

Chapter Three

Easy like Sunday morning was the song stuck in Kevin's head as he cruised peacefully up the Pit River arm of Lake Shasta. He secured the mooring line to an old snag sticking up out of the water and then went into the galley and started putting the groceries into cupboards and the one operating refrigerator. All the new fishing equipment and tackle got strewn on the table; including live worms, cheese bait and the guaranteed to get fish **Red Hot** eggs. Kevin looked through all the gear for instructions and found nothing, not even on the jars of bait. Tying the hook and clamping the lead shot on to the line seemed straight forward. Kevin elected to try the eggs first; not sure how to hook on a worm. He'd always had a guide do the grimy baiting and fish cleaning.

Out on the front of the lower deck his first cast was short and across an old tree snag. When Kevin started to reel in the line it got hung up; one hard tug and everything was gone. The end of the line was curled where the hook had slipped off. An hour later Kevin hadn't had a bite and was running low on hooks and patience. Kevin always caught Marlin, Tarpon or Swordfish off the Caribbean Islands but the deck hands on the charter would do all the rigging on those trips—all he had to do was reel in the catch.

As the temperature approached triple digits Kevin's futile fishing endeavor bowed under for a swim. A dozen or more times climbing up ladders to dive from the upper deck finally did Kevin in. Back inside the Captain's room Kevin stripped off his wet shorts and laid down on one of the two queen size beds. *This is great being all alone. But, I do wish Tina was here. I wouldn't have her sleep in the other bed like when we went to Hawaii. This trip we would...* Kevin dozed off.

The sound of metal bumping metal followed by the sound of footsteps jumping onto the houseboat woke Kevin. Naked, he ran from the bed to the window and could see that a small houseboat had pulled up next to him. He heard voices just down the inside steps to the galley. "Kevin are you up there?"

"Stan is that you?" Kevin yelled as he picked up the damp shorts off the floor.

"Yeah, we came up early!" echoed back Stan's voice.

"I'll be right down," Kevin said, slipping on the **Duke Blue Devil** basketball shorts.

"Okay!" Stan yelled back as he started looking over all the new fishing equipment on the table.

"What's going on?" Kevin asked as he climbed down the inside ladder.

"Not much!" replied Stan. "The bald kid at the marina wasn't much help. All that he would tell us is that there was only one member from the Duke Basketball team on the lake. He would not give out your name or any other information. That young boy was very secretive."

"I know. I asked him to keep quiet. Anyway, I came up yesterday. I had to get away. My Dad was on my butt over a tennis game."

"Tennis? I didn't know you played. I thought basketball was your sport." Stan said as he picked up the fishing pole and started checking the action by bending the tip.

"Hi Kevin," came a soft voice through the screen door.

Kevin was whipping the sleep boogers from his eyes when the bright sun behind Patty silhouetted her in the doorway. After a few seconds of squinting Kevin could see that all she had on was a thong and a tiny yellow bikini top. Two more voices came through the screen door from the smaller houseboat. Kevin moved to the door cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted, "Hey Hank. Hey Laura."

"So you're up here all alone?" Stan asked while more closely examining all the new fishing tackle on the table. "Tina's, coming up tomorrow with the rest of the gang."

"How do you know that?" Kevin asked.

"Laura talked to Sue. Sue told Laura about Tim being upset because she got pregnant. Laura told Patty on the drive up here and so on. Now everybody knows... You get the picture," Stan answered.

"Yeah, whatever..." Kevin replied. "It's really none of my business. I just hope they don't go at each other this week. It might make things tense for everyone."

"It's going to be one hell of a party for five days. There'll be plenty of Hotties for Tim to hit on, if Sue gets on his case."

"Yeah, but that might put a damper on things for the rest of us."

"Kevin you worry too much. Tim will get this party going... He'll probably get some girls to go topless. I bet Tim scores with. . ." Stan looked toward Patty who was still standing just outside the screen door with her head tilted up capturing sun rays.

"Patty, could you grab me a beer?" Stan asked forcefully.

"Sure. Do you want one too?" Patty asked Kevin in a soft sexy voice through the screen door.

"No beer for me Patty," Kevin replied.

"Hey babe get that firm, tight ass of yours moving, I'm getting thirsty," yelled Stan from the booth type table against the wall in the galley.

"I might be one of those girls that go topless." Patty whispered to Kevin thru the screen. Patty smiled at Kevin, turned then stepped from one houseboat to the other. Kevin caught himself staring; from the back with only a thong on; she might as well been naked. Kevin finally looked away...

Patty looks good doesn't she?" Stan said in a bragging tone.

"Yeah, she does! You have a nice looking girlfriend; all the volleyball keeps her firm." Kevin replied as he walked away from the door and sat down across from Stan.

"She's not really my steady girl. We have the friends with benefits thing going on." Stan shut up when Patty pulled open the screen door with two beers in hand. She handed one to Stan and started to drink the other. Kevin had not seen a bathing suit so small since a family vacation years ago in Spain. Kevin took in an eyeful... In the hot stillness of the galley there was some sort of weird telepathy floating between the three of them.

Stan twisted off the top of his beer and started chugging while watching Kevin stare. Patty pushed her bare hip against Kevin's bare shoulder. Kevin moved into the booth further so that she could slide into the booth. Stan smiled from across the table. Kevin was pinned into the corner and Patty rubbed her hand on his bare leg under the table.

The awkward silence and Kevin's arousal was interrupted by Stan. "Hey how'd your new ride do coming on the drive up?"

"Okay, but it might be too flashy for me. Everyplace I go, people are staring and asking questions about it, or wanting a ride."

"Isn't that the truth? I saw a couple of guys in suits bent down looking underneath it in the resort parking lot. I thought they were casing it out or something."

"When was this?" asked Kevin

"About an hour ago. When we were hauling stuff from the truck to the houseboat. I walked over to see what they were up to and they and they got into a black stretched-limo."

"Did you get the license number or anything?"

"No, never thought about it," Stan replied while taking a gulp of beer. "I'm sure your Dad has it insured for theft."

"If that car got stolen I wouldn't really care." Kevin reached under the table and pushed Patty's hand off of his upper thigh.

"Well, if those guys do steal it, two Asian guys in suits, one tall one short shouldn't be that hard to find."

"Two Asian guys! Are you sure?"

"Yeah Chinese, Japanese or some type of nese. Like I said, one of them was fairly tall. The older guy was kind of short."

"How old do you think the tall one was?" Kevin asked.

"Not that old, maybe thirty or so."

"And the short one. How old would you think he was?"

"I don't know. It's hard to tell with those Asians." replied Stan, taking a long drink of beer.

The investigative conversation was halted by a loud scream from the top deck of the other houseboat, followed by the words. "Damn you Hank!"

"I got to see this!" Stan jumped up from the table and ran out the screen door.

Hank was at the top railing with a water gun in one hand and a bathing suit top in the other. He had just sprayed Laura who had been sunbathing on her stomach with her swimsuit top unfastened. When she jumped up screaming, Hank made the snatch.

"Hank, I'm warning you! Give me that top back!" Stern words from Laura lying on the chaise lounge careful not to lift up.

Hank laughed; tossed the bathing suit top into the lake then turned the water gun on the other houseboat. Stan, Patty and Kevin were now wet and standing below on the deck. The nozzle on the water gun started hissing as it ran out of fluid. Stan disappeared as he went to reload. Laura now appeared at the railing with her arms crossed across her bare chest; she saw her swimsuit top floating about ten feet out from the front of the two house boats. Stan jumped across to the smaller houseboat and out of site to get armed for retaliation.

Laura moved away from the side railing out of their site. She reappeared with a towel wrapped around her chest, came down the ladder and jumped off the front of the houseboat. Hank now back at the top railing had the gun reloaded and saw Laura swimming toward her bathing suit; he moved along the railing toward the front and used the spray from the water gun to push the swimsuit top away from her.

Kevin had gone back into the galley and got into his supplies; he tore open the bag of balloons and went to the sink. He filled some balloons and when Stan appeared with his loaded water gun, Kevin hit Stan dead on with a cold water balloon. Patty had gone to the front and jumped into the lake to help Laura retrieve her top.

Kevin quickly climbed to the top deck of the Stargazer. The first water balloon just missed Hank, but Hank heard it whiz by. Just as he turned Kevin's second throw was right on target; it hit Hank directly in the side of the head. Stan appeared on the

upper deck shaking a can of beer, he rushed Kevin popped the top and started spraying him with ice cold beer. Then Stan tossed a second beer into the lake, ran across the deck and followed it with a long arching swan dive over the railing, his entry into the lake was crisp and straight down.

Thirty seconds passed— Stan did not surface! Another fifteen seconds passed before Kevin and Hank dove in to look for Stan. Finally... Stan popped to the surface; he had caught up with the sinking beer. Stan twisted over so to float on his back; he popped the top and poured the gold liquid into his wide open mouth. Everyone laughed.

After an intense thirty minute water fight, heavy drinking and swimming everyone was worn out and buzzed. Kevin dried off in the captain's room retrieved the two piece mobile phone, then climbed up to the observation deck and straddled a chaise lounge chair.

"What are you doing?" Stan yelled as he pulled on the rope between the two boats.

"I'm supposed to contact my Father. I'm going to try this hi-tech mobile phone that came with the SL600.

"Can a phone work way out here?" Stan now had the boats within two feet of each other and threw a second rope across the stern of the Stargazer.

"Possibly, it sort of worked from the marina parking lot." Kevin answered back.

"Cool! Maybe I can use it to call another friend for a threesome?"

"You're sick Stan," piped up Patty from her tanning position on a chaise lounge.

"She's right. You are sick Stan." Kevin looked away from the bag-phone and winked at Patty directly across on the upper deck of the smaller house boat.

Kevin punched in the numbers on the handset and listened for a dial tone. Nothing... He looked at the display on the bag unit and it read '**NO SIGNAL.**'

"Hey, Kevin you want me to cook you a burger?" asked Stan now standing on the lower deck in front of the barbeque grill.

"No thanks. I got plenty of food over here," Kevin answered as the display flashed '**3 MESSAGES.**' Kevin placed the handset back into the black nylon bag and walked over to the side railing. "Hey, you guys I'm going to have to take off for awhile. I got to go make a couple of phone calls." Kevin hurried down the ladder and untied the bow line.

While untying the stern Patty casually approached. "Kevin would you like me to come along and keep you company?"

"What about Stan?" Kevin asked from his bent over position.

"Stan is the one that suggested I ride along with you," replied Patty with a forced smile.

"What?" Kevin glanced up at her.

"Yeah, Stan told me about you and he's okay with it."

"Stan told you what about me?" Kevin asked in a demanding tone.

"He said you were shy around women... Maybe, I can help you overcome that shyness." Patty said as she lightly licked her lips. "Maybe I can do something for you while you drive the boat. You know something... Something, that isn't sexual relations"

Kevin took a deep look at Patty. He barely knew her but from their first flirting episode he did feel like they had a connection. "Patty, I appreciate your offer but I have to go take care of some family business, maybe later."

"Won't your girlfriend be here later?" Patty asked.

"Tina won't be here until tomorrow," Kevin replied.

"Like that's cool," replied Patty. "Remember the President said 'It's not sexual relations,' or something like that," Patty said. "So, maybe tonight we can have some fun."

"Yeah maybe later," Kevin replied as he continued to untie the stern line.

Piloting the houseboat back toward the marina Kevin thought about Patty's offer. But mostly, he thought about how his own grandfather had changed his life the summer he was finding his sexuality at the age of fourteen. After that awkward summer it was prep school, basketball camps, and then a demanding battle to keep his college scholarship. Kevin's life so far had been all laid out—no time for any true intimacy.

While cutting a swath through the dark green water of Lake Shasta, Kevin thought about starting a different life someplace else; something not under the Trask's family umbrella. Going to college on the East Coast had been a partial reprieve but now he was back home and felt smothered. *Oh God I truly give thanks for all that you have given to the Trask family... But is this my fate or is there something more?*

Danny had spotted the Stargazer pulling up to the dock. He ran across the wood planks and had the bowline secured before the engines were shut off. Danny tied off the stern and then yelled, "Coming in to make that phone call Mr. Trask?"

"Yes, and please don't call me Mr. Trask." Kevin replied in a loud voice just before

he shut off the engines.

"Yes, sir," replied Danny in an anxious voice, eager to be helpful.

"And don't call me sir," Kevin said as he stepped from the boat on to the dock.

Danny followed in Kevin's footsteps. "I did call Condi at Trask enterprises. She asked me if you had that new mobile phone. I told her you were out on a houseboat that was why I was calling. I just took the message and didn't say anything about knowing where you were or..."

"Hey, slow down Danny, you did just fine."

"Thank you Mr. Trask. I just wanted to ..."

Kevin stopped in his tracks causing Danny to bump into him. "Danny, remember to just call me Kevin. That's my name."

"Okay, sorry . . . I'll try to call you Kevin."

"Can I use that phone in the office again? This call is somewhat important." Kevin started walking again with Danny following.

"Yeah that should be okay. Are you going to call the 800 number on the business card that you gave me? If not you'll have to call collect."

"No problem Danny."

"I'd let you call long distant but my Dad says we need to watch the bottom line. But since you tipped me the ten dollars this morning you can call and I can pay back my Dad if you want."

"That's okay Danny. I'm calling home and I'll call collect. Your Dad's right about the bottom line. It sounds like he's a good businessman."

"Oh he is. Dad says the customer is not right all the time, but I shouldn't argue. Dad says that the customer will tell everyone if you do them wrong and probably not tell anyone if you do them right."

"I like that! It sounds like something my Granddad would say to me when I worked in the welding shop." Kevin picked up the pace.

"My Dad tells me and my brother to always be honest. That truthfulness will set us free. Be honest at work and be honest with yourself and retirement will be long and great beyond our dreams." Danny replied in a proud voice.

"Well, I won't be thinking about my retirement for a long time. I'm just starting off my career. That's the reason I'm up here... I need some alone time out on the lake."

"The retirement my Dad is talking about is the one in heaven. No person knows the date it will start. Mine could start tomorrow." Danny's tone sounded despair or even worse suicidal.

Kevin's fast pace came to a dead stop, he looked down at Danny. "You're not thinking of harming yourself or something like that?"

"No... The cancer is doing a good job at that," Danny answered.

Kevin didn't have a reply. He suspected cancer the moment he met Danny. *God how can this be? Please heal this young innocent child. In your name I pray.*

Danny hurried ahead and opened the sliding door to the marina office. "You better make that call."

Kevin went directly to the wall phone hanging next to the green chalk board behind the counter. As he placed a collect call he nonchalantly looked over the messages on the chalk board. The '**Meng**' name had been erased and written over. Kevin turned around and could see Danny outside on the dock bent over filling up a row of red tanks with gas.

Maria accepted the collect call and was unusually short with Kevin before she went to get Robert Trask.

As Kevin waited he looked at the brown accordion folder on the lower shelf in the counter with the words '**Rental Agreements**' on it. He moved down the counter and his finger walked up the index tabs on the top to the '**M**' tab. "Kevin is that you?" blasted through the phone

"Yes Sir, it's me." Kevin replied and paused his file searching.

"I needed to talk to you, before you tore out of the club yesterday. I know that I promised you three weeks off. But, I might need you to start before then."

"What about our agreement? Am I still starting out in the shop?"

"Kevin things are getting way too complicated to play that starting out on the bottom game. Mr. Hung Meng just had Pro-Star Investigators do a private audit of the plant and something isn't right! You might have to take over Richard's department immediately!"

"What?" Kevin yelled into the phone. "You mentioned yesterday you might be letting Richard Johnson go..." Kevin paused to take a deep breath. "I told you if Richard goes so do I."

"Kevin, I don't know what is going on with Richard, since the audit. Richard has bigger problems than work? He could go to jail." Robert Trask yelled back.

"I don't understand! An audit of Richard Johnson. Who ordered that?"

"Mr. Meng suggested the audit. We'll talk about it when you get back. Be back here next week."

Kevin wasn't listening to any demands now. "Hey, if there is a problem with Richard, I want to know about it now! Granted he's not been the same since Jabbar got shot but . . ."

"Kevin, we'll talk next week. The audit is over and out of my hands."

"What about Condi? She will know what's going on with her Dad? I'm calling her."

"Don't do that!" warned Mr. Trask just before he blasted out the words. "Richard has been cheating on Makayla."

"I don't believe it." Kevin blasted back.

"Condi might have to testify against her own father." Mr. Trask took a deep breath. "Rocky Johnson might have to go also. It's ugly..." There was another long pause.

"How do you know Richard is having an affair?" Kevin asked in a firm voice.

"I have the pictures. I was looking at them yesterday when we talked out at the pool." Another long silence. "The woman he was with died yesterday in a horrific car accident. I'm still getting the details."

Danny had just walked back into the shop and noticed Kevin at the other end of the counter with the phone cord stretched out and with his hand down under the counter. "Are you looking for something?"

Kevin took his finger off the 'M' index tab and moved his hand to the top of the counter. "Hold on for a second Dad," Kevin covered the mouth piece with his hand. "Danny, do you have a pencil and piece of paper to write on?"

Danny came around the counter and retrieved a pad of paper and took a pencil from a tall can beside the cash register. "Here you go."

Kevin took his hand away from the phone mouth piece. "Dad who gave you the pictures of Richard?"

"Pro-Star Investigators, Mr. Meng assisted on them. Kevin I got to go." Click, *and* then there was dial tone.

Kevin walked back to the other end of the counter, hung up the phone, and wrote **PRO-STAR INVESTIGATORS** on the pad of paper. "Thanks." Kevin said dazed while tearing off the top paper from the pad.

"No problem," replied Danny then added. "I checked the gas in your houseboat. It

looks okay. You didn't drive the Stargazer much."

"No, I just tied her up and tried some fishing and did some swimming."

"Thanks again," said Kevin thinking about the private audit of Richard at Trask Trailers. While putting the piece of paper in his wallet Kevin pulled out a fifty dollar bill and held it for Danny. "This should cover the gas and your time."

"That's too much money Mr. Kevin. I put the gas on the rental agreement. Checking the houseboats and topping off gas is my job. "

"Okay," replied Kevin still thinking about **Pro-star Investigators**. "Then take this for using the phone and keeping quiet about me being on the lake."

"I didn't tell those people that you were out on the lake."

"I know. No worries." Kevin replied. Stan told me you never broke your silence." Kevin put the fifty back into his wallet and then started walking toward the glass sliding door.

"But, I'd take that ride in your car. Like you promised this morning"

"Sure thing, you've been more that helpful. Just let me know when." Kevin said as he stepped out through the open door.

"How about right now?" Danny rushed toward the door, raring to go.

Kevin stopped, turned, looked back and replied. "Maybe tomorrow or before I leave on Friday."

Danny stopped short of the door and replied, "I was just kidding about tonight. I know you got important stuff to take care of."

"No, let's do it. What time do you get off work?"

"My Dad will be back at four-thirty." Danny replied with a rejuvenated tone.

"Tell you what, I'll go up to the restaurant and get something to eat. Find out from your father if it's okay to go for a short ride."

Danny rushed back behind the counter and looked at his To-Do-List. "Okay I'll see you up in the restaurant. I got a few more chores to do, and then I'll be done!"

Kevin had just started the second half of a BLT when Danny came rushing into the restaurant. From all the 'Hi's' and 'How's' it going' you could tell Danny was well liked. Even the cook gave Danny the thumbs up through the serving cubby hole.

Danny made a beeline toward Kevin. "My Dad said it's okay to take me for a ride. At first he said no riding with strangers. But I told him you were the Trask Trailers guy."

Kevin took another bite of the BLT. One of the waitresses came over to table. "Here you go Danny; we made up one too many milkshakes."

"Thanks Edna," Danny replied with an ear to ear smile. "I'm going for a ride in a car like my PlayStation, Formula 1 game has."

"Wow, that's cool... Maybe you should drive since nobody around here can beat you on the PlayStation."

Kevin glanced up at the waitress and frowned. "I don't think he's old enough to drive."

"Well what about all those military shoot-em-up, blow-em-up video games that kids play day long, that aren't old enough to join up." Edna replied in a defensive tone.

"Yeah, college kids," Kevin snipped as he chewed his food, "plus they have age restrictions and warnings on those violent games."

"No, kids not even big enough to hold a gun. So why not let kids drive? We let them do everything else," Edna argued.

"Edna, this is Mr. Kevin Trask. That's his car out there." Danny pointed out the window toward the far end of the parking lot.

"I wondered who's car that was. Sure have been a lot of people looking at it."

Kevin swallowed quickly and then asked, "Really anybody suspicious, did you notice anyone in a suit or anything?"

"Not really, just the normal gawkers." Edna tone turned from harsh to pleasant.

"If you're giving out rides, how about giving this Old-Broad a ride?"

"A... Maybe, when Danny and I get back."

"Don't choke on your food," Edna smiled. "I'm just kidding. But I do miss those lumbar seats, my ex-husband had in his Cadillac."

Kevin took a couple more bites of the BLT, reached into his pocket and left a twenty on the table. "Let's go," Kevin barked out. Danny grabbed the chocolate milkshake and followed Kevin out the door.

Within fifty feet of the car Kevin pushed the key fob, the alarm chirped and the doors unlocked. "Oh, I better run my milkshake back," Danny said, as he stood next to the passenger door.

"That's okay, hop in," Kevin plopped down behind the steering wheel. He reached over and pushed a latch and a retractable cup holder slowly ejected from out of the dash.

"Cool," Danny said as he inserted the paper cup.

Kevin turned the key and the V12 roared to life. He pushed a button on the dash and the top started to retract into the trunk. Danny watched in awe. When the top was fully retracted there was another low humming noise as the automatic roll bar started coming up. There was a solid clunk as the roll bar locked itself into place. "Buckle up," Kevin's instructed.

"I know a road that has a hairpin corner just like my PlayStation, Formula 1 game has. Can we go on that road? Danny asked as he excitedly pulled the seatbelt across his chest.

"Sure tell me the name of the road." Kevin moved his hand to the keyboard of the GPS unit.

"Trinity Loop road" Danny rattled off. "The road is just across I-5. My brothers and I used to ride that road on our mountain bikes when it was gravel but they paved it last year."

When Kevin pulled on to I-5 south the interstate he pushed hard on the gas pedal. The SL 600 accelerated to 80 MPH... Immediately they came up on a semi truck; Kevin put on the left blinker and shot around the truck.

"Wow..." Danny yelled out from the passenger seat. "Can we do a 100 mph before the next exit?"

Kevin pushed harder on the gas pedal and then had to merge in behind another semi. The green road sign read **Trinity Campground Exit 1 mile**, Kevin decelerated.

"Wow... That was so cool. I bet this car can do at least a hundred-fifty miles an hour!" Shouted Danny over the rushing wind

"Probably more than that," Kevin loudly replied while glancing down. "The GPS quit working."

"The new campgrounds that Trinity Loop road goes around are not open yet, maybe that's why... But, I know the way." Danny replied as they headed up the off ramp.

Danny gave Kevin directions and Kevin probed Danny about the name **Mr. Meng** that was written on the chalkboard. Danny promised that he'd ask his father and if he could give out any customer information that he would get it to Kevin.

The temporary orange canvas construction sign read: **New asphalt-fresh shoulder gravel**. Kevin put on his left blinker and turned onto Trinity Loop and then parked stopped in the middle of the new road. He opened the door and got out to take in the view. They had climbed at least two thousand feet above the Pit River arm of Shasta Lake. The new black asphalt was hot from the blaring sun; the road was straight and

at least a six percent down grade.

Danny got out of the car and looked down the road and said. "At the bottom of this straightaway is a hairpin corner to the right and then the backside has a bunch of uphill curves. That's where all the new campsites are."

"Well let's take a practice run," Kevin replied as he opened the door.

Danny excitedly plopped back into the passenger and pulled the seat belt snug across his frail body. "That hairpin corner down there is just like the one on my PlayStation."

Kevin revved the engine, pulled the shifter back and pushed on the gas pedal. The tires squealed and the SL600 took off. The downgrade was a plus for acceleration; they were doing almost eighty before Kevin started to brake. It was a rush that Kevin hadn't expected. He slowly steered around the one hundred and eighty degree corner and it hit him right in the face... The un-obstructive view of Mount Shasta...

"Mt Shasta is impressive from this uphill side." Danny added to Kevin's visualization.

It took a few moments for Kevin to reply. "It sure is... Wow."

"A lot of men see a mountain and then need to conquer it." Danny spoke with weighted words. "Then their ego will take over their common sense. Life is not about the 'do or die' mountaineer mantra. Life is about trust."

Kevin wasn't listening to Danny's weighted words of wisdom. He was fixated on Mt. Shasta from every corner on the backside of Trinity Loop road.

"You need to down shift going into corners, to save your brakes. This car is equipped with a manual shift-automatic transmission. That's what this SL600 was made for; downshifting thru corners."

"What?" Kevin asked snapping from his fixated daze.

"Speed up for the next corner, then down shift just before you need to turn the steering wheel." Danny said with authority.

Kevin pushed on the gas; the turbo kicked in and the SL600 leaped into action. Kevin braked for the next corner and then pulled back on the shift lever; the SL600 rounded thru the corner, slowly. "Like that?" Kevin asked Danny.

"Sort of, but at this next corner do the same thing except don't use the brakes."

Kevin followed Danny's instructions of not using the brakes. Just before the next corner he pulled back on the shift lever! The SL600 slowed, squatted and gripped thru the curve. Kevin valued the driving lesson. They did Trinity Loop two more times and each lap got faster.

"This is our last lap Danny." Kevin said when he came to stop next to the canvas orange construction sign at the top of the straight down grade.

"No problem. Best I get back and help my Dad close up anyhow." Danny replied.

Kevin gripped the steering wheel and punched the gas pedal; they hit 85mph halfway down the straight away. *Just a few more seconds*, Kevin thought.

"Yahoo!" Danny yelled when the speedometer showed a 100 mph...

Kevin froze--the brake pedal went almost to the floor and felt like mush! The front tires locked up and the backend started fishtailing! "We'll never make the corner" Kevin yelled. Everything turned to slow motion...

With his left hand Danny pulled back on the shift lever and the rear of the car took hold. They were still approaching the corner way too fast! Danny pulled the shift lever back one more detent, the engine back revved and the rear tires bounced on the hot asphalt. "Steer left!" Danny yelled over the sound of the skidding and decompressing V12 engine.

Kevin turned the steering wheel counter clockwise and the SL600 went right. They were approaching the hairpin corner in a sideways skid with gray smoke pouring out from the front fender wells. Danny pulled up on the emergency brake; gray smoke now poured from all four wheels... The SL600 was now skidding backward. "Give it gas," Danny yelled, as he released the handbrake. The spinning rear tires super super-heated and then took hold. The silver Mercedes came to a stop

The slow motion continued as Kevin shut off the engine, opened the door to get away from the heavy burning rubber smell. He shook and staggered to the edge of the road and stared down into a fifty foot deep ravine where they could have ended up. Kevin bent over and threw up.

Danny merged out from the heavy gray burning rubber smoke and approached Kevin. "Are you okay?" he asked.

Kevin couldn't talk and started to shake uncontrollably...

Danny returned to the SL600 and did a walk around. He then plopped into the driver's seat and moved the seat all the way forward. *You should get the car out of the middle of the road.* When Danny started the car and pushed on the brake pedal it was too soft. *Something is wrong with the brakes.*

Kevin slowly approached still shaking; his skin was as white as Danny's. "Do you, you, know how to drive?" Kevin asked in broken words.

"I've been driving the work truck and parking boat trailers since I was twelve." Danny said in a grown-up, reassuring tone. "These brakes feel soft..."

Kevin opened the passenger door and collapsed into the seat. "Can you drive us to the top of the loop?"

Danny slowly started meandering up through all the corners and curves on the backside of Trinity Loop Road. Kevin felt mysteriously safe as Danny used the shift lever and hand brake to navigate the SL600 with.

Ten minutes later when they approached the Interstate Kevin had quit shaking; his skin color had returned to normal but he didn't say a word. It almost felt like a guardian angel was driving when Danny pulled on to the I-5 north merged into traffic and then turned on the right blinker for the Shasta Lake exit. "That was so awesome on Trinity Loop!" Danny said without taking his eyes off of the road.

When they turned into the **Bridge Bay Resort** parking lot Kevin's heart started to race again. Danny's father was coming up the gang plank ramp! Hank waved.

Danny carefully navigated thru the lot right toward Hank and used both the foot brake and hand brake to stop. Kevin felt ill again...

Hank hurried around to the passenger side of the car and stared down at Kevin. "Are you okay? You look sick."

"He's okay Dad. But I think there is something wrong with the brakes." Danny injected.

"Like what?" asked Hank, looking over the top of Kevin at Danny.

"I don't know, they feel mushy. Like there is no rear brakes or something." Danny answered Hank.

"Pop the hood," instructed Hank.

The hood spring rang out a loud *Bong* when Danny pulled the hood release.

"Look at the V12 engine!" Hank said as Danny approached and stood in Hank's shadow.

"You can't believe the torque this monster puts out! So much different than any of my video games." Danny elatedly replied.

Hank removed the top off the master cylinder. "There's the problem. Low brake fluid. The rear reservoir is almost empty."

"Dad, is it right for both sides of the master cylinder to be low?" Danny asked.

"This is a proto-type hand built car. Probably an oversight at the factory."

Kevin finally emerged to see what was going on under the hood. "What is a master cylinder?"

"Right here," Hank pointed. It transfers foot pressure to the brakes using hydraulics."

"Oh, Trask trailers use electric brakes," Kevin added, not wanting to appear too mechanically challenged.

"You're right, most large trailers have electric brakes," Hank quipped. "Danny, I think we have some brake fluid in the shop. On the shelf with the other chemicals"

Danny jogged toward a metal building at the edge of the parking lot a short distance from the gang plank. He hardly had enough weight on his body to slid open one of the two large hanging doors. The shed was stuffed full, there were orange life jackets hanging on hooks, piles of boat cushions, mountain bikes and tools. Resting on wood blocks in the center of the building was an old **Master Craft** ski boat covered in dust and dirt. The back wall was lined with shelves of paint cans and cleaners. Danny disappeared behind the vintage ski boat—a restoration project that was on hold.

Hank looked over at Kevin. "You didn't have to let him drive. Just a ride in this car would have been enough."

"A... A, well..." Kevin stuttered and then immediately realized the less said the better. "Well it just worked out that way."

"Anyway, thanks." Danny loves all those race car video games. You just fulfilled one of his wishes." Hank took a deep breath then under his breath said, "Now if his older brother ever comes around Danny would..."

A loud crash and then the sound of broken glass came from the metal building. Two gray Pigeons flew out between the parted doors. Danny emerged with a blue plastic bottle in his hand. "Those Pigeons built a nest on the shelf. I scared them and they knocked some empty beer bottles over," Danny yelled while hurrying across the parking lot.

Hank topped off the master cylinder with brake fluid. "I need to get back to work." Hank took a shop rag from the rear pocket of his coveralls, wiped off his hands and extended one hand to Kevin. "Thank you Mr. Trask."

"It was my pleasure," replied Kevin with a firm handshake from the heart.

"Here, put this back." Hank handed Danny the bottle of brake fluid. "Danny I will close up tonight. I have some extra paper work to take care of. "

"Okay Dad, I'll ride my bike home. I can't wait to tell Mom about driving a prototype, Mercedes 600SL with a turbocharged V12." Danny ecstatically replied.

"Danny why don't you leave out the part about driving. Your Mother will be all over me." Hank winked at Kevin

Kevin parked in the far corner of the lot, put up the top and set the alarm. Danny was in stride with Kevin rambling on as they both walked back down toward the lake. Kevin waited at the top of the wooden walkway for Danny to get his mountain bike from the shed.

Danny rode back over to Kevin and said. "Thank you for putting me on your prayer list."

Kevin stood silent for a moment. "Danny. I don't recall telling you that I would be praying for you."

"You did this morning when you pulled the Stargazer away from the dock." Danny replied as he threw his leg over the mountain bike. "Trust in Him..."

"Wait a second... I was way out on the lake and I said that to myself." Kevin yelled out.

Danny was already halfway up the parking lot on his bike riding into the fading sunlight. Kevin so wanted Danny to come back so to finish their conversation. The untainted silhouette waved—an unfinished need for closure came over Kevin.