

Dead End

By

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Bright red blood oozed from a wound in his head while more blood spurting from the gaping hole on his left calf.

“Sir! Sir!” John Tsai said in a tight, tense voice, as he bent his long legs into a crouch. “Are you okay?”

No response.

“He’s unconscious. Check to see if he’s breathing,” I ordered.

John lowered his head so his face was next to the victim’s mouth. “Nothing.”

I pressed two fingers against the rubbery skin on the victim’s neck. No pulse. I shook my head.

“Let’s start CPR,” John said, kneeling down on the pavement beside the body.

I turned to the huddle gathered around us. “Make sure someone’s called 911 and go find the AED.” As I spoke, I pointed to someplace off yonder where the defibrillator was attached to a wall inside City Hall.

“And one of you put pressure on that wound.” The spurting blood from the calf hit the sleeve of my white long-sleeved t-shirt and spread into a dark red stain. Shit!

I swiped the back of my gloved hand across my brow, pushing renegade strands of long blond hair out of my face. Next time I went to an emergency I’d bring a hair band. And a clean shirt.

Our Public Works receptionist, Cheryl Erickson, crouched next to us. Huge pink peace signs dangled from her ears. She slapped a gauze pad over the spurting blood. “Eeeeew!” she squealed. She looked a little green, but held firm.

John leaned over the body readying his arms and hands for chest compressions.

Dreary dark clouds swirled overhead like a washing machine filled with dirt. Great. Any moment it would start to rain. I gave John my best ‘you better listen to me buster’ look. “I am not doing breaths. No way.”

“You’ve got a mask! Use it.” John sounded a little panicked.

“No. I did it last time. Move over. I’m doing the chest compressions.”

John didn’t move. “You suck at chest compressions. I’m a guy. I’m bigger. I’ll do it.”

I glared back. John was always hogging the spotlight, trying to one-up everyone, and I was sick of it.

“Team one, your patient is dying.” Jeff, our barrel-chested firefighter first-aid instructor tapped his watch. “Over 30 seconds without breathing.”

Frowning at John, I knelt over the resuscitation dummy and slapped a plastic mouth guard over its face.

John started pushing down the chest with the heel of his hand. A rhythmic popping noise accompanied his counting, “One and two and three and…”

I jabbed my fingers under the dummy’s head, and cranked its chin back. When John said “twenty nine and thirty,” I stuck my mouth on the plastic and blew. Nothing. The dummy’s chest didn’t move.

“Pinch the nose,” Jeff, Mr. Patience, suggested.

“Oh, yeah.” I pinched the nose while holding the chin. I felt like an idiot. My knees ached from kneeling on concrete. Leaning my back in an awkward and painful position, and giving the whole class a view of my butt, I blew into the dummy’s mouth twice. Its chest raised and John started in again.

“Okay. That’s good.” Jeff said.

John and I scrambled to our feet. I brushed the debris off the knees of my jeans and shook my sleeve trying to dislodge the fake blood. No luck. I was marked. The rest of the class of city employees stepped back and gathered around Jeff.

“They did pretty well,” Jeff said. “What did you notice?”

Grant Russell eagerly raised his hand and spoke, “Kaitlyn killed the guy while she complained about not wanting to breathe, then did it wrong.”

Thanks for pointing that out. I glared at Grant, an overweight nerd who worked in Public Works doing data entry and other computer stuff, but fancied himself a field worker. John and Grant were my co-workers. Usually I made a point to get along, but today I found it a challenge.

The Mayor of our fine city was the one who decided all city employees needed to re-certify in first aid. The Mayor based his wise decision on direction from the real power, the City Manager. No one was very happy to be here.

I had no problem listening to the presentation, looking at gory pictures and discussing scenarios. But I found the hands-on practice--in the City Hall parking lot--corny and humiliating.

“Team One did very well. Always make sure the wound is taken care of—before you start compressions. It’s a lot of work if you’re just pushing blood out his leg,” Jeff said. “However, if Seattle has the 8.5 earthquake that’s sometimes predicted, you might have several people with multiple injuries from fallen debris. You’ll have to make choices on who to handle first—or at all.”

“What would you do if the victim has big boobs?” asked Marcus Trask, another co-worker, as he ogled me like he wanted to open up my shirt and start compressing my chest.

“Push ‘em out of the way,” Jeff said not taking the bait.

I reflexively crossed my arms over my triple-D chest and glared back at Marcus. *You wish, you creep. You wish.*

“Who can remind us what triage means?” Jeff said.

And on it went. Luckily we ran out of time before Team One had to run another scenario. No more mouth-to-mouth on dummies today. I threw away my gloves, packed up my things, and prayed I’d never have to do it on a live person—ever.

I actually enjoy my job working for the City of Cedar Grove, Washington. I drive around in a city truck picking on citizens. I’m a CEO--Code Enforcement officer. Being youngish (38 and holding), a woman, and a well-endowed blond isn’t what most people picture when they think of code enforcement. But most of the time, I like the work. I put up with the riff raff like Marcus and Grant (the allure of government benefits, I guess. If I was in HR, I’d be more discerning in who I hired).

Sharon Stone patted my shoulder as we walked back toward City Hall, a long one-story former grocery store building. “Ignore them guys, Kaitlyn,” twanged Sharon. “That’s the only way to survive.” Sharon is no relation to the actress and no resemblance either. She’s a large black woman with a deep voice who sings perfect alto. Rows and rows of orange colored braids covered her head.

I picked discouragingly at the stain on my shirt, not feeling my usual cheery self.

“And don’t worry about that either. I’m sure fake blood comes out in a cold rinse.”

“Thanks, Sharon. Sorry I’m in a crabby mood.”

“It wasn’t so bad.”

Sharon is the kindest person I know. She’s the one I go to when I feel beat up because she could put a smile on my face on the worst day. She was also the one you wanted with you on a job when an angry homeowner decided they didn’t like your last posted notice. She was big and tough and didn’t take crap from anyone. Came from having ten siblings and now five kids.

“You weren’t the one with your butt up in the air,” I said.

“Nobody’s wantin’ to see my ass,” she replied. “I just had to whack that little rubber baby on the back. Shit. In my old neighborhood that was called child abuse.”

“It still is if the kid isn’t choking.”

We walked out of the parking lot and into City Hall. I needed to pick up my messages and make sure there weren’t any emergencies before going home. Usually about half of the little pink slips Cheryl left me contained abbreviated swear words. She’d come up with a very creative short hand for our messages. For example: *AH w/ rst-v wts U*. Some others in the office (Grant) didn’t get it, but I did. An asshole with a rusted vehicle in his yard wasn’t happy about his citation and request to move the car.

When I started in Code Enforcement I thought I was helping my community, cleaning up the streets. But lately it seemed more like a game. I tag something. Not an official ticket but a notice. The homeowner is ‘it’ and back and forth we go.

“I never got the notice.”

“What’s wrong with my fence?”

“I don’t see any trash in my yard.”

“You tryin’ to tell me how to run my own home?”

Cheryl was back at her desk, a rounded counter inside the main entrance of the Public Works division of Cedar Grove City Hall. She perked up and waved a form at me as Sharon and I entered. “I got a live one for you, Sharon.”

Sharon looked at her watch. It was almost 5:00 PM. “Can I put it off until tomorrow, honey? I’ve got two kids home sick, one with a school project due, and two I need to track down and drag out of whatever trouble they’s in.”

“I don’t think so,” Cheryl said. “Guy sounded pretty pissed off and wanted action now. You’re up in the rotation.”

I glanced at Sharon. I saw the struggle between work and home in her face.

“I gotta get home to the kids,” Sharon said. “And if the homeowner’s that riled, it won’t be a short call.”

Cheryl, an average-looking 25-year-old brunette, looked like a quiet, shy wall flower. Not so. Her phone started to ring. She waved the piece of paper across the counter. “Sharon, take the frickin’ lead and go! I got stuff to do here.”

“I’ll take it,” I said, reaching over Sharon to grab the slip. “I’ll do it for you.”

Sharon looked relieved. “Really? You’ll do it?”

“Sure.” I nodded.

Cheryl hummed *We get by with a little help from our friends*.

“Cheryl, log me out to that address,” I said. “I’ll take the truck, then go straight home. Tomorrow I’ll stop back by the Tolefson’s and look at their dying tree.”

The Tolefson’s were personal friends of our Mayor and were quick to call him if we didn’t respond to their complaints right away. The tree in question was really on their property and therefore, their responsibility to remove. But they continued to argue it was on City property and we should pay for the removal.

I took the paper. Cheryl grabbed the phone, looking like she was about to scream at someone. Instead, she smashed the receiver against her ear and in an ultra calm, sweet voice said, “Cedar Grove Customer Service, how may I help you?” She paused and stuck her tongue out at me. “Absolutely, sir. Hold just a moment and I’ll transfer you.” She mouthed “go.”

“I’m going,” I whispered. “See ya round, Sharon.”

“Thanks again, K. Ciao.”

I headed for my portable office in a white Ford pick-up and my stash of Gummi Bears and Diet Coke. After the day I’d had, I could use some comfort food.