VP status.

It only took a few minutes before the young mother invited Kevin in out of the rain. She handed the baby to Kevin and cleared some laundry off the couch for a place to sit. Kevin's knees were already shaking and hoped that he wouldn't faint with the baby in his hand. Ann Marie worked her walker over next to the couch and asked, "What's your name?"

"My name is Kevin Trask."

There was the sound of a bedroom door opening and then a toilet flush. A tall skinny man with messed up hair and a scraggly beard came out into the front room and looked directly at Kevin holding his child.

"This is Mr. Kevin Trask," Ann Marie said while looking up at her Dad.

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Kevin only called Patty twice while he was in Lansing, Michigan. She promised to keep her mouth shut about the sting operation. But somehow the word about where

Kevin was and that he was dealing with the brake light problems had leaked out onto the assembly line. The leak was probably from the day Kevin stormed into Robert Trask's office and had the WTF screaming match. It didn't matter the rumor was out and was being spun in Trask Inc. favor.

Friday morning Condi agreed to help Patty with filling seats at the Senator Byron Sheppard fundraiser, ever since Robert Trask had given a definite 'No' on him or his wife attending. It was a last minute request but Gus was always more than thrilled to have Ali overnight. Reading super hero comic books to a six year old, eating hot dogs and having ice cream sent Gus always to an elevated place of happiness. Condi even rented the 'Toy Story' video knowing that Gus would watch it at least three times with Ali.

Just before noon, Kevin hit the stairs two at a time and from the top landing told Patty to grab her notepad and come into his office. Kevin waited. When she came through the door he closed it behind her. "We need to schedule a meeting ASAP with the Trask insurance company."

"No problem." Patty wrote on her notepad. "Who else should be at this meeting?" Patty asked.

"My Dad, Condi, Mr. Hung Meng, Kang Chan and yourself. The Trask insurance adjusters and absolutely no lawyers," Kevin paced while Patty wrote.

"Okay I'll get on it right away." Patty felt a new sense of leadership in Kevin's tone.

"What else happened, when I was gone?" Kevin asked.

"Well, your father has refused to go to the fundraiser tomorrow night. Condi agreed to go with her mom and fill two chairs." Sally answered.

"Good," Kevin replied. "So, I'll be the only one there without a date," Kevin mumbled to himself.

"One good thing is that this Wednesday and Thursday we set a record for production. Wednesday we were seventeen units over norm and yesterday we were twenty-one units over."

Kevin sat in the office chair, "Wow... What do you think caused the spike in production?"

"Well... A... I'm not sure," Patty hemmed hawed.

"Patty, I know you better than that. What do you think caused the increase in production?"

"Okay, a rumor got out and it wasn't from me, but everyone in the plant thinks you are going to quit using the wiring harnesses form China. They know you went to Michigan to talk to the Schulz family and think you have their backs and will quit outsourcing."

"Oh..." Kevin leaned forward in the chair, picked up the production spread sheet on his desk. He was silent while he looked at the numbers.

"I'll get to work on setting up a meeting with everyone." Patty said and left the office.

Kevin got up and stood at the one way glass window. There was a definite up tick on the assembly line; which was a good thing. One important condition of the Hung Meng land sale contract was for production numbers to increase. Now, Kevin knew a way to make that happen. The union contract was a different story. Kevin spent the next two hours going over every demand and hi-lighted the ones that he felt could be negotiated.

Patty knocked on the door and entered the office. "Mr. Hung Meng will be in the Middle East starting Monday next week. The following week Kang Chan will be in Thailand for three days. The soonest we can have a meeting with everyone is two weeks from today."

Kevin looked up from the twenty two page document. "That sounds good, set it up for Friday two weeks from today." Kevin replied and then went back to the Union Contract.

"I almost forgot." Patty interrupted Kevin's concentration. "Sonny, the coach of CP's basketball team called and wants to make sure that you will be there Sunday."

"Oh, that's right. But I'll be driving home from Sacramento on Sunday. A... I don't know if..."

"Patty interrupted again, "This Sunday the game is at four and if we leave Sacramento by eleven you will have plenty of time to make the game."

"That sounds good, call him back and let him know that I'm planning on being there."

"There is one more thing," Patty injected. "Sonny wants to know if we will bring Gus again to take game stats."

Kevin looked confused. "So let me get this straight. You and I are driving up to the fundraiser tomorrow. Condi is driving up with her mom. CP's is driving down from Oregon and..."

"I made you a schedule." Patty handed a detailed trip planner card to Kevin.

Kevin started looking over the schedule, that included coffee and bathroom breaks.

"If we pick up Gus for the Sunday game what time do we need to leave Sacramento?" Kevin asked.

"I have that alternated trip schedule on back." Patty answered.

Kevin flipped the card over. "Okay let's go with this schedule and pick up Gus to chart the game stats."

"Can you let Sonny know that I'll be at the game with Gus?"

"I will do that." Patty turned and when she got to the door had to ask one last thing. It had been eating at her all week; it was just something that girls never grow out of doing. Mothers even do it for their daughters. "Kevin... Lilly Saxton said that she would ride down with CP and fill that last contributor's chair tomorrow. Since, Its paid for and all, it would be a shame to waste the thousand dollars per plate fee."

"A..." Kevin was totally caught off guard, and then finally replied. "I'm sure you got that planned out too?"

"I've been working on it." Patty replied.

"Whatever, if Lilly Saxton wants to ride down with CP that's fine by me."

Kevin set the trip planner card to the side and picked up the union contract. Patty went back to her desk, dialed and whispered into the phone. Ten minutes later Lilly and her Mom were headed into Portland to buy an entire outfit—it was the prom dress shopping that never did happen for Lilly Saxton.

Saturday morning Kevin picked up his tux from the dry cleaners and headed to the Country Club. Some basketball practice was in order before the four o'clock game on Sunday. After a couple of hours of pick-up basketball, Kevin headed for the showers. He paused at the oak bench where Robert had slapped him across the face back at the beginning of summer. The whole spiel about being born into affluence and who were the kings of commerce was running true. Three month ago Kevin would have never flown back to Michigan to make a deal. When he exited through the Pasadena country club Lobby in tux and all, Kevin held his head high—he was learning to like the kingship feeling.

When Patty came out of the town house with her hair up in the blue strapless full length dress, Kevin couldn't help himself. "You look hot."

"Thanks Kevin, you look hot too; in your tux." Patty replied and then flashed a smile. "Where can I put my high heels?"

Kevin pulled the trunk lever. The trunk lid popped Kevin got out and went to the back of the SL600. When Patty put her heels in the trunk the wide open back on her dress displayed her Chinese dragon tattoo; he reflected back to the last time he remembered the tattoo up at Shasta lake when all she had on was a bikini. "Do you want me to put up the top so not to mess up your hair?"

"No, I can fix it in our room when I do Lilly's hair. I built forty five minutes of prep into our trip planner."

"Oh," Kevin replied. "So, Lilly is coming and she's riding down with CP?"

"Yeah, she even went out and bought a new dress!" Patty answered.

"For a stupid fundraiser?" Kevin stated.

"Fundraiser and dance!" Patty answered. "I'll be right back! I got to get CP's dress

blues."

"Did the Senator's event coordinator suggest the military uniform?" Kevin asked.

"No, but she hinted that it was more than acceptable dress attire for the formal event." Patty walked back through the front door and grabbed the uniform, black shoes and an overnight bag and hurried to the open trunk. "We better hit the road. We're already five minutes behind schedule."

"Okay, you're in charge." Kevin shut the trunk and hurried to hold open the passenger door.

Patty pulled the blue full length dress almost up to her waist, Kevin noticed the gray running shorts as she carefully lowered herself into she Mercedes.

"Why are your legs shinny" Kevin asked?

"I had them waxed this morning." Patty answered.

"Is that why your back is shinny too." Kevin asked.

In a somewhat defensive tone Patty answered, "My back isn't shinny. I did put oil on my tattoo, to make the colors stand out. But I didn't have my back waxed. There are men that have that done! I don't have a hairy back."

"Sorry Patty!" Kevin apologized and shut the passenger door. "So waxing is a hair removal thing?"

Patty went on to explain the waxing procedure and then on to the oil used on her tattoo. She couldn't be mad; Kevin was so naïve; maybe if he wasn't an only child or had not been raised by a nanny. It didn't matter; she still loved Kevin and his innocence was sort of sexy. The short lesson about girl things eventually turned to why the Chinese dragon tattoo. The tattoo was mainly out of respect for her Grandmother; what Kevin wasn't expecting was a four hour lesson on Chinese history.

The Tiananmen Square protests, commonly known in Chinese as the June Fourth Incident happened when Kevin was in high school. He did remember the video of the one lone student stopping a row of tanks but didn't know that the day before over seven hundred innocent students and civilians were murdered in Beijing. Kevin had no clue that the video or even talking about the democracy movement was still suppressed in China. The most amazing part was that there were less than a dozen elders in the Communist Party that declared martial law on their own people and that the police and internal security forces were strengthened after the Tiananmen Square protest. The four hour lecture about Communist China was eye opening!

Kevin was mentally exhausted by the time they pulled under the Hampton Inn awning. CP immediately emerged from the lobby and Lilly sprang out of the passenger seat and ran to him. The long hug and extended kiss was obvious that their relationship was beyond just friends. Lilly stood just outside the sliding doors

feeling like the third wheel and timidly watched Kevin removing bags, shoes and other items from the trunk. She felt out of place! Kevin looked like a dignitary in his tux.

The doorman approached and loaded the items onto a hotel cart. Kevin walked over to Lilly. "Thanks for coming down and filling that last chair for this event tonight."

"No problem," Lilly replied; she already felt like an outcast in her jeans and Levi jacket. "I've never been to anything like this."

"Prepare yourself for a bunch of speeches and kiss assing that will have you looking for the exit. But on the upside the food and music are usually good," Kevin said while handing the valet a tip.

"I already checked in and have a formal dress up in my room," Lilly said and was now wishing she hadn't given into Patty's insistence.

"Yeah, I know. Patty built forty-five minutes into the schedule for prep time. I'll be waiting in the bar after I park the car and check in."

CP approached and shook Kevin's hand. "Hey Bro, don't be trying to ace me out or make your move."

Kevin paused for a moment not sure where this conversation was headed. "Okay."

"Sonny, let me know that you're a good fit on the team. He said your skills are not as good as mine, but for a white boy you got game." CP smiled and displayed a set of perfect straight white teeth that Lilly was envious of.

"Well, I practiced this morning at the club for a couple of hours. Hopefully tomorrow I'll be playing up to your level for the Sunday afternoon game." Kevin smiled back.

"I'll go change into my dress blues and then meet you in the bar." CP grabbed the canvas garment bag off of the luggage cart, went into the motel lobby and headed toward the elevator.

"We will see you in forty five minutes," Patty said while grabbing Lilly's hand and pulling her through the door and toward the front desk. "There should be four rooms for Trask Inc." Patty told the desk manager."

"Yes Madam. Mr. CP Johnson and Ms. Lilly Saxton have already checked in; so you must be Ms Patty Kelly." The desk manager said while reading off the reservation computer screen. "Would you like one or two room keys?"

"Two keys please," replied Patty." The second key was for CP—after the dance.

Lilly had already hung the new full length red dress in her room. Her dress wasn't backless because she didn't have the boobs to hold it up. The red push up bra and panties that her mom insisted that she get was the first purchase she had ever made at Victoria's Secret; those unfamiliar items were in her room also.

Patty opened room two-thirty, tossed her stuff on the king size bed did a quick walk around, opened her overnight bag took out a hot pink camisole and laid it on the bed. She then grabbed a makeup bag and blue blazer. "Let's go get you ready."

Up one floor they entered Lilly's room. Patty walked over and took the red dress off the hook on the bathroom door. "This is going to look good on you," Patty said while examining the slit all the way up the left leg.

"I didn't buy a blazer like you have." Lilly said in a nervous, not sure voice.

"My blazer is to cover my tattoo; I'm not sure how stuffy a fundraiser crowd will be to a woman with a full back tattoo." Patty replied as she started to examine the red dress more. "The spaghetti straps are a nice touch. Are you going to wear a bra?"

"Yeah my mom took me into a Victoria's Secret and had me get a strapless one," Lilly nervously replied.

"I love that store," Patty said, as she removed the red dress from the hanger.

"It's the first time I ever purchased anything from a store like that." Lilly said.

"Well then let's get that new sexy bra on and get you all made up."

Lilly was scared but not modest; she pulled her shirt up over her head and exposed her small firm breasts. The red bra did push up and accentuate her boobs. Lilly pulled some red skimpy panties from her bag and asked. "Do you think I should wear these?"

"Hell yeah girl" Patty answered.

Lilly pushed down her jeans and then pulled on the red lace panties.

"You look like one of those lanky long legged Victoria Secrets models." Patty said.

"Not really, those girls have perfect teeth," Lilly replied and then closed off her smile.

"Well they don't have the muscular legs like yours. You look good woman!" Patty said as confidence builder. "Now come over here and sit down so I can get your hair done and makeup on."

CP and Kevin were sitting at the bar when an unusual hush came over the small drinking area. They both turned on their stools at the same time. In the doorway was Patty in her long blue dress, tight fitting open front sequenced blazer and stilettos. Lilly's hair was pulled up on top of her head. If she were in high heels she would have been the tallest person in the bar, the long red dress cover her white sandals.

CP stared and then walked over to Patty and put his arm out. "May I escort you to the ball?" With a big proud smile, he asked.

"Yes you may, Master Sergeant Charles Patrick Johnson," Patty said then slipped her arm through the arm of CP's dress blues.\*

"Wow you two look so cool. I need to get a picture." Lilly opened the small clutch purse and pulled out a brand new compact film camera.

"Be careful that no one rides up on a bike and snatches your camera tonight," Kevin said and then let out a small laugh. From the look Patty gave him he realized he'd just said the wrong thing. Lilly felt out of place even more. Patty and CP walked arm in arm through the lobby and out the door. Kevin and Lilly followed at an arms distance from each other.

CP went to get his pickup and Kevin the SL600; they pulled under the motel canopy almost at the same time. Patty looked up at Lilly and said. "I'll ride over to Crocker Art Center with CP, you ride with Kevin."

Lilly walked back to the passenger side of the SL600 and stated, "I guess I'm riding with you." She opened the door and put her small purse behind the seat and froze. With the full length dress on she didn't know how to get into the low riding sports car. *I should have never come to this event and I don't even know how to get into this car without ripping this overpriced dress.* Lilly looked back at the sliding lobby doors; maybe saying that she was suddenly felt ill was the solution.

"Patty just pulled her dress up and her legs out the slit before she sat down," Kevin offered.

Without any hesitation, Lilly pulled the red dress up, even higher than Patty had; Lilly didn't have running shorts on neither. Kevin got in eyeful. "That works," Lilly said as sat down into the passenger seat."

"Should I put the top up, so not to mess up your hair?" Kevin asked.

"No," Lilly quipped, "don't worry about my hair. I don't think I'll be fitting in at this event no matter what."

"Yeah, I know how you feel," Kevin agreed, as he loosened the black bow tie in the rearview mirror. "The Crocker Art Center is only four blocks," Kevin said and then started the SL600.

CP had just pulled up and hurried around to the passenger door. Patty's legs swung out the door, her grey running shorts didn't really fit with the stilettos'. CP took her hand; she stood straight up and worked the dress down and around her legs, then pulled at the top of the blue dress.

Before Kevin had a chance to even shut the car off, Lilly stepped out and worked the red dress down and around her legs. The valet took the keys and Kevin walked over to Lilly. They walked over and got in line behind CP and Patty. "This will be fun!" Patty stated while others already wanted the fundraiser to be over.

Condi and her mother were already sitting at the round table and made plans to ditch out after dinner and maybe two songs. Condi stood and waved the four over as they came up the stairs into the ballroom. "This is my mother; Ruth Johnson," Condi

said and then everyone introduced themselves around the reserved Trask Inc table.

"How is Richard doing up in Oregon?" Ruth immediately asked of CP.

"I think he's getting the hang of using Richard's thirty-six inch chainsaw. Being the nubber with a short twenty inch bar was killing his back. Next week I'm going to show him how to operate the loader," CP answered Ruth.

Lilly butted in, "I think Richard and my Dad are going fishing tomorrow, after church. My mom was trying to get a ride to church so that they could get in some early fishing. I'm not sure that my mom found a ride to church though.

Ruth's head was spinning; she'd only understood about one word of the logging terms. The fact that Richard would set foot in a church made her question their thirty-one years of marriage. For Condi, she didn't want to hear one word about her hypocrite Muslim father, who cheated with a white woman and practically disowned her when Ali was born; mixed race. Condi moved the name cards on the table and then started a conversation about work and the pending union contract with Patty. CP and Kevin headed to the open bar talking about basketball and the fact that they couldn't support the Los Angeles Rams after leaving LA and going to St Louis.

Patty flashed a smile of support across the table at Lilly, who didn't know what to expect. But, this formal event was no different than all the expectations and build up for a senior prom; over eighty percent of girls attend their senior prom with someone that they wished had never asked them. But then Kevin didn't ask her, she was just a tag-along so to fill an empty chair.

It didn't take long for the master of ceremony to start with accolades from the podium in the center at the head table up on a small stage. The thanks you's and pitching for even more than the thousand a plate fundraiser was followed with phony laughter and clapping. Senator Byron Sherpard took the microphone and immediately jumped into his promise to represent the people, create jobs and the same old same old false rhetoric. When the senator started into his save the trees initiative Lilly couldn't help herself, she called out the words, "It's all a bunch of bullshit!"

Her words weren't meant to carry any further then around the table of six; yet they did. The Senator lost his place on the teleprompter and was now as red faced as Lilly. But with years of political skills he knew exactly how to turn and spin the screw up toward Lilly. "Excuse me young lady, I didn't hear you."

The spotlight went from the Senator's embarrassment to Lilly's downturned head. Lilly was more than red faced; she could barely get out the word, "Sorry."

A hush came over all the elite and mighty in attendance; all eyes were focused on the spotlight that was now shinning on the Trask Inc. table. "Young lady if you think cutting down all the trees is a good thing I'd like to hear your rebuttal." The Senator was skilled at debating and was ready to bury Lilly and win support.

Mrs. Johnson leaned over and whispered into Lilly's ear. "Stand up young lady and

“speak your peace.” Ruth felt the fear radiating from someone who felt way out of her place in the ballroom of society's privileged and elite.

The spotlight immediately pinpointed on one of the few black women in the ballroom when Ruth rose from her chair. “This young lady is from a family of loggers up in Oregon. The only thing her family knows is cutting down trees! So why would you expect her to like your no cutting of trees policy and putting people out of work?”

Senator Shepard felt a trap being set. A black woman asking a question about putting people out of work could cost votes. But he was a skilled spokesman. “Thank you Mrs. or is it Ms, I don't see a husband. Unless that man in uniform is your husband.”

It's Mrs. Ruth Johnson! My husband is logging up in Oregon. This is my nephew Charles Patrick, Johnson, who served in Desert Storm. Ruth pointed directly across the table.

The Senator played his next card. “Mr. Charles Patrick, Johnson could you please stand up so that we all can give you a round of applause for your service to this great country.”

CP stood... With his hands at his side he clicked his shoes together and took the stance of 'at attention.' The white gloves and thumb curled inward were placed exactly on the satin strip on the dress blues pants. The clapping got louder as people stood and cheered. Finally CP reached down and helped Patty up, she threaded her arm through CP arm and the applauds got louder—respect and honor can't be faked. This would be as close as Patty would ever get to be introduced as Mr. and Mrs. Johnson and she was good with it.

The standing ovation died down and Lilly needed to make amends she stood and faced the Senator. “I'm sorry sir! I meant no disrespect.”

“No problem young lady. I understand your trepidation working in the lumber industry and all.”

“Sir, I don't work in the lumber industry. I'm a fishing guide.” Lilly replied and sat back down. Ruth reached for Lilly's hand and gave it a squeeze of support.

“There must be for some interesting discussions around your dinner table. A lumberjack verses an outdoor enthusiast.” Senator Byron Sheppard spoke from the podium; politicians' always need to get in the last word. The crowds let out a little laughter before the Senator got back on track with his speech. Dinner started being served and the ice breaking period was over with all the wine and champagne that had been already consumed.

In the shadows at the back of the ballroom a last minute table had been set up for Hung Meng Imports. Ten day before, after listening into a mobile phone conversation between Tina and Kevin, Tim went to Kang Chan. Tim suggested that having a senator in their back pocket could open up huge antivirus contacts with the

government. Kang went to Hung Meng about the fundraiser and Mr. Meng paid for their private table of six. Two Middle Eastern men filled two of the chairs. If it were not for the inconspicuous dark place they would have been booed for not standing when CP was applauded. Four at the table hated the American Military and what it stood for—freedom for all. Tim and Tina just went along with their new partner.

At a thousand dollars a plate you would expect the food to be good; it was. Lilly said the lobster tasted like crawfish and then Ruth wanted to know where crawfish could be trapped. Patty and Condi couldn't let work go; their conversation was all about production numbers, employee morale and the reliability data that they had collected. Kevin and CP were talking basketball and about all the new flat screen televisions that were showing up in Sports bars. Kevin one-up'd CP with no matter how big the new flat screens were it wasn't as good as watching the Lakers from box seats at the Staple Center.

As dessert was being served, you could hear the band Pearl Jam warming up one floor below. The guitar licks and drum riffs had most of the crowd ready to dance to the music. When Eddie Vedder's raspy voice rang out the lyrics to 'Easy Flow' a herd of guests headed for the stairs. The alternative rock bands message sent a few attending world leaders to the back stairs down to the parking garage. The Trask Inc. group was being herded down the front stairs like cattle. From the first landing and out through glass facade of the Crocker Art Museum Kevin noticed two men, one with a white turban, the other had on a red and white check headdress. They were leaned over talking to someone behind the smoked glass of a white limousine with diplomatic immunity flags on the front bumper. Kevin tried to work himself closer to the window but the flow of the crowd was too strong.

The band slowed the music down as the ballroom filled up with guests. CP took Patty by the hand and led her onto to dance floor. The couple looked like something out of a military movie as the spotlight followed them around the dance floor. There were a few more slow songs; Kevin danced with Patty and then Condi. The second song CP took his aunt Ruth by the hand and danced with her. Tears flowed onto the Dress Blue Jacket—Ruth so missed her son, Jabbar.

When Pearl Jam let into their song 'Black' the whole ballroom went wild. Patty, Condi and Lilly had formed a small trio, Patty had taken off her jacket and her strapless dress and dragon tattoo was like a bad girl stamp. Lilly's long legs and occasional flash of red lace underwear was sexy Condi had the smooth moves and natural rhythm. Someone from behind started pushing Kevin out through the gyrating crowd toward the stage; he didn't turn to see who it was. A pair of tanned arms and a diamond bracelet along with firm breasts pushing into his back were all good clues.

When Kevin did a one eighty his guess was confirmed. Tina looked stunning! Her

low cut dress, barely held in her enhanced breasts. The opening in her dress let everyone know that her tan was real from head to toe. With Tina's features and natural beauty she would have easily been picked as queen of this ball and she knew that by the expression on Kevin's face that he desired her.

Kevin yelled out, "You look stunningly beautiful."

Being tall helped; Lilly quickly spotted the king and queen of the ball dancing up by the stage. In that one moment her heart went from bliss to distress. When a tall stranger asked her to dance Lilly accepted; she secretly hoped that Kevin would take note that she was a worthy catch. Lilly had attended some of her high school dances; being tall along with her crooked teeth were the reasons she was never asked to the senior prom. The same gloomy thoughts were now flowing back like a murky river. The tall, dominant dance partner introduced himself as, "Tim".

Mother-hen quickly had her claws out and recruited the man with the fighting spurs. Patty had already given CP a room key and promised him a night to remember but those plans changed when Tim and Tina appeared out of no place. Patty pulled CP out into the lobby and filled him in. Like a true soldier CP volunteered for the mission and pushed his own needs to the side. The black man with a white woman look that Tim had casted during the first dance had nothing to do about acceptance; it was hate filled—a crime that destroys the innocent for no reason.

Condi and her mom left after the fourth song, two songs longer than they planned. They felt somewhat out of place but mostly wanted to get on the road for LA. Condi was good with Ali spending the night with Gus. Ruth had honored the Sabbath on Friday at the mosque but was still in a fog why Richard would be attending a Sunday Christian service the following morning. The loss of their son Jabbar was equally painful but Muslim women were conditioned to be silent and patience. The random shooting made it worse, maybe martyrdom or fighting for a cause would have eased a throbbing heart but probably not.

Pearl Jam took a break and Tim and Tina were out in the lobby solidifying a plan. It was like school dance Déjà vu: coming outside the school gym and being all worried about who was with whom. Tina's skill at getting the boy she wanted went all the way back to her first middle school dance when she took the most popular boy under the bleachers to make out. Tim okayed that she go for it with Kevin, and also told her to find a ride home. Tim had already conquered Tina and now it was Tina's turn to conquer Kevin. The game of lust is always fleeting; it requires being played and played again—often with a set of new players.

Strutting back into the ballroom Tim headed for his next video starlet. Lilly was not rally nor sorority girl quality, but she might be virgin material. If not the red sexy

underwear would look great in his latest video to share with Kang Chan Monday morning in the darkened computer antivirus lab. In reality, Lilly was twenty years older than Kang liked—plus Tim never choked out his victims.

This was the night Kevin couldn't resist Tina! There was not a man that could; her skill at temptation was better than the shrewd way Bathsheba acted and immodestly bathed in front of King David. Tina didn't need to bring down a nation but she did need to let Lilly know who the real queen was; having Kevin before the sun rose would prove her point.

Maybe it was the realization that a quick exit out of Trask Inc wasn't going to happen or maybe it was the trip back to Michigan? There were so the many other items on Kevin's list—but tonight he was going to just go for it. In less than two weeks he would be throwing in the towel; what seemed important wasn't anything compared to a six year old using a walker in a home with an alcoholic father.

Up until midnight Lilly was the one having the most fun. She was okay with Tim driving her back to the hotel; worse case scenario she could walk back. Kevin also thought about walking back, if he continued to drink. The one person that was disgusted with who was pairing up with who at the formal dance turned hook-up party was Patty! Way before midnight CP was ready to leave; his plans were being tossed while standing at the check in desk four blocks over at the Hampton Inn.

"We don't usually give out a guest key to a different room. But since it was your American Express card that was used to book Ms. Saxton's the room I can do that." The night clerk handed Patty a second key.

Patty took the key and headed directly up to the third floor. CP was changing out of his dress blues and putting on sweats and basketball shoes. A ball cap with the hood on the sweatshirt would hide most of his identity, but the security cameras in the hallways would still pick up his skin color—even with hair spray on the lens. A black man coming out of a white woman's motel room probably wouldn't have the same outcome as the OJ Simpson trail. Two in a row were too high of odds to play...

Patty knocked on the room door and slipped into the room with her can of hair spray in one hand and a room key in the other. "I sprayed the one camera at the end of the hall on Lilly's floor and I didn't see any camera on the stairs."

"Okay," CP took the key, looked at the two-thirty numbers and slipped out the door. He kept his head down and his hand up on the brim of the ball cap. Patty was right there were no cameras in the exit stair well. Once inside Lilly's room CP unscrewed the light bulbs next to the bed and then put the bathmat in the bottom of the bathtub. With the shower curtain pulled CP could still see the bed. CP got out of the tub and

went over to the bed and pulled off one of the pillow covers. He barely made it back into the bathtub before he heard the key in the door.

Tim carried Tina in his arms and threw her face down on the bed. He went back to the door and hooked up the security chain, next he pulled a small video camera from his jacket pocket. Tina was moaning and so drugged up that she couldn't even turn herself over. Tim turned on the camera in positioned it just so on the night stand; he tried the nightstand light but it didn't work. Tim opened the bathroom door all the way and turned on that light and then turned on the vanity light; he had a lot of experience where to place the camera so that his face would not be on the video. A good video needs lots of light, the bathroom and vanity lights helped. CP was only inches away behind the shower curtain standing on the cloth bathmat.

Tim pulled up Lilly's red dress then pulled down the red lace panties and waved them in front of the video camera; another trophy to go along with another notch in his belt. He undid his pants and purposely left them around his ankles; it was a part of his sick sadistic movie script—violate, sodomize or do whatever and then pull up your pants, turn toward the camera, zip up your zipper and leave. The fringe of Hollywood short films at its bests—an award winning movie that would go viral on the internet dark side.

Lilly was struggling to push herself up and turn over or do something to fight back but the Rohypnol was doing its number. When she tried to yell out Tim pushed her face into a pillow. Now she could feel the large hands around her waist and pulling her up on her knees— just then everything went dark!

CP needed to put an end to this movie before it started. He stepped out of the bathtub and rushed toward the bed! He delivered such a blow to Tim's kidney that the blast dropped Tim almost to his knees. From behind CP pulled the pillow slip over Tim's head and then twisted him around. The next blow was delivered to the mid section as Tim hunched over CP's knee found his face. Blood exploded from Tim's nose and as planned contained to the inside of the pillow slip. It was like water boarding, but with blood. CP then applied a choke hold until Tim went limp and dropped to the carpet. All the military hand to hand, covert training paid off—hit fast, hit hard and leave nothing behind.

CP stuffed the video camera into Tim's pants, pulled out the belt, walked across the room and opened the balcony door. A car alarm went off when the camera and pants bounced off the roof of a car in the parking lot three floors below. CP used the belt to tie Tim's hands behind his back and then pulled him out into the hallway all the way down to the fire exit door. One last kick to the gut and then setting off the fire alarm had the entire mission completed in less than five minutes.

CP took the stairs two at a time and Patty was looking out a peephole and pulled open her motel room door the moment she saw him CP in the hall.

CP pulled the room key from his pocket and put it into Patty's hand. "Before the fire department gets here you should go help Lilly. I think you were right about that asshole using a date rape drug!"

Tina didn't need a date rape drug, she had Kevin laid back in the passenger seat of the SL600 and rubbing at the front of Kevin's pants. From behind the steering wheel she twisted and turned in the seat and kicked off her high heels. Kevin worked the tux jacket up over his head and then worked down the black tux pants. This was not exactly what Kevin envisioned his first sexual experience would be like. But just like the senior prom—those first time experience's are usually not like what you read in romance novels.

Tina opened the passenger door and said, "I don't have on any underwear... And you already know that I take birth control."

Kevin was beyond the point of talking or thinking straight; even under the mercury vapor lights and in the fog of heavy exhaust fumes Tina was beautiful... She lifted her right leg and tried to straddle Kevin but her knee got pinned between the mobile car phone and the seat. "Shit that hurt!"

Kevin reached for the bag phone and pulled on it but it was re-enforced to the dash and floorboard. He fumbled with the handset and threw the headset over on the driver's seat. This time Tina's knee pushed down on some of the buttons on the keypad. The dialing sound coming out the hands free speaker could be heard all though the parking garage. "BRIDGE BAY MARINA HOURS ARE 9:00AM TO 9:00PM. WE ARE CLOSED. PLEASE ALWAYS DRIVE SAFE ON THE LAKE AND ON THE ROAD."

"Too bad you brought that buck tooth, bean pole with you or we could go up to your room." Tina said as she got out of the car and adjusted her dress.

"Lilly's not staying in my room," Kevin answered as he pulled up his pants and pushed a redial button on the keypad; he wanted to hear the message again. Kevin could never forget that soft confident voice—it was Danny.

"Well that's good news. I was wondering what you were doing with white trash like her. Like, getting her to transport you car down from Oregon I got. But like bring her to an event like this. Like what were you thinking? Like, I bet she's..."

"Tina could you shut up for a moment!" Kevin listened to the message for a third

time, then hit the redial button again and listened for a fourth time.

Tina suggested that they go over to the Hampton Inn to Kevin's room. But Kevin was on a spiritual quest. Gus was right, JC was talking to him all along; it was just that Kevin never listened. Now with his own ears he heard a message from above, or better yet it was a miracle. Regardless, Kevin had to drive up to Shasta Lake and find out for himself.

Kevin took Tina by the hand and pulled her out to the lined up taxis in front of the Crocker Art Museum. It was easy, along with four hundred dollars to find a taxi to take Tina down to her new apartment in Silicone Valley. Tina's pleading to go over to the Hampton Inn landed on deaf ears. She immediately noticed something strange come over Kevin. It happened the moment the Bridge Bay Marina message played and then Kevin listened to it three additional times.

Reluctantly, Tina got into the back of the cab; for her sake it was best! Mr. Hung Meng insisted that the diamond bracelet be back in his hand no later than Sunday noon. Blood diamonds have their name for a reason. Tina was worth far less than the conflict gems on her wrist. Mr. Hung Meng never put anything at risk—Tina would be traded into the sex trafficking market if she did not return the diamonds on time. Diamonds are not always a girl's best friend. Especially since—Blood diamonds come from hell...