

## Chapter 3

Sal was back behind the wheel now, fresh from the rest and happy that the traffic was moving so well. Vince was buckled into the cot behind, but not asleep yet. “Hey, Sal. Who pays for the gas you use to make these trips?”

“I do. I’m an independent trucker.” Sal said without taking his eyes off the road.

“What does that mean?” Vince asked.

“It means I don’t work for a trucking company that provides the fuel. I pay for it out of the money I get paid for drivin’ these loads. When companies like the apple company that hired me pay me for this run, I set some of the money aside to pay for fuel.

“That kinda sucks, doesn’t it?” Vince asked.

“It does when diesel costs four bucks a gallon!” Sal exclaimed. “Right now it ain’t too bad.... Costs about two-fifty.”

“How many miles per gallon does this truck get?” Vince wanted to know.

“Most trucks get seven to eight miles when they’re empty, but only about five when they’re full, like we are now.”

Vince yawned, “That doesn’t sound like much. I mean, most cars get around 30, right?”

“Actually, we do pretty good, considering we’re pulling the weight of more than ten minivans full of passengers,” Sal said proudly. “Wouldn’t you agree?” He waited for a response from Vince, but this time, Vince was the one snoring.

Sal drove through northern California, past San Francisco, **Silicon Valley**<sup>31</sup>, and down into the farm belt of central California. Night was falling. Sal turned on his headlights and hoped the drivers around him would do the same. Fog was often a hazard in the Central Valley, and there had been some terrible **fatal**<sup>32</sup> vehicle pileups, because of poor **visibility**<sup>33</sup> in this stretch of farmland over the years.

There wasn’t much to listen to on the truck’s radio, and Sal didn’t want to wake Vince, so he drove the truck focused on the road, now in a small **convoy**<sup>34</sup> of other trucks

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<sup>31</sup> **Silicon Valley** is an area where a great number of computer and Internet-based companies like Apple, FaceBook, Google, and others are located

<sup>32</sup> **fatal** means deadly, as when people have died for one reason or another

<sup>33</sup> **visibility** means the distance one is able to see; it can be limited by fog (clouds of moisture low to the ground), smoke from fires, or darkness, for example)

<sup>34</sup> **convoy** means a group of vehicles or ships traveling together, sometimes for protection

in front and behind, listening to the faint chatter of other truckers on the radio.

As he nursed the cold coffee with a sip now and then, Sal's mind wandered back to the times he and Vince would ride the bus out to baseball games to sit in the cheap seats out in left field. Vince always said he liked those seats best because they could talk to the players as they jogged by during warm ups, and maybe catch a home run ball hit there during the game or in batting practice. Sal knew Vince couldn't afford better seats, so he was cool sitting out there. Sal also remembered them hanging out in the bowling alley after school playing video games and looking for change left behind in the coin slots. Sometimes Vince would ask Sal for advice about asking a girl to the movies. He also remembered them going to all the Bruce Lee **martial arts**<sup>35</sup> movies together when they didn't have dates.

In their talk before the trip, Sal and Vince had decided that they would stop to refuel, stretch, and eat a good meal near the end of the flat portion of the trip before continuing up into the mountains. This highway was known to truckers as the Grapevine, and as being quite steep. Fully loaded trucks would typically pull loads uphill at under 30 miles an hour when passenger cars whizzed by at sixty-five or more. The Grapevine had lots of curves, requiring extra care and attention. It was only a couple of hours from L.A., so when they got to the top of the mountain, they knew they'd almost be there.

Sal continued driving the seemingly endless miles through the farmbelt. Sal planned for Vince to drive the next stretch into the mountains after the break, when he could rest again. Right now though, Sal was looking forward to opening a real menu, sipping a freshly-brewed cup of coffee, and having someone to talk to. He had heard about a place near Bakersfield from another trucker he knew. He had passed it a few times before, but never stopped. Sal figured it would be after 9:00 pm before they would get there. Just thinking about it kept Sal motivated to keep driving.

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<sup>35</sup> **martial arts** includes karate, judo, taekwondo, jujitsu, and other fighting, and self defense disciplines