

Chapter Thirty-four

Tim was back selling his antivirus protection service and Kevin was back at Trask Inc. Both had a common goal to make drastic changes in their careers and life paths. Getting into politics was always a burning desire deep inside Tim. The power and win at any cost had a draw similar to what he experienced up in Oregon. Mr. Hung Meng was pleased with the way Bull Elk was eliminated. Tim's method of operation to make it look like diabetic shock was met with praise. What Hung Meng didn't know about was the body of Aiana wrapped up in a blue plastic trap only fifty feet off the road to the Mt. Jefferson trailhead.

The burning inside Kevin was far removed from politics and power. It was not to be involved with anything or anyone. Getting rid of Trask trailers and also the logging start-up operations was first priority. The way Richard Johnson told him to hang back until the helicopter logging wrapped up, pissed Kevin off. He was tired of everyone being worried or thinking that he couldn't do hard manual work. With Lilly always going out of the way to hurt or dig at his rich city boy status—Kevin had had enough. Sell Trask Trailers lock, stock and barrel and then head to Bhutan for the hardest trek in the world.

A young beautiful Bhutanese woman had put on a slide show at one on his college climbing club meetings. Bhutan a small monarchy in the Eastern Himalayas claims the highest unclimbed mountain in world. The last virgin peak known as Gangkhar Puensum lies on the border with China. This sparsely populated part of the world, hosts the Snowman Trek—220 miles of hardship, heartbreak and sometimes the final quest.

Patty knocked on the door jam with her notepad in hand and quietly asked. "Are you ready?"

"Tina, I have to go." Kevin spoke into the phone and then motioned Patty to come in.

"Kevin, your next meeting with Mr. Hung Meng won't be until after Christmas. He's in the Middle East for three weeks."

"Oh?" Kevin leaned back in the executive chair. "This might be a good time for me to go to the Far East and get things rolling."

"You must be serious about doing that Snowman Trek?"

"Yep, I'm going to try to do it next fall. I might get some practice on the Pacific

Crest Trail. There are trails around the base of Mt. Hood, Mt. Jefferson and even Mt. Shasta. Not on my agenda would be El Camino de Santiago in Spain; that Trek is way too crowded.”

“So you want to start trekking over mountain climbing?”

“I’m not sure. I just need to find myself. Nobody understands me. Everyone thinks that I’m this spoiled rich college kid that has it all. I hardly have any true friends. Growing up without a brother or sister was lonely. Never once did I ever have a sleep-over with a friend.”

Wow. Patty thought and was at a loss for words. She finally said, “Kevin, I’m your friend. And we sort of had a sleepover at Shasta Lake.”

Kevin chuckled. “That’s not what I meant. But maybe that does qualify for a sleepover.”

“It better! Or I’ll be hurt if you don’t consider me a true friend.” Patty sat down and set the notepad on the edge of the desk. “Haven’t you had a couple different sleepovers with Lilly? At their cabin and in a motel when you guys watched movies all night?”

“How do you know about that?” Kevin’s face started turning red.

“Girl talk.” Patty replied. “We’ve become good friends. If I ever have children I’d want Lilly to be a godparent. Lilly’s a good person and has a Christian soul.”

“Did Lilly say anything else about the motel?” Kevin’s face was full on red.

Yeah, I think she said you two watched the movie **Tommy Boy** and then you fell asleep. That you got up and took a shower but still couldn’t stay awake for the second movie.”

“That was all that Lilly told you?” The heat from Kevin’s face was receding.

“Yeah, that was pretty much it,” Patty answered with her tranquil smile that always put Kevin at ease.

“Patty that night before we slept up on the deck of the houseboat, what did you think about me? Be honest just like a true friend would be.”

“A... Well I thought you were good looking and...” Patty hesitated.

“Did you think about me as being wealthy and privileged?”

“I knew you were part of Trask Inc but that didn’t matter. I would have slept with you anyway. I was upset with Stan and I wanted to hurt him.”

“We did sleep together.” Kevin quipped.

“But we didn’t have sex.”

“So you would have had sex with me to hurt Stan?”

Patty was feeling pinned down but not uncomfortable. “Kevin, yes I would have had

sex with you that night... But there was more to it than me wanting to hurt someone. There was the alcohol, the loss of my sister, not having many friends, not really being part of that group up there at the lake and so much more.”

“What about getting pregnant?” Kevin asked.

“I was taking the pill.” Patty quipped.

“Oh?” Kevin replied. “So, you’re not taking the pill now.”

“Yes, that’s correct. CP wants to hopefully start a family this next year. Trask Trailer will be sold and I’m sure Mr. Hung Meng will have his own managers to bring on board.”

Kevin paused and leaned back in the black leather chair. The ramification of all the managers being let go was one thing he’d never thought about. It was almost like Grandpa Trask was rolling over in the grave. “Let’s go over the list.” Kevin tenderly spoke and then leaned forward.

They went over the list and most everything was on track. A big surprise was that Trask Inc was producing more units than ever; even without using imported wiring harnesses from China. The union officials were demanding a recount of the desertification vote and also threatening a lawsuit. The new Trask corporate attorney Condi hired was full blooded Italian. John Pagano said he’d make a house call to the union headquarters with two of his brothers; his family was experienced with union law enforcement... The last item was that Condi was recommending a seven percent across the board pay hike for all non-salaried workers.

Kevin pondered the pay hike for at least an hour before he got up from his desk to go see Condi. It was strange to go into Robert’s office and see Condi behind the big ornate wood desk. “What’s on your mind?” Condi asked.

“This seven percent pay hike, is it enough? It looks like we’re setting new profits records.” Kevin took a chair in front of the desk. “Could we afford to give the workers more; something like ten percent?”

“Sure we could afford it this quarter but trailers sales slow down during the winter.” Condi said with a stern voice and a stern look. “I’ve been over the numbers and made some projections and seven percent is what I came up with!”

“But, if we hike up the pay, then when Mr. Hung Meng takes over he won’t be able to roll back wages.” Kevin replied with a deceptive tone.

“Kevin, when Mr. Hung Meng takes over he can do whatever he wants. I’m betting he shuts down the manufacturing. It just looks to me like he’s only interested in the property.”

“Why would he do that? Trask Inc is making an eighteen percent profit using the **EBITDA** accounting formula.”

“I didn’t know you understood the **EBITDA** accounting formula.” Condi quizzed Kevin.

“Sure I do!” Kevin replied defensively. “It is net income with interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization added back to our profit statement. Or something like that... Patty has been explaining it to me.”

Condi frowned. “Anyway, Kevin let’s stick with the seven percent pay raise and let’s hope that Mr. Hung Meng wants to stay in the trailer manufacturing business.”

For the second time it felt as though Grandpa Trask was rolling over in his grave. Kevin stopped at Condi’s old desk. “Patty, after lunch could you come upstairs? I need your thoughts about something.”

“Kevin, could I come up just before quitting time. I need to get payroll out and I have an accident reports that has to be faxed before quitting time today.”

“Sure no problem.” Kevin quietly replied. “Would you like me to bring back lunch for you?”

“That would be great! Condi and I have a meeting at one.” Patty took some invoices over to copy machine and started making copies.

At the end of the hallway Kevin didn’t go up the stairs he went down one floor and pushed open the heavy metal doors that opened to the manufacturing plant. A few workers nodded or waved; a few more shook his hand when they rushed by. Everyone was busy and had a task at hand. Kevin meandered down one side and then up the other side of the U shaped assembly line. *Mr. Meng would never shut down the plant*, Kevin rationalized to himself...

Gus was even too busy to talk, he was checking under a delivery trucks with the Y2K stick mirror. *What would Gus do if the plant got shut down?* Kevin drove the Range Rover straight down Navy Way Road—over the top of the passageway Mr. Meng needed to complete his mission

The knot in Kevin’s head migrated to his stomach, he didn’t feel like eating. Kevin took a stool at the bar ordered a double shot and two lunches to go. *Why is all this stuff being laid on me? Nobody gets me! All this Trask family stuff is like a noose around my neck. My entire life has been on a schedule; I just want is to do my own thing. My parents are finally doing their own thing... I don’t want to work thirty years before I go on my road trip. I can’t deal with all of this right now. After Christmas I’m going to find myself a trekking partner to explore the world with...*

The bartender put some chips and salsa in front of Kevin with another second double shot of Cutty Sark. After about twenty minutes, Kevin’s self pity was interrupted. “Sir your two lunches are ready.” The bartender put two brown bags on the bar.

“I’ll have another double shot.” Kevin said and continued to ponder. *I’m not*

responsible for anybody but myself. Whatever happens to the plant is not on me. All of this crap and decision making for the past six months is draining me! I need my space and my own freedom away from Long Beach. Kevin poured down the double Cutty Sark put eighty dollars on the bar and picked up the two brown bags.

“Hey drive responsible Mr. Trask,” the bartender yelled as Kevin steadied himself at the rear exit to the parking lot.

Gus lifted and then motioned Kevin to pull through the gate. Kevin stopped the Range Rover at the door of the security shack. “Gus have you been thinking about moving? Maybe after Christmas would be a good time?”

“Yes sir, Mr. Kevin Trask.” Gus answered and noticed the alcohol on Kevin’s breath. “Are you celebrating like when we were on the airplane?” Gus asked.

“No, Gus. I have a lot on my mind. What I’m about to do could make a difference to a whole lot of people here at the plant.”

“Oh good! You must be looking over my plans for the remodel of the old Navy training room.”

“What plans? What remodel? What are you talking about?” Kevin pounded his fist on the steering wheel out of frustration. More stuff that he wasn’t even aware of! More stuff, to control his life and fill a skull that was already about to explode. The six shots on an empty stomach were bringing out the nasty side of Kevin.

“The plans in the red binder that I gave to you,” Gus sheepishly replied.

“No Gus! It is not about any plans that you gave me. It’s about the workers and their families...” Kevin looked straight through the windshield at the five hundred foot plus cinder block plant that seemed to be moving. “Gus, I’ll always be known as the rich kid that bailed out on everyone and didn’t care!” The rear tires on the Range Rover squealed as Kevin blasted off and then unintentionally parked under the basketball hoop. Kevin focused hard on walking into the building in a straight line. A few workers were watching from the dock.

“Thanks for lunch,” Patty said over at the four drawer tall and four wide employee filing cabinets.

Kevin set the two brown bags on the half circle counter, hiccupped and then said. “I bought a lunch for Condi too.”

“She’ll appreciate that, she’s still on a conference call.” Patty went back to filing employee records.

Kevin didn’t attempt the stairs two at a time; instead he used the railing to steady himself. Alone on the third floor he stood at the one way glass window and watched all the workers in the plant below. The noon whistle blew and concurrently the assembly line stopped. Kevin never thought that selling off Trask Inc would have huge life changing consequences for so many people. *All this pressure is pushing so*

hard on my skull, it feels like my head is going to explode. I get why people that everyone thinks has it all put a bullet into their own head. I didn't ask for all of this. I want to climb my own mountain—not stand on one already built...

Kevin's drunken depressed self consuming dark mental state was halted by the desk phone. "Kevin Trask here."

"Mr. Trask this is Officer Anthony Crowfoot from Warm Springs. I'd like to ask you a few questions."

Kevin was pulled out of his dark place when he was informed about how Shrimp spotted a blue tarp from the Chinook logging helicopter. The body of Aiana was wrapped in the blue tarp and Officer Crowfoot was careful not to give the details that she's been shot in the chest and also up between her legs. Kevin said that he did know of the area that she was found. It was about fifty yards from the yellow gate that Bull Elk had taken him too. Kevin remembered how Bull showed him brown rubbings of where Deer or Elk were trying to shed antlers. What Kevin didn't know was that he was a prime suspect. Kevin had no plans to return to Oregon and gave Officer Crowfoot as much information as he could recall during over the phone.

Officer Crowfoot made a note and put it in the open case file. **First contacted suspect on Dec 12 @ 12:10pm. Mr. Kevin Trask seemed evasive, his words were slurred and he repeated himself several times. Suspect somewhat refused to come up to Oregon to give a detailed statement. The first phone conversation felt deceptive. Need more evidence before proceeding with extradition paperwork. Case is open.**

Kevin leaned back in the executive chair; it felt like the chair was moving. He pulled the lever on the side of the chair and it leaned further back. Now everything was spinning! His head throbbed and pounded. Trask Inc was smothering him like the lead x-ray blanket that dentists use. Kevin had never achieved anything on his own—everything was either given or laid out before him. Good looks, good health, some fame on the basketball court were gifts that Kevin refused to accept or give thanks for. The world will always ponder why a Marilyn Monroe, Ernest Hemingway, Jimi Hendrix and so many more choose an early exit. Often the word accidental will be listed as cause of death to somehow lessen a suicide. The truth be told, mental pain cannot be seen. The pain of a broken arm can be fixed—unlike the pain of a broken mindset.

Patty had to pound on the door casing to get Kevin's attention!

Kevin sat up, rubbed at his eyes and brought the back of the chair forward. "I must have dosed off."

Patty came into the office and held out a package. "You got something from Notre Dame."

"Thanks." Kevin took the legal sized envelope; he could feel small bumps through

the bubble pack.

“Patty since our talk this morning and since we are close friends; I’d like to run something personal by you.” Kevin rubbed the dry slobber off the side of his face and thought about how he would phrase his words.

“Kevin just tell me what’s on your mind.” Patty sat in the chair in front of the desk, and sensed that she was about to be put on the spot.

“So Patty, would you sleep with a guy if your parents were in the next room?”

Patty slid all the way back in the chair. Lilly had mentioned something about her and Kevin falling asleep in front of the fireplace. She recalled something in Lilly’s story about Kenneth Saxton waking up Kevin first thing the next morning. “Well I guess it depends on the circumstances.”

Kevin rubbed at his forehead and tried to focus for better words. “You wouldn’t be married you would be single.”

“Would I really like this guy that is at my parent’s house?” Patty asked.

“Yeah, I guess. And her parents are in the next room. Wouldn’t you think that was wrong or weird?”

“Are we going to have sex?” Patty asked.

“Yeah, I think so. Or maybe just have some fun. My point is her parents are home.”

“Just have fun? What kind of fun?” Patty was getting lost in the conversation.

“Okay, let’s say you go almost all the way. Or you go all the way; the point is her parents know what is happening.”

“Kevin it sounds a little awkward but I’m going to be truthful. I had fun with a boy at my parents’ home when they were gone. But my grandma that lives with us heard us having way too much fun.”

“Wow, did your grandma ever say anything or tell anyone?”

“No my grandma never said a word.” A big smile came to Patty’s face.

“What so funny?” Kevin asked.

“Nana did take my bedroom door off of its hinges and put it out in the storage shed.”

Kevin laughed. “If you and CP have a little girl you’d better remember that story.”

“CP knows the story and he will do just like Nana did; if something like that happened in our home. CP thinks it’s some old Chinese chaste practice for teaching children respect.”

“That’s funny!” Kevin was wiping at tears running out his eyes. “I’ll pray you have a boy.”

“Why the double standard? Patty quizzed Kevin with a scowl. “Boys need to know and show respect also.”

“You’re right. That life lesson would work for boys too.”

“Well CP wants at least four kids so the door removal lesson will probably happen more than once.” Patty scowl turned to a frown.

Kevin felt a small tug on his heart. He always wished that he had at least one sibling. “Wow, are you good for having that many children?”

“God willing.” Patty said with her faith journey sincerity that Kevin so much respected her for. “I need to get back downstairs and make sure a fax went through.”

“Hey, thanks Patty. But, your door story really didn’t help me make a decision.”

“Kevin one last thing.” Patty stood up and ran her hands down her skirt. “Gus is going to be calling you on his new cell phone. He’s been up here twice and you were sleeping.”

“More like passed out.” Kevin said under his breath and picked up the package from Notre Dame as Patty exited.

Inside was a receipt for the donation of the SL 600. The car sold for one hundred and forty four thousand dollars at the Harper Research fundraiser. Coach Mike McCall included a heartfelt thank you card and told him he was returning the rosary that was hanging from the rear view mirror. Kevin took the rosary and wound it around a marble and gold pen holder on his desk.

After looking out the window at the front parking lot, Kevin slithered down the stairs and into the employee lunch room. Kevin rarely raided the vending machines, but not having any food for lunch had him standing at the wall of glass windowed junk food dispensers. *No wonder why I never come in here...* The truth be told the real reason he never came into the break room was that he was of a different eating class. Maria almost always packed fresh fruit, a small salad, healthy sandwich and natural fruit drink. Only occasionally would she slip in a Twinkie. Not one worker out in the plant had someone to make them healthy well balanced meals.

With chips and beef jerky in hand Kevin made a coy exit. On the second flight of stairs he came to a stop when he heard the new cell phone ring from his office. *I don’t want to talk with Gus right now.* Kevin did an about face in the middle of the stairs.

Out back of the plant Kevin found refuge among the stacks of steel, retired welding equipment and metal bending tools. There were three rows of proto-type trailers; some never made it onto the assembly line; other’s had manufacturing or wiring problems. Grandpa Trask started it all from a small welding shop in Burbank. It was Robert Trask that moved Trask Trailers to the vacant Naval Yard about the time Kevin was born. A major factor why Kevin didn’t have any sibling or family faith

structure. Success, fame and even royalty usually come at a huge cost. That price tag was like a red target in the middle of his back.

The quitting whistle blasted out and Kevin took up a post on the rear corner of the building by Gus's apartment. It took less than fifteen minutes for the entire parking lot to empty. Kevin hit the stairs two at a time; from the landing Kevin spotted the perfect pressed blue work pants. Kevin froze!

"Mr. Kevin Trask your new cell phone must not be working." Gus's voice echoed down the stairwell.

Crap he found me, Kevin thought as he came up the stairs. "Gus, I need to leave right away. My head hurts."

"Is that because of the alcohol you had for lunch?" Gus asked as Kevin passed in front of him.

"No! It's because of all the stuff that needs to fall in order. The more things get out of order the more it makes my head hurt."

"I know Mr. Kevin Trask. Just like the beads on my Rosary!" Gus pointed at the Rosary draped around the wood and marble pen set. "That is why I had to put the five extra beads on the prayer rope."

"What?" Kevin picked up his keys off the desk.

"Someone took the **Glory Be** beads away and it hurt my head when I pray. Like you said things are out of order." Gus rubbed at his forehead; he needed order a hundred fold more than Kevin did.

Kevin had taken **World Religions 101** the one year he spent at Gonzaga and knew prayer beads are used by members of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and the Bahá'í faith to mark the repetitions of prayers. "Gus, I don't know anything about that and I really need to go."

"Okay Mr. Kevin Trask." Kevin started to pull the office door shut.

Gus stepped out into the hallway. "Mr. Kevin Trask if you can find out why there are no Glory be beads, I will move out of my apartment. That way maybe my head will stop hurting if I know."

"Okay Gus, I'll think about it." Kevin hurried down both flight of stairs and out the front employee entrance. He spotted a note under the windshield wiper of the Range Rover. The note read: **Asshole! Park in your spot, not under the hoop!!!** One more reason and the final straw to be done with Trask Inc.

Even with the mansion empty, Kevin chose to still live above the six car garage. Marie still came by and cleaned, got the mail made him breakfast, packed a lunch and cooked a dinner with instructions for Kevin. Within forty-five minutes inside the main house, towels would be left on the floor, newspapers spread all over and empty

beer bottles and popcorn sometimes cluttered the entertainment room. About half of the time Kevin would leave the eighty inch projection television or surround sound system on. Digging the remote controls out from seat cushions was a daily ritual. Marie was glad that the tornado, Kevin, was staying in the apartment above the garage.

The herb blackened salmon on brown rice was still warm and on the marble counter when Kevin busted into the kitchen. The mail was next to a note: There is an asparagus salad in the refrigerator next to your lunch. A colored post card from Florida had the usual note on the back: **Having fun motoring-coaching, see you in the spring. Love Mom and Dad.**

A few pieces of junk mail landed on the tile floor along with a wine bottle cork. The herb blacked salmon and rice filled the void that the chips and jerky from the vending machine missed. Looking over the top of the wine glass at the wall phone Kevin read the message off of the whiteboard: **Tina Williams called three times this afternoon. She said that your new cell phone must not be working.**

Kevin reached for the phone clipped on his belt. *That's right I turned my phone off so Gus couldn't get a hold of me...* Kevin turned the phone back on and the display read: **5 missed calls.** He dialed the long distance phone number with an Ohio prefix.

"Sue answered, "Hello."

"Sue, is Tina there?"

"Yeah she's here. Hold on for a minute." Sue set the phone on the laminate countertop.

"Like, Kevin what did you decide? Are we going to do Christmas Eve at my parent's house?"

"Yeah, I guess. Kevin replied with hesitation. "It just seems weird with your parents going to be there and all."

Like, what feels weird? Christmas is all about family. Christmas day, Tom scored reservations for a private room at **Tony's Fish Grotto.** Then the day after me and mom take back a lot of our stuff and then like, we really score big on the sales. That's like a tradition for our family."

"I'm not that big on shopping," Kevin said while pouring another glass of wine.

"You can watch adult movies with my stepfather. Like, that his thing to do when he's all by himself. Tom's not that big into sports."

"There are not any games the day after Christmas." Kevin replied. Now things were really feeling weird.

"Anyway Kevin, Like what did Tim say about you paying back the money.

Remember six thousand of the twenty two thousand was mine.”

“He’s good if I give him fifteen thousand in cash to square things up between you two. I’m going to meet up with him next week.”

“That’s great Kevin. I’ll pay you back. Like, this new position with the Red Cross pays so good. Like, the VP is already having me work remotely from back here in Ohio.”

“That’s good. So I’ll plan on seeing you on Christmas Eve.” Kevin said and then finished off a second glass of wine.

“Yep, I can’t wait to show you how much I appreciate all the stuff you’re doing for me.” Tina said in her canned sensual tone. “We’ll talk later... Kevin, I can’t wait to have you.”

The half bottle of wine added to the six shot whiskey lunch, but still didn’t help make the Christmas holiday stay over from feeling weird. *Maybe, I can find a motel close by to Tina’s parent’s home.* Kevin left the cell phone on the counter and walked over to one of the oversized double door Sub-Zero refrigerators. Marie always had a special treat waiting for him. The strawberry cheesecake was at eye level...

Even with Robert Trask being on an extended RV trip Kevin knew better than to take a piece of cheesecake into the study with shelves and shelves of collectable books. A home library that had its own Dewey Decimal System was Robert’s pride and joy. Kevin hoped for something about the history of the rosary in one of the three sets of; encyclopedias. After two hours of reading and searching all Kevin knew was that the **Glory Be** was not a prayer it was a doxology. Maybe Gus had duped Kevin into not moving from his apartment. Kevin left the books stacked on the antique desk and one encyclopedia open on a reading stand. Marie knew the Dewey Decimal system and would make sure that every book was back in its place. Kevin didn’t even care if the title was put back with the title reading top down. Kevin had free reign over most anyplace in the Trask manor except for the study.

In the morning Kevin passed Marie coming through the wrought iron gate as he was leaving. Kevin rolled down the window on the Range Rover. “Marie, I was in Robert’s study last night looking through books.”

“Not a problem Kevin, I’ll put everything back,” Marie replied and then drove toward the main house.

At the next gate Kevin stopped and took a side to side look at the ten acres Trask Inc sat on. *I don’t want to drive out one gate only to enter another gate for the rest of my life. I’m the one locked out of everything good or bad. This land deal needs to be done by summer*

“Good morning Mr. Kevin Trask. I’m glad we had our talk last night,” Gus said with an illusory look.” Sure Gus was servile and had a photographic memory. The Holy Family Catholic Church was due north and uphill from the plant, it was where Gus

attended school through eighth grade. It was probably a Nun that put Gus onto the rosary bead quest as a way to keep him busy.

“Yeah, me too. We’ll talk about the doxology beads later.” Kevin waited for Gus’s reaction to the word doxology. There was none.

“Please don’t park under the basketball hoop this morning.” Gus asked.

“I won’t!” Kevin speed off. He knew someone at Notre Dame that could give him an answer about the five missing beads.

Kevin stopped at the top of the first set of stairs and looked right, all the way down the hall he could see that the two doors to Robert’s office were closed.

“Condi’s on a conference call with the union.” Patty said as she came out of the supply room. “They want a second desertification vote. I think she is pushing that vote out until next summer.”

Kevin followed Patty down the hall. “That’s a smart move. Hung Meng can deal with the union then.”

“One more reason for Mr. Hung Meng to close down the plant.” Patty whispered. Rumors about the pending sale and plant closure were already circulating. The increase in production numbers and Union desertification was an effort to show that the American worker could be a better choice than outsourcing.

“Yeah we need to keep quiet about the pending sale,” Kevin whispered back; there were other office doors that were open. “Oh by the way, I took your advice!” Kevin said in an upbeat normal voice.

“I’m going to do a Christmas stay over.”

“What?” Patty exclaimed with confusion. She was working on a stay over with Lilly during for the week between Christmas and New years but that was a surprise for Richard Johnson.

You know yesterday when you told me about your Grandma taking your door off the hinges?”

Patty smiled at Kevin. “Yes... I remember.”

“Well, I hope that Tina doesn’t have a Grandma like yours.”

Patty’s smile turned to disappointment. “I thought Tina was back in the mid-west?”

“She is! But I’m working on a plan to get her home for Christmas.”

“Oh!” Patty was not whispering now.

Kevin looked ahead at the closed office doors. “Could you send Condi up when she has some time?”

Kevin hit the stairs two at a time. At his desk he picked up and examined the thank

you card from Notre Dame. The card did have a phone number on it.

“Hello, Coach McCall.”

“Coach, Kevin Trask here.”

“Yeah Kevin, what can I do for you?”

“Coach, I got your thank you card and the Rosary back. That’s why I’m calling.”

“Okay?” Coach McCall moved the phone to his other ear to hear better. His small cinder block office was located between the locker rooms and gymnasium.

“Did you notice those extra beads on the Rosary that you sent back?”

“Yeah, I did notice some fine copper wire wound into a ball. I figured beads fell off and these were the new markers.”

“No, those makeshift wire balls are where a doxology should be said.”

“A what?” Coach McCall blurted.

“The **Glory Be** prayer,” Kevin said. “It’s a doxology”

“Okay, so what can I do about that?” Coach McCall was lost.

“Could you tell me why there are five missing beads on a Rosary?”

“Kevin, you’re asking the wrong person. I’m not even a catholic. But I know a professor and or a priest here at the college that should know. I’ll get back to you.”

“Thanks Coach.”

“No, thank you Kevin! That sports car we auctioned off is going to do a lot of good for cancer research.

“What did you do with the bag cell phone?”

“I had the engineering department pull it out of the car, just like you said to do.”

“Coach could I get one more favor. It’s not a big deal but could you ask the engineering department to check that bag phone for a tracking device?”

“What’s all this spy and doxology stuff all about?” Coach McCall asked.

“I’ll have to tell you later coach. I have someone standing at my office door.”

“Okay, talk later,” Coach replied; both men hung up at the same time.

“Come on in Condi.” Kevin stood and motioned with his arm.

“I haven’t been up here since my father was terminated.” Condi did about a 360 degree scan of the office. “It looks a lot more cluttered.”

“Probably is, I’m not that organized. Now, with Patty down stairs there’s no one to help pick things up. By the way how are you and Patty doing working together?”

“She’s great! But I wished she’d stay out of my family business.”

“What do you mean?”

Oh, she and that Lilly from Oregon are planning some secret rendezvous for my Mom and Dad over Christmas.

“You wouldn’t want your Mom and Dad to get back together?”

“No! My father is a racist and a cheater.”

“Condi, I’ve talked with Richard and he said nothing happened in the motel room. All he remembered were sirens and birds out on the deck.”

“He’s still a racist! Richard won’t even acknowledge his own grandson, just because Ali is half white.” The veins on Condi’s temples were bulging.

“I get it Condi... I’m not going to meddle in your family business.” Kevin took a deep breath and gently sat down.

I’m going to need sixteen thousand dollars in cash next week?”

“What for?”

“Tina borrowed some money and they want it all back in cash. She needs to pay up so that she can come back to San Diego for Christmas.”

“Kevin, you can’t withdraw more than ten thousand dollars in cash without filing a CTR; that’s a currency transaction report. Plus paying off someone’s personal debt is not a legitimate business expense. You’re getting into a real grey area.”

“Do you have an idea where I can round up that much money?”

“Yeah, take an advance on your salary account. In fact you should give yourself a raise. I think I’m earning more than you since Robert doubled my pay to stay on until Trask Inc is sold.”

“Do I really deserve a raise? You and Patty run everything around here.”

“Kevin, I got a meeting right after lunch. Give Patty the payout information. I’ll look at your salary account and figure something out.”

“Thanks Condi, I know you will always do what’s right for the company.”

“Not a problem, Kevin. Thanks for your vote of confidence.”

One last question, how is Ali doing?

Ali’s doing great; I wish his dad was more involved. Gus has been a big help and role model when I work late. Gus is teaching Ali how to read.”

“I bet it’s all super-hero stuff.”

“Yeah, but Gus also reads out of a children’s bible to Ali. The nights that I work late they ride around the parking lot when it’s empty. Gus got Ali one of those big wheel

things sort of like a trike.”

“I hope you don’t work late every night? Kevin asked with sincerity.

“I work until the work is done. That’s what I’m paid to do.” Condi replied firmly.

“You sound a lot like your Father.”

“My Dad doesn’t think women should be allowed in the workplace at all!”

“Richard is old school. He didn’t think I should work at the helicopter loading zone because I’m not a hardened worker. Your Dad is not only against women working, he chewed my butt out a couple of times too.

“Kevin, that’s because you’re a blunderbuss and reckless. You need to take life more seriously and put this new mounting climbing stuff to rest.”

“I’m going to be trekking not climbing mountains.”

“Kevin get off the finding yourself, do or die soapbox and do something good.” A hard day’s work for the good of mankind is what you will be measured by.”

“Now you sound like Grandpa Trask.”

“I never met your Grandfather, but most all the old times respected his work ethic and honesty”

“Well, Grandpa Trask would say to cut your Dad some Slack.”

Condi frowned and started toward the office door. “Get Patty the payout information and I’ll take care of it.”

Kevin went to the window overlooking the front parking lot. Gus was riding up and down the rows of parked cars and then he vanished around the corner of the building to patrol the back lot. *Gus will like it when he has a brand new condo and not have to work...Kevin lied to himself. Gus is out back, I can leave undetected. I need to get Tina a Christmas present.*

The gemologist offered Kevin a glass of wine after he laid out three different bracelets. “Any of these would make a wonderful Christmas present.”

“Yeah, I’m not exactly sure. My girlfriend is really picky.” Kevin took a drink of wine. “Tina knows what’s in or out of style.”

“What about diamond earrings, they never go out of style?”

“Would she be able to bring them back if she didn’t like them?”

“Yes, there would be a ten percent restocking or exchange fee. We could apply that fee to an engagement ring in the future. Our goal is to make our customer happy so they keep coming back,” the owner rambled out as he poured more wine.

Kevin drank the entire glass while the gemologist ran a credit check and found out that he had a Trask heir in his private showroom. The restocking or exchange fee

was waived and Kevin left with two different bracelets and a set of one carat diamond earrings on just a signature. Being a Trask had perks that Kevin wasn't even aware of—most anyone else would have had to leave the title to their car or signed over their house.

A late lunch with margaritas was the next stop. Kevin was becoming a regular at the Mexican restaurant at the SW corner of Navy Way that overlooked the entrance of Long Beach harbor. The supertankers seemed bigger these days from when he'd ride his bike down the gravel road built on top of the jetty. Grandpa Trask trusted Gus as though he was Kevin's big brother to come watch harbor ship traffic some sixteen years ago.

Patty was getting accustomed to the chair reclined all the way back and mouth wide open position. She knocked hard on the opened office door.

Kevin reeled forward in the executive chair. "Is it that time already?"

"Yes, it's almost five and the only thing on your list this afternoon is the contact information for the cash payment you want Condi to handle."

"Here I wrote everything down." Kevin tore off the top sheet of a notepad folded it and held it out.

Patty took the folded paper and tucked it under her notepad. "I'll go drop this off to Condi before I leave for the night." Patty turned and headed for the door.

"What's the rush?" Kevin asked while he opened the top center drawer on the desk. "I'd like a woman's opinion on something." Kevin took out three jewelry boxes and then opened them one at a time.

"Wow, those bracelets are so eloquent and those earrings are over the top." Patty bent over to get a better look. "What are these, a caret each?" Patty pointed at the smallest box.

I'm not sure? But which of the three do you think Tina will like most for Christmas?

Patty immediately straightened up. "Tina and you must be getting serious..."

"I like the red rubies on this bracelet." Kevin pointed at one box. "But the white pearls would look good against Tina's dark tan." Kevin picked up the pearl bracelet and laid it on the cuff of his dark blue dress shirt.

"I'd do the earrings. Diamonds are a girl's best friend," Patty sarcastically quipped and then headed for the door.

"Thanks!" Kevin picked up the smaller box and put it back in the desk drawer.

The quitting time whistle blasted just as Patty knocked and then pushed open one of the heavy wood doors and entered the large office.

"Did you get the contact information for the cash payout? Condi asked.

“Yeah.” Patty practically tossed the folder paper on Condi’s desk.

“What’s the matter?” Condi asked.

“Oh nothing...”

“There’s something bugging you. I could tell this morning after you and Kevin talked.”

“Oh, it’s Kevin’s girlfriend. I can’t stand her and it looks like they’re getting back together.”

“You mean Tina? The girl he went with during college.”

“Yeah, that bitch! She thinks she’s a goddess.”

“Well she sure looks like a goddess.” Condi gave Patty an odd look. “Over the years when she’d get the chance she strut her stuff out in the plant. She could bring the whole assembly line to a halt.”

“That’s her for sure, hot-shit Tina.”

“Patty you shouldn’t stick your nose into other people’s private lives. Just like this thing you are doing up in Oregon; trying to get my Mom and Dad back together. That stuff always backfires and nobody likes it,” Condi said with a stern warning.

This was the first time leaving work that Patty didn’t care about working at Trask Inc. Hopefully, she’d be pregnant by next summer—in unison with the sale of Trask Inc.