

Chapter Twenty

A benefit of being Vice President—it doesn't matter what time you get to work. Kevin tiptoed up the stairs and slithered across the hall into his office; he had made it by Gus with an only five minute recap of the parking lot one-on-one basketball game. Now, if the mother-hen could just give him a little time to make a hotel reservation at the Hyatt Regency at Mission Bay in San Diego— Kevin's long awaited night to remember would be set. He didn't even make it to his chair...

"Good afternoon, Mr. Trask." Patty said from the doorway with yellow notepad in hand.

"Good morning," Kevin replied in a rhetorical tone; it wasn't noon yet.

Patty looked over the top of the yellow pad and then started. "I rescheduled the early morning vetting meeting. Second item, a Nick Icorn from Myrtle Creek, Oregon will be back; he said that you lost a pocket watch in his motel room. Third item, Tina called."

"Wow, Nick found Grandpa's old pocket watch."

"Yes, he waited for two hours before he left. He said he'd be back."

Patty walked to the front of Kevin's desk and flipped to another page. "Item four, the union officials want a meeting. Item number five, we got signed off for the safety meeting without any fines. All of those steeled toed tennis shoes are OSHA approved." Patty looked up and smiled over the top of her notepad. "And lastly, Gus has been up here three times to thank you for taking him out to dinner."

"Well, you can cross the Gus item off, I just talked to him." Kevin replied.

"That was nice that you brought him to the Mexican place." Patty said.

"Yeah, I never knew he liked the LA Lakers that much." Kevin replied.

"Did you know that it was the first time that he had been out to dinner at a restaurant in six years?" Patty asked.

"No, I didn't know that." Kevin looked up from behind the desk. "Now you're making me feel guilty for avoiding Gus sometimes."

"Kevin he admires you," Patty replied.

"Well, it seems that CP admires you," Kevin casually said as he looked at all the paperwork on his desk.

"What?" Patty quipped loudly.

"I noticed at dinner you two seemed pretty close and he's been bringing you to work and all."

"That's just for my safety... So I don't have to take the bus." Patty drew a quick breath. "Plus, while picking out Gus's three-wheeler we got to know each other and now were friends."

"Well, that's good." Kevin shuffled through all the paperwork. "I might start playing on CP's city basketball team."

"That's what he said when we got home." Patty's stomach knotted, she'd just let the cat out of the bag.

Kevin was still shuffling through paperwork. "Did you see a fishing brochure about steelhead fishing that I had on my desk? Ms. Saxton brought it to me when she delivered my car."

"Kevin, I know you don't want to be here but going fishing right now won't make all this go away."

"The fishing brochure had some important stuff on the back!" Kevin knocked some of the papers on the floor.

Patty got down on her knees and started to gather up the papers and the tri-fold brochure slipped out from the union contract. "Is this it?"

Kevin grabbed the pamphlet and flipped it over. The palm print was still intact under the clear packing tape. "Thanks Patty."

Patty stood and started organizing all the papers back into piles. "I'm still short guests for the for fund raiser for Senator Byron next weekend."

"Why don't you come as one of the guests? The food and entertainment at these events usually make up for the narcissism and kiss-ass speeches. Invite CP since he's your chauffeur."

"A... Okay, I've never been to a white-collar event." Patty had excitement in her voice. She knew that the band Pearl Jam was featured, but the minimum one-thousand dollars per plate donation dulled the elation. "On second thought, maybe I should pass on the dinner. They'll expect a big contribution, plus I'm nobody important."

"Don't give me that not important crap! It will give you a chance to see all the back room cronyism that politicians do. Something I'm sure you don't learn about in your business classes."

"It does sound like the entertainment is going to be good, Pearl Jam is playing." Patty replied, still with concern in her voice.

"The company will pay for you and CP. Hopefully CP likes that alternative rock, grunge music."

"He's more into Jazz and the Blues." Patty replied excitedly.

"Patty, could you give CP the phone number for my car phone? Since he invited me

to play on his city league basketball team."

"I'll do that." Patty said and jotted the request on her note pad. "The rescheduled vetting meeting is at one."

"Do you have the lawyer's resume? Kevin asked.

"No, I think your father has it," replied Patty, "I can go ask Condi to make a copy."

"That would be good. I hope we can find a couple of good lawyers soon, so that Trask Inc. can back on track with the land sale contract."

A knot instantly twisted in Patty's stomach, these couple of months at Trask Inc. was more than what she ever prayed for. She knew that Kevin wanted out but for her everyday was exciting and now she was going to be attending a white collar political fund raiser with important people.

The vetting meeting went sideways—it was rare when Kevin and Mr. Trask agreed. A lawyer that was under summary disbarment in Washington State for commingling a client's trust account would not be a good fit. Their consensus was that that it might take all winter to find a lawyer that could represent Trask Inc. and at the same time protect the Trask living trust. Also in the mix, was the pending lawsuit for faulty brake lights on the newer cargo model of Trask trailers.

Patty heard Kevin come up the stairs two at a time. He went directly into the office. It was almost quitting time and Patty had news that was just going to add to Kevin's list of tasks. She stood in the door silent. Kevin was looking out the window at Long Beach Harbor. Patty knocked on the opened door.

Kevin turned and asked. "What now?"

"I just found out that the Saxton's are one of two in the running for the logging contract to clear the trees out of the safety corridor."

"Well that's sounds promising," Kevin said and then walked to his desk.

"Yeah it is, but the State of Oregon wants all the employees regardless if they are part time or on contract to have medical insurance above and beyond Workers Comp."

"What's that mean?" Kevin asked as he sat down behind the piles of paperwork.

"Basically, the state of Oregon wants what is best for the workers. Hiring minorities, paying a fair wage and making sure that they have medical insurance are all things they would like to see on the contract."

"Is that going to be a problem?" Kevin asked.

"I don't know?" Patty replied. "I've been talking to Lilly Saxton and she is going to talk to an insurance carrier first thing in the morning. But their family hasn't had insurance for over a year so there will probably be a waiting period."

"No medical insurance for a year, that's not right. I remember her mother using a

walker." Kevin rubbed his hand on his forehead. "Could we put them on the Trask Inc group policy?"

"I could get with Condi first thing Monday morning and see if that is possible. I know from reading over the union contract that your full-time workers have a good HMO for their medical insurance."

"Okay," Kevin replied. "What kind of insurance do our part-time employees have?"

"They don't have any insurance," Patty replied.

"What?"

"Part-time employees don't get insurance. That is the reason most companies are outsourcing jobs. Large benefit packages are bankrupting companies and municipalities all over the United States. An average Los Angeles city employee retires with over seventy-five thousand dollars in perks for life."

"Wow..." Kevin picked up about fifty pages that were stapled together. "Now I get why the union is demanding a part-time to full-time employee ratio of less than ten percent."

"You got it Kevin. The union stays strong by protecting everyone. It's called solidarity"

"Yeah, but the unions orchestrate slowdowns and production numbers to drop. Their strategy ultimately causes the stock to crash and in the end nobody wins." Kevin dropped the union contract back on his desk. "I got way too much stuff to deal with!"

"Would it help if I worked over the weekend?" Patty asked.

"No, I'm going down to San Diego," Kevin answered and picked up a resume. "Make sure you have CP call me, I need to get on the court and burn off some frustration."

"I'll do that." Patty got to the door then stopped and turned. "Kevin a few days ago you told me that you got out of line with Lilly Saxton."

Kevin looked up and thought for a moment. "Yeah, it was late. I laughed when her old film camera got snatched. Then I made a wise crack when she was buying postcards for her Mom and it just put a damper on a perfectly fun day. She would hardly even talk to me after that."

"And you think you were out of line when you kissed her in the photo booth?"

"Yeah, sort of," Kevin said and then looked down. "It was just one of those spur of the moment things, that I now regret."

"Well, I don't know if Lilly regrets it." Patty smiled and went on, "Every time I talked with Lilly on the phone she asks about you coming up to go fishing."

Kevin paused and looked back up. "I want to take some time off, but you keep adding stuff on my list of things to do."

"I know," Patty replied feeling Kevin's angst. "Lilly wants you to know that she wouldn't even charge you for her guide services. But I'm not supposed to tell you..."

"Tell me what?" Kevin asked.

"That she always asks about you and that you are a cool guy, even if you are rich," Patty answered with a wink and went back to her desk.

Five minutes later with jacket and purse under arm Patty stuck her head in the door. "Don't work all night."

Kevin barely looked up and mumbled under his breath, "I won't mother-hen."

Patty was halfway down the stairs when Kevin yelled for her to come back. She did an about-face and was back in the doorway.

"One last thing Patty..." Kevin said in a worried voice. "I hope that you can stay on through fall and probably winter. There is no way in hell that I can wade through half of this stuff without your assistance. Maybe we can adjust your work around your class schedule?"

"That would be great." Patty said holding back her elation. "The on the job training that I'm getting here is more than I have learned in any of my business classes."

"So, is that a yes? You'll stay on," Kevin asked.

"Yes, Kevin, I'll stay on." Patty so wanted to go over and hug Kevin but their relationship had involved beyond good friends to mutually respected business associates. It took hard work and time to ascertain her 'Mother-Hen' position. This was so much better than the self destruction she was on since her twin sister died.

Thank you God... Ever since I put it all into your hands, things have been working out. Please continue to look out over my sister, Cecelia also... Patty prayed silently as she bounced down the stairs. With her head held high, Patty practically skipped across the parking lot toward the white truck and waiting driver. "Mr. Trask would like you to call him about playing some basketball." Patty slid up and into the passenger seat.

"That's great, we can really use him," CP ran around the front of his spotless white pick-up."

She couldn't hold it back any longer. "And Kevin wants me to stay on through the fall and possibly the winter!"

CP reached over grabbed Patty's hand. "That's great babe! With your skills you'll never be out of work."

"Are those my mother-hen skills?" Patty asked, putting CP on the spot.

"Yeah, but you got other skills too," CP looked over at Patty and flashed a playful smile. "Let's go celebrate! I'm buying you dinner tonight."

Up in the office Kevin was going through more resumes. Finding a lawyer to help

wrap up the pending Hung Meng land sale contract was his first priority. But now a class action lawsuit had to be settled; the Union Contract was in limbo. Then getting Gus to move off property all needed to get completed before Kevin could do his own thing outside the family business. Kevin found a couple more candidates to set up interviews with and left their resumes on Patty's desk.

The mobile phone rang before Kevin started the SL600. "Hello," Kevin spoke into the handset.

"Hey Bro, Patty said to call. She said that you wanted to play some ball."

"Yeah, I need to get my head out of all the stuff down here at the plant." Kevin started the car and backed out of the space.

"Next Sunday we're playing at the Poinsettia Rec-Center in north LA at noon. You probably won't get any game time but you can warm up and meet the guys."

"Sound good CP. I'll be there." Kevin said and then moved the headset away from his mouth and yelled, "Okay Gus! Yes, I remember what you said about my phone being tracked. But this is a very important call." Kevin pulled out onto Navy Way Road. "Sorry about that," Kevin said moving the headset back to his mouth.

"So this is a 'Very important call'." CP asked.

"Yeah sort of. But mostly I didn't want to deal with Gus and all the superhero stuff tonight. It's been a long week."

"Got it," CP replied and then continued. "I wouldn't drive your Mercedes to the Rec-Center, unless you can hide that phone in the trunk."

"The phone's bolted to the floorboard. But I'll drive the Range Rover."

"Sounds good Bro... I'll write the address down and Patty can give it to you on Monday."

"Sounds good CP. I'll try to get some practice time on the court at the country club this weekend." Kevin replied.

"Patty mentioned that you need her to stay on through the fall."

"Yeah, I'm glad I met her; she has been a real God-send."

"Yeah I'm glad I met her too," CP replied and then changed the subject to the important stuff. "This team we're playing next Sunday is one of the best in the city. We've never beat them!"

"Good, sounds like a challenge. Have a good weekend." When Kevin put the handset back into the bag he took note that the GPS signal strength indicator flashed four times. *Maybe Gus is right and these phones do have tracking devices.*"

Kevin had just got on to the 710 when the mobile phone rang again. "Hello."

"Mr. Kevin Trask a Mr. Nick Icorn is here at the guard shack with your expensive

watch."

"I'll be back there in five minutes Gus." Kevin glanced down at the display—the GPS indicator flashed four times. Kevin also noticed a distinctive click through the handset. *I wonder if someone is monitoring this phone?*

The old worn down motor home had its front bumper almost touching the orange guard gate, dark blue smoke was burping out the side. Kevin pulled up directly behind it. The World War II Veteran/American flag bumper sticker was the only clean thing on the back. Kevin got out and started walking down the side when the door opened. A cane came out first and then Nick Icorn stepped down off the rusty metal step. "Sorry that I didn't make it back during your work hours. This old piece of crap stalled out on me; it needs a battery and a tune-up. Some punk-ass kid charged me twenty bucks for a jump!"

Kevin smiled, he remembered Nick's crass words in the lobby of the motel in Myrtle Creek. "Sorry that you're having battery problems Mr. Icorn," Kevin said.

"Not a big deal. This piece of crap is on it last leg, just like me." Nick replied and reached into his pocket and pulled out the pocket watch. "The chain was hooked on the lamp cord behind the night stand."

Kevin took the watch and chain. "Thanks, I thought I lost it that night in the gravel parking lot while getting in that truck after shooting pool? I was fairly intoxicated when they dropped me off at your motel."

"Yep, you were drunk as a skunk when Big Ed checked you in," replied Nick. "Those two Dick-Heads you shot pool with, said to tell you 'Hi'."

"Yeah, I don't usually drink like that but..."

"No need to explain son," Nick interrupted. "I've tried to bury a lot of my past with booze. "But, the inscription **Do and Die** on the back of that there pocket watch sums up a lot."

Kevin rolled the pocket watch over in his hand and looked at the inscription that was almost worn down to where it was barely readable. "This was my Grandpa's motto. Do good and die appreciated."

"**Do and Die**, could also mean, serve justice and die honorably," Nick offered. Like so many veterans have.

All of a sudden a loud pop shot out followed by a hug ball of smoke from under the motor home and it died. Gus instantly dropped his inspection mirror and ran about twenty yards away! He started mumbling to himself and rapidly swayed side to side. Gus thought he had set off a bomb.

"I guess I scared the big-fella," Nick said.

"Gus, it was just a back fire!" Kevin yelled at the top of his lungs. "Come on back!"

"Can you give me a jump?" Nick asked Kevin.

"I'm not sure where the battery is on my new car," Kevin answered.

"That's the fancy car dick-head fixed the brakes on."

Kevin went back at the SL600 and popped the hood. Gus approached and asked, "What are you looking for?"

"The battery... Mr. Icorn needs a jump."

Nick approached and used his cane to point toward the trunk. "If the Kraut's built this car the battery is probably in the trunk or under the floorboard. Those German's are engineering genius..."

"Yes, they would put something like a heavy battery at the lowest point of gravity in a high performance car like this," Gus agreed with Nick and then added. "The Germans built the Tiger Tank, it was a engineering wonder in its day."

"Nothing like the mini-subs the Japs were building back then," Nick replied to Gus. It was lucky for us that a HA-19 mini-sub got grounded on a reef the day after Pearl Harbor. That is how we knew how big to make the training tunnel for the Navy Seals."

Gus's face lit up. "You know about the training tunnel?"

"Yes sir young man. We're standing on top of the tunnel right now. It runs from the corner of that building." With his cane Nick pointed back at the SW corner of the Trask plant. "All the way under Navy Way Road into the Harbor."

"How do you know about the secret tunnel?" Gus asked

"I helped design and build it," Nick puffed out his frail chest with a sense of pride.

"So you know the diameter of the tunnel?" Gus asked.

"Yes sir, young man. Twelve feet-two inches. The height of the Mini HA-19 was nine feet-ten inches. That gave us one foot and one inch on each side when we brought it down the training tunnel."

"Wow, I didn't know they brought a mini-sub down the tunnels." Gus said

"Yep, we sure did. That was top-secret stuff back in the war days. Most everyone that worked on the tunnel project has died off. That mission was top-secret.

"Did you know Bayani Bianchi," Gus asked.

Nick snapped his head around, looked directly at Gus and asked "How do you know that name?"

"I found some of his super-hero books in his old Navy foot locker. His name was inside the footlocker on the wood lid along with his passport and a photograph of his family."

"Are you talking about the Captain America series that started in 1941?" Nick asked.

"Yes, he had the first ten copies. I started my own collection and have every copy through 1953." Gus replied with a sense of satisfaction and ownership.

Nick smiled for a moment, then said "Bayani loved reading those superhero books. In 1963 the Iron Man super hero series came out and hinted about this here tunnel under Navy Way Road." Nick pointed with his cane directly below.

"I know! I have collected every one of those copies also. I know all about the Repulsar Drill and Iron Man," Gus eagerly replied.

I got to get out of here, Kevin thought to himself then said. "There must be a battery on the assemble line or someplace in the shop, I'll go check." Kevin scurried away. *Those two will be talking about UFO's next.*

Gus and Nick did continue on and their conversation never did turn to UFO's. Nick shared how Bayani had drowned in the tunnel and it took him over forty five years to track down his parents back at their home in Manila. In 1990 Nick flew to the Philippines' with the bad news. Bayani's parents cried as he told them the story about how Bayani showed up at the Long Beach Naval yard on December 15, a week and one day after Pearl Harbor was bombed. Bayani was too young to join up and wanted to do his part to save the United States.

Bayani's parents shared how their youngest child at the age of sixteen left for the United States for work so to send money back home. A year after his arrival they never heard from him again. Forty-five years later Nick brought closure to the entire Bianchi family when he flew to the Philippines. When departing the airport in Manila, Bayani's mother handed Nick a small vial of Holy Water from the baptismal pool at San Augustine Church, located inside the walled city of Intramuros; a historical place on the main Island. She asked Nick to sprinkle the water on her Son's grave

Nick could not bring himself to inform her that Bayani's body was pulled through the tunnel and out to sea due to an unusual low tide. Bayani's body was never found. This freak accident saved many lives; all future Navy Seal training was only done during slack tide periods so that no diver would be trapped and then pulled by the heavy tidal current.

While lowering the jumper battery/handcart off the loading dock, Kevin could see that Gus was taking in every maxim Nick Icorn was spewing. As Kevin pulled the handcart behind him he rationalized that getting away from these two ASAP wasn't being rude; especially since he had just called their fleet mechanic to help.

"Mr. Nick Icorn knows all about the tunnel and is going to help me with important measurements for sealing it off from any outside evil force." Gus boosted as Kevin approached.

"Well that sounds good, replied Kevin."Our mechanic can't make it down here with a new battery until tomorrow. "Let's get this motor home started and park it someplace

out of the way."

Nick approached Kevin and grabbed for the handcart. "I'll jump this beast; you'll get all dirty reaching into the battery compartment."

"Sounds good to me," Kevin's said, already headed toward the SL600; thankful his exit plan was working.

"Mr. Trask, one last thing!" Nick called out in his frail voice.

Kevin stopped, this was not part of the exit plan; he walked back toward Nick. "Yes Mr. Icorn."

"Would it be okay if Gus lets me into the old training room?"

"Yeah, no problem," Kevin replied. "Don't try to pay my mechanic for the battery, tune-up and he'll fill up your gas tank too. It's on me for bringing my watch all the way down here from Oregon." Kevin said and now feeling less guilty about ditching out.

"Thank you Mr. Trask," Nick replied.

"Gus, it's okay to let Mr. Icorn look around that old locked up Navy training room." Kevin reached into his pocket and peeled off some money. "Why don't you two have a Pizza delivered or something?" Kevin handed the bills to Gus while backtracking—the exit plan worked.

Gus and Nick got the motor home started and moved it next to Gus's apartment. They did order a pizza and started talking and discussing the tunnel. Gus was writing down every small detail and Nick started double checking Gus's math, the best that he could with an old Texas Instrument scientific calculator.

When Kevin got home he examined the mobile bag phone more closely. It was mounted permanently; this made sense for something in a convertible, making it hard to steal. What didn't make sense was that there was no on-off switch. Kevin called the main house, Maria answered and Kevin told her he was home. When he put the handset back into the bag the GPS indicator flashed four times. The longitude and latitude waypoint was marked and recorded. The words "Marie, I'm home," were also recorded on cassette tape up North in San Jose.

The next waypoint marked and recorded was Saturday from a Motel Sixteen parking lot. There was no phone conversation to record. Kevin parked and went into the office to find out the room number. Kevin was at unease; this Motel Sixteen was located in the seedy part of Hollywood. The motel clerk had called up to the room before Kevin knocked on the red steel door. There was the distinctive sound of ice being dropped into a plastic cup, Kevin swallowed and looked back over his shoulder; he hoped this would not become that day that he'd never forget.

The smell of alcohol reeked from the motel room and Richard Johnson head throbbed. Richard was corrigible and told Kevin to come on it. They discussed

getting a ride up to Oregon with CP so to work on a road clearing crew. Richard was okay with anything that got him out and away from the four closed in walls of this seedy motel. Riding all the way up to Oregon with his nephew would give Richard an opportunity to convert another family member to the Islam faith—conversion wasn't working on his daughter; Condi.

The next waypoint this Saturday was marked from a MVP parking space at the Pasadena Country Club. Some practice was in order before Kevin showed up to play with CP's city league basketball team. Kevin walked onto the court and was immediately asked to join a lopsided pickup game of four against five. It wasn't the three lay-ups or the slam dunk that gave Kevin up, it was his behind the back and bounce passing... While at Duke, Kevin had 1075 assists; just one short of the school record. A statistic that didn't gain fame—but it did assist Duke to the college NCAA championship.

The word got out and spread, just like it had a few months back. This Saturday the county club members were watching Kevin Trask on the basketball court, not the tennis court. Out of character, Kevin even did a few dunks, to show off. It felt good to be back on the court, even if it was with a bunch of seasoned basketball hackers. Next weekend wouldn't be as fun as driving the key for lay-ups on older gentlemen but it would be more challenging. Kevin would be playing against an undefeated team and he couldn't wait for the challenge...

From the MVP parking spot Kevin called Tina; he was surprised with the abrupt way that she called off their planned rendezvous at the **Hyatt Regency at Mission Bay**. Their conversation didn't even last a minute; there wasn't a click on the phone this time. But Kevin thought he heard a slap just before Tina hung up. Tim also punched Tina in the stomach. If it happened again he would take complete control and choke her into unconscious.

Sunday morning, even with Nick staying overnight Gus couldn't miss his Sunday ritual on not going to church. Nick asked Gus to open the old training room before he rode off on his three-wheeler. Nick entered the musty room and could hardly breathe the thick stale air. After a half of century the room looked the same. Nick even remembered where the light switch was; the hum of the old mercury vapor lights coming on brought back all the bad memories of war. The purple haze of the lights warming up casted a heavy shade on the wood deck that had been built over the diving pool. The smell of saltwater and the fifty years of mold growth on everything caused Nick to exit the room. Outside Nick filled his lungs with fresh air and went back to his motor home.

The small vial of holy water was amongst some letters and cards. Nick had been corresponding with the Bayani's family ever since his trip to the Philippines. They were a poor family and Nick knew that even the postage to the United States was a burden for them. Each time Nick would get a card or letter he would quickly scan the words to see if the family asked if he had sprinkled the Holy Water on Bayani

Bianchi's grave—they never did ask.

With the clear glass vial of Holy Water in his hand Nick stood at the doorway; the lights had yet to come on to full brightness, it was still gray inside. He took a couple deep breaths and twisted the cap off the vial and entered. As the droplets of Holy Water landed on the wood decking the lights finished warming up; it was getting so bright in the old Navy training room that Nick had to close his eyes. It must have been the lack of Oxygen or maybe a weary old brain that caused Nick's mind to drift off course. What he was visioning was a dark gray atomic bomb mushroom cloud being sucked back into the small vial. It made no sense—as did war, destructions and the carnage.

Nick's extended moment of dementia was halted by Gus standing in the doorway and stating. "Mr. Nick Icorn, I'm back from church."

Nick turned, wobbled and didn't dare take a step. "Gus do you see my cane?"

Gus came into the old training room and found Nick's cane all the way on the opposite side of the training pool. The vial was setting on the wood pool covering. It looked as though all the darkness in the world had been sucked inside. Gus opened an inspection hatch on the wood pool cover and pushed the small vial to the edge—it sounded and sank like a cannonball when it hit the seawater twenty feet below.

Gus looked across the wood decking and said. "The task is not completed yet...We need to finish the plans."