

Chapter 2

From the Blue

It was kind of late for the phone to be ring, Kevin thought. It was about quarter past 11 at night, and he was in the middle of watching TV. The ringing pissed him off a little, but he figured that it was an emergency. Whose emergency, he had no idea.

Kevin turned down the TV and let the call go to the answering machine.

“Kevin Logan, if this is the right number, uh, this is Tim Logan. Your dad,”

“What the hell? He has to be kidding,” Kevin thought. He muted the TV and ran over to the device.

“Anyway, I need to talk to you. Please call me back. Umm, I know it’s been awhile. My number’s the same, in case you don’t have it. It’s 954-555-0402. And uh, well, bye.”

The machine hung up, and there was a long beep. Kevin was dumbfounded. He had not heard from his dad in a few years. A few? Maybe more like a decade, he thought. He played back the message again. The voice was slightly huskier, but it was him.

Kevin wondered why he would be calling so late. The thought held him standing by the phone for a few more minutes. Ten years. What if the call really was important?

He could still remember the last time he saw Dad, and the words he had said to him. Kevin still had no regrets. He

felt that he had done things to Mom that were unforgivable. Psychological, mostly. Dad was a drunk and a loser. As far as Kevin knew, he never hit her, but there were other ways to be an asshole.

Kevin didn’t have any real connection with his mom, either. They only saw each other about once a year, mainly because she lived closer, an hour or so up Long Island. Kevin’s old stomping grounds. Dad lived in Florida.

Mom and Dad fought constantly when Kevin was in high school, and it was the only thing that made him work harder to get the hell out of there. When Kevin finally graduated, he went to the furthest college that accepted him, Arizona. By then, his parents had divorced, and Dad came by once while he was home at Thanksgiving, but that was it.

Kevin had an older sister working in NYC, named Kristen. They rarely talked, but at least they didn’t have much reason for mutual hatred. She got the better share of family life, since Dad at least held regular jobs early on. As far as Kevin knew, she was married and successful. She escaped Long Island after high school and never came back.

Kevin graduated, crashed with Mom while taking various jobs in the city, and finally wound up as an architect with Schonauer + Schonauer Associates in Rockville Centre. Most of these firms use a plus sign instead of an ampersand, because it’s more pretentious. Kevin didn’t know what claim the firm had on elitism, though. It wasn’t even in the city. It was a 27-person house that stamped out numerous variations of

the same condo complex for low-rent developers. Kevin's job was mostly about drawing staircases.

Dad's loser genes definitely flowed through Kevin's bloodstream, but at least he wasn't a drunk. Yet.

Every time Kevin wanted to feel worse, he thought about his finances. He was probably about five years and sixty grand behind where he felt he should be. Not a dime in the bank. He was also more than eighty grand in the hole for school, credit cards, and loans for cars, including the one he drove into a barrier in the LIE median two years ago.

The rent for Kevin's tiny apartment over a 24-hour Laundromat was always past due. He could not figure out a way to get ahead of it. And now, just when he was nodding off in front of a late-night cartoon, forgetting who he was, Dad calls to remind him.

"I am just not interested in remembering who I am right now, thank you," thought Kevin.

He was completely drained from the Maine trip. After the ill-fated visit to the building, Kevin, Donny and Amanda ate at a seafood restaurant where the fish sandwich had him retching over the bowl the rest of the night.

The next morning, they visited the town surveyor, assessor and permitting agent, who is basically one guy, and this guy was out doing inspections. "Everybody knows Ed does his visits on Tuesdays and Thursdays," said a guy wasting his time mopping the grimy floor in the corridor. Kevin figured he was the police chief and janitor.

In the final tally, the three were actually working for fewer hours than they were on the road. The six hours up was fine, but the drive back was a nightmare. They decided to leave at noon after whiffing on the permit. Kevin was sick, causing Amanda to stop at nearly every Burger King so he could puke. When they got to New Haven, it was already rush hour. The ride into the city and back to the office took another five hours.

Eleven hours listening to Amanda's nasal whining and Donny's persistent silence.

Now Kevin was sitting in a chair, having not slept since 4AM the previous day. He was still feeling ill, and Dad calls.

There was no way Kevin was calling him back. Tomorrow was still a workday. He had a lot of coordination to do to get the schedule from two angry contractors. He was starting to hate being a project lead. The work is too important. "Give me stairways," he thought.

Now Kevin realized he would never get to sleep. Even after all these years and so many miles away, Dad could still be an asshole.

The next day, Kevin dragged himself out of bed a half hour later than he should have. He took a quick shower, grabbed a stale cheese Danish in the kitchen and sat in traffic for seven miles. One of the roads he needed was under construction, and the detour signs told him exactly how to get lost on the back streets of Rockville Centre.

Amanda was standing in the open office area when Kevin walked in at least 45 minutes late. Being a project lead, even being on time would not have been sufficient. A half hour or more before the rest of the crew showed up would have been more like it. Amanda looked his way and said nothing. Not even a jibe.

That wasn't good news, Kevin knew. It meant that later on, there would probably be one of those "step into my office and close the door" kind of meetings. The sooner she got that out of the way, the better.

Kevin climbed the stairs to his cube, which was in a loft that had formerly been a storage area. Now it was a storage area and a cramped office, where tubes of architectural drawing sets going back ten years shared space with Kevin and three other architects. He threw his bag on the floor next to his chair and decided not to grab a coffee in the kitchen. It would just look like more time being wasted. Besides, by this time the coffee was always gone. He fired up the PC and sat there watching it boot when Amanda came up the stairs.

Kevin decided to take the initiative, stammering, "I'm sorry, Amanda, I-

"Never mind. I don't have time for one-minute management today, Kev. Feeling better?"

"Yeah. Thanks. It was bad fish, I guess."

"Yeah. I spoke to Dave, and he wants to wait until Monday morning to deliver his schedule."

"Shit. What about Joey at LSI?" Joey's company was Landscape Specialists, Inc., but architects tended to use acronyms for almost everything.

"Left a message. Your job, you know."

"Want me to call him now?"

"Don't ask me. Do you think you should?"

She was right. Kevin was late and these calls were his job. He needed the info to finish his schedule and present to the town, but that was little excuse. He had barely worked on the schedule himself yet.

"Yeah. I'll call him," Kevin said as he picked up the phone and started flipping through his notebook for Joey's number.

Amanda looked up at the clock above the loft. "Rookie mistake," she clucked and walked back down the stairs.

Kevin didn't find the number in his notes, and the phone started beeping in his ear. He hung up and reached for his cell phone in the bag, to see if the number was stored in the recent list. He realized immediately that his cell phone was still sitting on his kitchen counter at home.

It was one of those days, at the end of one of those weeks. Kevin decided to start working on the schedule. If no other projects flared up, he figured he could get out of there before dinner.

It wasn't to be. By the time he talked to Joey, and got his estimates, it was past noon. Dave said he would work over the weekend to get his work to Kevin on Monday morning, but

it was unlikely that this meant any time before 11:59AM. After that, there was only one way to deliver the schedule to the clients. Kevin would have to already be in Harbin.

After some discussion with Amanda, they decided that Kevin would go back to Maine for Monday morning and get set up where he could get online, print out the documents and deliver them to Frank. The firm's IT guy, who doubled as a junior architect, set up a laptop with VPN and gave Kevin a password. The secretary found him a hotel with the services he needed, and all he had to do was drive up on Sunday. With any luck, he could also visit the surveyor's office.

Something in the back of Kevin's mind told him he was headed for a clusterfuck.

When he finally got home after dark, there was another message on his machine. It was from his sister, Kristen. He played it.

"Hi, Kevin, it's Kris. Listen, have you heard from Dad? He called me, and I think something's wrong."

Kevin shuddered at the fearful sound in her voice. She was usually the stronger one. But she was also closer to Dad, and as far as Kevin knew, she had talked to him a few times over the last ten years.

Kevin had not talked to her in a few months, but something was definitely going on with Dad, and he had to at least know what it was. He figured he was in an accident or something, and was having a deathbed conversion. Kind of late for that, Kevin thought.

He wondered if that was what happened, and if he would regret not seeing him. Maybe he could ask Kristen to send along his condolences. "Sorry you're dying after being such a scumbag for so long," Kevin could say. Maybe he could send some black roses to go with that.

He called Kristen.

"Hello?" she answered.

"Kris, it's Kevin."

"Oh, my God. Have you heard from Dad?" she asked, sounding frantic.

"No, I-"

"Something's wrong. I don't know what, but he called me yesterday, last night, and today," she told him.

"Have you talked to him?"

"No. I tried. I swear, I actually picked up the phone and started to dial, but I called you instead," she said.

"So what do you want to do?" Kevin asked her. He was afraid she was about to ask him to call Dad first.

"Could you call him?" she asked. "I know it's hard but I'm dying to know what's wrong and I just can't do it right now."

"Why not?"

"It's just the schedule. I've been busy lately. Tonight I-"

"C'mon! I'm busy, too. I know you-"

"Kevin, seriously, Brian and I have to-"

“Have to what? Opera tickets? Knicks game?
Dammit, Kris!”

“Y’know, I just don’t need this right now. I’m sorry I
even called.”

“Kris, Kris!”

She hung up.

What a waste of time, Kevin thought. He was jealous
of her life, and he was enough honest to declare it to himself.
Brian was Kristen’s husband, a finance lawyer with some
muckety-muck Manhattan firm. Everybody who reads The
Wall Street Journal can name the company’s top staffers, all
the way down to Brian himself.

Kristen was a high-flying marketing director for some
ad company. She was responsible for the leggy models and
skimpy underwear in nearly every soft drink and airline ad.
She acted like she earned everything on her own merits. In
reality, she was lucky. She met Brian in college, and slept with
every single one of his friends until he was the first one to land
an internship. His dad was a Madison Avenue bigwig, and the
rest is fill-in-the-blank.

Kevin wondered if Brian knew that Kristen’s sleeping
around didn’t end with the ring. Probably not.

He looked at the phone and felt, for a microsecond, the
urge to call Dad. It passed, and he went to watch some stupid
reality show. It was a Friday night, and he had a lot of work to
do before going up to Harbin. Kevin had to plug in the laptop
to see if the VPN would work. And it better, he thought,

because he had to upload some drawings that he forgot to copy
while still at the office. His cell phone was still sitting on the
counter, and it was dead. He had to remember to plug it in
before leaving on Sunday.

Kevin found himself hoping Kristen was having a
terrible time at the theater, or wherever she was.

After spending Saturday struggling with the computer,
doing laundry, and avoiding the phone, Kevin headed back to
Maine. He kept the cruise control on to avoid a speeding
ticket. He didn’t need any more of those. He forgot to tell
Kris that he would be away for a few days, so if Dad called
again she could suffer her cowardly curiosity alone. She was
the one who wanted to know. Kevin didn’t.

He kept the radio on AM as he drove, because FM was
nothing but “ish” music. This was a name Kevin used for most
types of modern pop. He added an “ish” to almost every type
of music being played on FM radio. Rock-ish. Jazz-ish.
Country-ish. Blues-ish. Pure stuff could only be found on
AM, but the stations kept fading out before Kevin could hear
one song.

Then there’s talk radio, which on the weekend is
nothing but investment tips and religious exhortations. Kevin
thought about the ridiculous programs he could come up with
for radio. Drag racing. Cooking shows. He once heard the
NBA slam dunk competition on a radio broadcast. He laughed
out loud thinking about it.

Six hours is a long drive, Kevin thought, at least a few times.

When he finally got to Harbin, he discovered that the hotel was ten miles further, in the next town. It was one of Maine's touristy towns with schooners and little stores that sold everything from wicker baskets to lobster sushi and ended in 'Haus'. Harbin was its malnourished stepsister.

Kevin checked into the hotel and tried to get the internet connection working, to no avail. It could have been his settings, because he didn't get it to work at home either. Kevin decided he would talk to the IT guy in the morning. With nothing to do, he decided to take a look around town and maybe get some dinner.

He searched for a decent place to eat, that wasn't selling fish & chips, fish & clams, clams & chips, or fish & fish. His other option was lobster at 'market price'. Kevin needed a cheeseburger. A thick one with fat ripple-cut fries. He never found it, but he did find a place that could sell him an Italian sub with a bag of chips. Actually, Kevin ordered an Italian sub, but got a ham & cheese with oil, peppers, pickles, and a grove's worth of black olives.

But he did like it. He had to admit that.

Maine was a different place than Kevin imagined. He thought it would be all trees and streams, but most of what he had seen so far was fairly urban. He had seen its tourist traps, its abandoned mills and burnt hospitals. He had seen row after row of cute sidewalk shops and three-decker apartment houses.

There were glimmering brand-new SUVs, beat-up Subaru, and Buicks like Howie's, kept in perfect condition despite being 14 years old.

As Kevin tried to get to sleep at the hotel, he noticed that the lights in the parking lot glowed through the windows, just like at home. He had not seen any Moose yet, and he had not smelled any low tides. Maybe, he figured, this project wouldn't be that bad.