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OUT OF TOUCH: A Pat Cassidy Novel

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Out of Touch

A Pat Cassidy
Novel



E.P. GARTH

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ISBN 978-1-60910-287-6

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Printed in the United States of America.

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Booklocker.com, Inc. 2010

Author's website: <http://epgarthlearn.com>

Publisher's website: <http://www.booklocker.com>

Chapter Seven

In the middle of the afternoon I sat in the University of Texas coach's office waiting to talk to Mike Earl, Kerry Vogel's recruiter. The walls of the office were burnt orange and decorated with black and white pictures of Longhorn All-Americans and national championship teams. The secretary told me Earl was in a meeting with the head coach and would meet with me as soon as he could. I smiled at her which appeared to please her. She then smiled back which I also found very pleasing. The name plate on her desk said she was Linda Preston. Linda was an attractive woman, about my age, with long blonde hair parted down the middle. Her slim figure was dressed in a powder blue sleeveless blouse tucked into a cream colored short skirt. Her arms and legs were lean and tanned.

"Just curious, Mr. Cassidy," she said, with her green eyes peering at me, "why are you here to see Coach Earl?"

"Pat," I said.

"Excuse me?" she said.

"Call me Pat."

"Oh, O.K. My name's Linda."

"Kerry Vogel," I said. "Do you remember him?"

"Yes, he was supposed to be the next great Texas quarterback. He was in my ex-husband's recruiting class."

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“Was your ex-husband a coach or player?”

“Player,” Linda said. “He was a running back.”

“What’s his name?” I said.

“Billy Preston.”

“You were married to Billy Preston?” I said.

“Yes.”

“All-American running back drafted by the Giants?”

“The same,” Linda said, looking at a picture on her desk.

“He got hurt last year,” I said. “How is the rehab coming along?”

“It’s made him even meaner than he was.” She picked up a picture of a little boy and showed it to me. “This is our son, Billy Junior.”

I looked at the picture of Billy Junior who appeared to be about eight years old.

“Cute kid,” I said.

“It was a rotten marriage, but we have a great son.”

Two men came out of an office behind Linda’s desk. I recognized Darrell King, the head coach, who turned around and went back into his office. Mike Earl stopped at Linda’s desk.

“Coach Earl,” Linda said, “Pat Cassidy is here to see you.”

“Cassidy,” he said, shaking my hand, “come on in my office.”

Mike Earl turned and walked toward his office and I followed him.

I looked back at Linda and said, "Good luck with that kid. He looks like a real winner."

"Thanks," she said, smiling. "I think I'll keep him."

Mike Earl sat at his desk and invited me to sit down.

"So, Mr. Cassidy, you wanna talk about Kerry Vogel?"

His voice carried a Midwest accent and the resonance of it rolled around in my head.

"Illinois," I said.

"Illinois?" Earl said. "Oh, yeah, the accent. But I'm from Indiana. Valparaiso to be exact."

"Tell me about Kerry Vogel," I said.

"What would you like to know about him?"

"What made you want to recruit him?"

"Kerry Vogel was the best QB in the state the year we recruited him. Best numbers of any quarterback we looked at *and* he led his high school team to a state championship."

"His dad told me you became very close," I said.

"We were, but I always get close to the kids I wanna sign."

Earl's dark brown shirt with white stitching, brown slacks, white shoes, and white belt were attempting to make a fashion statement, but missed the point. His complexion was weathered and his blonde hair was ruffled and windblown. Earl leaned back in his chair with his hands laced together behind his head.

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“He was a great kid and a great talent,” Earl said. “Wish they could all be like him. I’m sorry things happened the way they did...he would have been a great asset to our program.”

“You mean the way he disappeared?” I asked.

“Yes, of course.”

“Coach, you were closer to Kerry than anyone here. What was going on with him?”

“The best I can recall is he didn’t seem to have it the moment he stepped onto the practice field.”

“Kerry had lost heart,” I said. “Isn’t that odd?”

“Not really,” Earl said. “Some kids can’t make the transition from high school to college ball.”

“Isn’t that something you look for when you recruit a kid?”

“Yes, but it’s not a perfect science.”

“Did you see any inkling that it would happen with Kerry?”

“Absolutely not,” Earl said. “I believed he was as solid a recruit as we’ve ever had.”

“Did it ever enter your mind something might be wrong?”

Earl’s relaxed, kicked back position shifted to one of crossed arms as he rocked slightly in his chair.

“Cassidy, once we get these kids on campus there has to be some natural attrition. If they don’t want to give it ‘their all’ then we’ve got to weed them out. It takes a lot of heart in a player to win a national championship.”

“That’s what it’s all about, isn’t it?” I said.

“You mean the winning?” Earl said.

“Yes, I mean the winning.”

“I follow boxing and I know firsthand what you did in the ring,” Earl said. “You telling me you didn’t have a champion’s heart? Did those titles you won not mean anything to you?”

“Touché,” I said. “Sheriff Vogel said when he left for Austin he was the same kid.”

“That may be the case,” Earl said, “but Kerry had changed by the time we got him.”

“How much time elapsed from when he checked into the dorm and two-a-days began?” I said.

“Freshman orientation for incoming athletes takes a week,” Earl said.

“Kerry leaves Brownwood on Saturday morning...”

“He signed in at eleven-thirty a.m. according to our records,” Earl said, finishing my sentence.

“And he has the rest of the weekend on his own,” I said.

“Most of the boys come with their families.”

“But Kerry wasn’t most boys.”

“No, he wasn’t,” Earl said. “He had an independent streak.”

“What about freshman orientation week? Anything scheduled in the evenings to occupy their time?”

“Full week of activities,” Earl said.

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“Did Kerry attend any of them?”

“Don’t know...the boys weren’t required to sign in for that kind of stuff.”

“Who would know?”

“Maybe his roommate.”

“Jerry Don Lane,” I said.

“Sounds like you’ve done your homework,” Earl said, a little surprised I knew about him.

“Some,” I said, “but a good reporter once told me, that when you don’t have answers...ask questions.”

“Sage advice,” Earl said.

“It was.”

Chapter Eight

The Holiday Inn was located a few blocks from downtown Austin on the Colorado River and just off I-35. My room was on the fourth floor overlooking the river. Dim lights on each side of the dresser mirror illuminated the room just enough for me to see where to put everything. I placed the suitcase on the bed, hung the hanging clothes in the closet, and put the briefcase on the table in the corner. The air conditioner hummed faintly in front of the window and the curtains blocked the light of the day. The late afternoon sunlight immediately brightened the room when I pulled back the curtains. There would be a beautiful sunset in a few hours if I were going to be here to see it. But I had plans to do more research at the UT Library. I took off my blue blazer and hung it up in the closet. The shoulder strap and holstered nine millimeter was next. I slipped out of it and put it on the shelf in the closet. I changed out of a white dress shirt and khakis into a black t-shirt, jeans, and blue jean jacket and headed back to the UT campus.

The traffic bottlenecked near the downtown exits and slowed to a snail's pace. *Kerry Vogel was having secretive phone calls with someone named Charlie. Was Charlie a man or woman?* Texas Ranger Domingo Perez told me he thought Kerry was probably in the wrong place at the wrong time, and because of that, may have been murdered.

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Conjecture on his part. According to the Austin P.D. file on the case, the investigation into Kerry's disappearance had been thorough enough. All students with the first names Charles, Charlie, Chuck, Chad or Charlene had been interviewed and dismissed as possible suspects. Perez's personal file on the case showed he left no stone unturned. *So, who in the hell is Charlie?* My visit with Mike Earl had revealed almost nothing of use...except that Kerry's roommate, Jerry Don Lane, might be able to shed a little light on what he was up to during freshman orientation week. In a short period of time Kerry went from being a highly recruited high school quarterback with unlimited potential, to a kid who Coach Earl described as...not having the heart to play the game anymore. *Why?* As the northbound lane of I-35 crept along, I turned on the radio and dialed up a local country station.

“Austin's *Home for Country Music*...you're listening to 1490 K-B-E-T and here's Johnny Duncan with 'Charlie is My Name.'”

The words to the song drove home an overpowering feeling that Charlie wasn't just any Charlie. *Sorry Charlie.* But Charlie has to be a girl. What else would cause a football player to lose his hard-nosed edge? *Other than drugs or Jesus.* Kerry may have gotten messed up in drugs all right; however, a little pot smoking doesn't necessarily mean a drug problem. The religion thing isn't even on the radar, but it's been known to happen. I recall an All-American and All-Pro football player who once told me he found Jesus ten years after he quit playing ball. He said Jesus taught him to lift up his opponents instead of knocking

them down. Maybe Kerry learned that lesson sooner than he did. There is a possibility that we could be dealing with all three, but I kind of doubt it. The odds of Kerry falling in love, getting religion, and becoming a victim of drug abuse seemed, for the moment, farfetched.

The UT Library was busy with students coming and going with books in hand. Study groups clustered together, some with their noses buried in books, others quietly discussing and debating the latest teachings of academia. A student who worked for the library helped me locate microfilm of the Austin American Statesman from June, July, and August of 1968.

In the corner of the microfilm room I began to search through the film. The front pages of June, 1968, were dominated by news of Robert F. Kennedy's assassination. Helen Keller, who overcame blindness and deafness, died at age 87, and Andy Warhol was shot and wounded by radical feminist, Valarie Solanas.

On June eighth a headline read "James Earl Ray Arrested for Murder of Martin Luther King." It made me think of Dion DiMucci's song 'Abraham, Martin, and John'.

Has anybody here...seen my old friend Martin...Can you tell me where he's gone? He freed a lot of people, but it seems the good, they die young...But I just looked around and he's gone...

On the sports pages, Denny McClain beat the Red Sox on June fifth to improve to nine and one and Dock Ellis pitched a no-hitter for the Pittsburgh Pirates on June twelfth. McClain would win thirty games

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in 1968; Ellis would win six. After a couple of hours I had worked my way to the August eighth edition of the Statesman, when I noticed a small advertisement in the bottom right hand corner of the classified section.

It read, "Come hear Sister Charlene from the Church of the Chosen and become the kind of person you never dreamed you could be. Revival August 8-14."

I stared at the ad for a long time. *Charlene. Could this be Charlie?* Opening up my notebook on Kerry's case, I looked at the timeline of events leading up to his disappearance. The day he moved to Austin was August eighth. After studying the advertisement a little longer, I went to find the helpful student to show me how to make a copy of the page off the microfilm.

As I left the library through the front door and walked down the steps, I looked up and saw Kelly Glasscock walking toward me.

Uh-oh.

Chapter Nine

Kelly Glasscock sat across the table from me in the Front Room of Scholz Garten on San Jacinto Street in downtown Austin. She leaned forward and, with the slender fingers of her left hand, made a swishing motion that brushed my hair to the side and away from my forehead.

“There...that’s better,” Kelly said. “I think this is the longest I’ve ever seen your hair.”

“It is,” I said.

“Is this the new you?”

“No...just need a trim. That’s all.”

Kelly’s long blonde hair was in a braid to the middle of her back and her hazel eyes were captivating. A few freckles spotted the smooth skin around her cheekbones and her makeup was freshly applied and on target. As always, her smile was flirty but always authentic. Kelly’s natural beauty was breathtaking and something was pulling us together. I was not sure what it was, but the chemistry we seemed to have going on between us was mercurial.

“Dad said you were in town,” Kelly said, “and for you to call him...in case I was to *bump* into you.”

“Did you know I was going to be at the library?” I said.

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“Pat, I know in the past there have been times when I knew where you were going to be, but this time it was a coincidence.”

Kelly was wearing a white UT baseball undershirt with burnt orange sleeves tucked into her tight blue jeans. The sleeves of the jersey stopped halfway between her elbows and wrists and she had on a pair of white tennis shoes.

“I’m glad I bumped into you,” I said.

“Me, too,” Kelly said.

The waitress arrived at our table with a basket of freshly baked rolls and took our drink orders. I ordered a Shiner Bock on tap and a white wine spritzer for Kelly.

“What did you find out at the library about your case?” Kelly asked.

“Not much,” I said. “Read a lot about what happened in June, July, and August of 1968.”

“Gosh,” Kelly said, “I was fourteen years old then.”

“I was nineteen.”

“You see,” she said, “there’s not that much difference in our ages.”

“I’ve known that all along, but back then you would’ve been jail bait.”

“That was a long time ago, Pat.”

Kelly picked up a roll and tore it in half, took a small bite, and put the rest of it on a white paper napkin.

“You look like your mother with your hair back in a braid,” I said.

“Just what every girl wants to hear,” Kelly said, “that she looks like her mother.”

“You have a beautiful mother, Kelly, and of the three Glasscock daughters, you look the most like her.”

“Not to change the subject, but have you thought any more about us dating after I graduate?”

“I have,” I said.

“Mom and Dad don’t have a problem with us seeing each other.”

“That doesn’t take away from the fact you are Jeb’s daughter and that is a huge hurdle for me to get over,” I said.

The waitress reappeared and put the spritzer with a slice of lime in front of Kelly and then placed a dark beer near my right hand. I took a drink of the Shiner.

“There is an attraction,” I said. “I can’t deny that, but you are like...the forbidden fruit.”

“The fruit is ripe for the picking,” Kelly said.

“So you mean I can take a bite of the apple.”

Kelly smiled and said, “Anytime you’re ready.”

“How is that boyfriend of yours?”

“I broke up with him,” Kelly said. “Larry is in the past now.”

“How long have you been apart?”

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“Since that day I left you at the ranch.”

“Last month,” I said.

“Yes,” Kelly said. “I knew if I was ever going to have a chance with you I had to end it.”

“How’d he take it?”

“Not well and to make matters worse,” Kelly paused and looked around the room, “I get the feeling he’s following me.”

I know the feeling.

Scholz Garten was quiet for a Tuesday evening. We were at a table near the bar, which made it easy to watch *Police Woman* on the television set elevated behind the bar. *Angie Dickinson has always been easy to watch!* The light yellow walls were decorated with antique signs mostly of German heritage, with a few lighted beer signs and framed Texas Longhorn team spirit posters interspaced among them. The floors were natural hardwood and a wide doorway behind me led to the historic Biergarten. A picture of the 1893 University of Texas football team, the first in school history to go unbeaten, hung on the wall near the end of the bar next to a picture of August Scholz, the founder of Scholz Garten.

“Has he threatened you?” I said.

“No, but I have seen him in places I know he shouldn’t be,” Kelly said. “Different places around campus. After all, I know his schedule, and when he’s somewhere at a certain time when he’s

supposed to be on the other side of the campus, then he's not where he's supposed to be. You know what I mean?"

"Umm...I think so," I said.

"It's not something I can't handle, Pat. Anyway, Larry's a pussycat. He's not a tough guy like you."

Returning with a pad in one hand and a blue Bic pen in the other, the waitress asked if we were ready to order. Kelly, nor I, had even looked at the menu.

"Give us a few more minutes," I said, flashing a smile.

The somewhat attractive young woman smiled back and said, "Sure, take your time," and walked away.

Kelly reached out and touched my hands with the tips of her fingers. The room became a little warmer and I had an almost uncontrollable urge to kiss her. Her complexion took on an amorous glow, especially in the area of her cheekbones and freckles. Maybe it was because of the wine, maybe it was because of me, or maybe it was because of both the wine and me. Either way it was a beautiful sight.

"Do you know what happened to my last girlfriend?" I said.

"Of course I do, Pat. I read the papers and watch TV."

"I wouldn't want something like that to happen to you," I said.

Kelly smiled brightly with amusement in her eyes.

"Pat, I know you would never hurt me."

"Not intentionally," I said. "But with some of the things that go on around me innocent people quite often get hurt."

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“I’m not afraid,” Kelly said.

“That’s easy to say,” I said, “but I could never forgive myself if anything was to happen to you because of me.”

“Like I said, Pat...”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” I said, “you’re not afraid. The fact remains, I’m not looking for a steady relationship in my life right now.”

Kelly leaned forward, and in a little louder than a whisper said, “It won’t always be that way.”

“But for now, Kelly, I have issues.”

“Because of what happened to Brett Tucker,” Kelly said.

“Yes,” I said, drumming my fingers on the table top.

She put her hands over mine as if the drumming annoyed her and forced a smile.

“And,” I said, shrugging, “everything else that happened.”

The somewhat attractive waitress walked by with a tray of drinks in her hands and I waved her over to let her know we were ready to order. Kelly chose a Chef Salad from the menu and I selected a Corned Beef and Swiss on Rye. It came with chips and I ate the sandwich and all the chips, washing them down with another Shiner Bock. Kelly ate very little of her salad.

After we finished our meal we left the restaurant and walked south on San Jacinto Avenue where our cars were parked a half a block away. A man got out of a 1974 Gran Torino and walked slowly toward us. Sensing trouble, I stopped and turned to face Kelly. Firmly holding

her shoulders, I looked her in the eyes and said, “Be ready for anything. If I say run...go back inside and call the police.”

Kelly looked at me and then at the shadowy figure walking toward us.

“Don’t get all worked up, Pat. It’s only Larry.”

“What is he doing here?” I said.

“What do you think?”

She stepped a couple of feet in front of me and shouted at him as he walked in our direction. “Larry, you’re going to have to quit following me!”

Larry stopped and said with a nervous voice, “Is this the guy you broke up with me for?”

“No, Larry,” Kelly said, “he’s just a friend.”

He moved toward us circling to our right with his back to the street. Larry put his hands on his hips and dropped his head.

“It’s Pat Cassidy, isn’t it?” he said.

Larry was a good inch shorter than Kelly even in his boots, which put him at about five feet eight inches tall. He had long black hair to his shoulders and wore a tight green t-shirt that displayed muscular arms.

“I knew it, Kelly,” Larry said. “I knew it from the moment you broke up with me. It was always about Pat Cassidy, your high school crush that’s the *big* hero.”

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“That’s enough, Larry,” Kelly said. “You need to leave or I’m going to call the police.”

“You don’t need to do that, Kelly,” I said. “I can take care of him right here and now.”

“Come on, you son-of-a-bitch,” Larry said, taunting me.

Larry doubled up his fists as I moved around Kelly to get to him. She put her body between Larry and me when he launched a looping right hand. I pushed Kelly out of the way, but before I could avoid the punch, it landed, glancing off my left eye. The expression on Larry’s face was one of horror. I can only imagine what must have been going through his mind. He had just punched a former National Golden Gloves champion in the eye. Larry might have also been thinking that this is the guy who shot and killed his last girlfriend. While he was surprised the punch actually landed, I was just as surprised that a pussycat, as Kelly called him, was able to hit me without me putting up any kind of defense. He stood frozen and as I stared at him, I wasn’t really sure what to do. If I threw a punch I would probably knock him out. So instead, I shoved him in the chest with the palms of my hands as hard as I could.

“Pat, no!” Kelly shouted.

Larry flew back across the hood of the car parallel parked behind him and slid off into the street. Kelly ran to Larry and helped him to his feet.

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“How could you do this, Pat?” Kelly said. “I told you I could handle this. Now you’ve hurt him.”

I just looked at Kelly in disbelief. Larry put his arm over Kelly’s shoulders and leaned against her as they staggered their way to his car. As she opened the passenger side door of the Gran Torino, Larry looked back at me and I thought I saw a glimpse of a smile before he flopped down onto the front seat. Kelly got in on the driver’s side without looking at me, or saying a word, and drove off with him.

Is this for real?

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