

“What do you say, Johnson?”

“It’s another day at the office, Chief. How’re you?”

“Good. Good. What’s wrong with the transport?”

“Just checking her over, Sir. Making sure everything is ship-shape.”

“They’re predicting lightning storms this afternoon, Johnson. We could get busy,” the Chief said.

“We’re always ready, Sir. I’m just keeping her that way.”

“Carry on, Johnson.”

Of course I’d carry on. Of course I’d have the truck ready. I was a transport driver for a fire department in California – I hauled dozer teams to wildfires. There shouldn’t be a lot more explanation necessary.

I grew up farming, so I was well aware of the need to keep your machinery ready to roll whenever the need might arise. I didn’t leave the family farm because I didn’t believe with the philosophy – I left because I needed a job.

Over-the-road trucking was a logical choice, and for a while, it wasn’t too bad. It was easy to get into, and once I got used to living on the road, it let me put a mountain of money away – I was never home to spend any of it. I even got rid of my apartment after a few years.

Winter sucked.

I have to admit that. I never liked snow, ice, frosted windows, the tension of being around cars sliding every which way, the truck idling constantly to stay warm...

I hated winter.

But, worse than anything, I hated being cold.

I think that’s the main reason I decided to settle in LA. I’d been through there plenty of times with the truck, but I’d never explored it. The sum total of my understanding of it came from watching TV shows – Emergency! And Baywatch.

But... Fire engines and women in swimsuits... Are you kidding me? I had to check it out.

I was lucky to find the job with the Fire Department. To be honest, I caught them desperate. Ordinarily, they would have had a trained firefighter run the dozer transport I got assigned to, but their last candidate had stuck the rig so bad it took three wreckers and unloading the dozer to get it out of the pinch he had put it in. That was, of course, the smaller problem. The highway they’d blocked for three hours during the evening rush hour was just considered unacceptable.

Fire season was just around the corner and they couldn’t afford to be caught unable to respond. They had assumed (correctly) that the time it would take a fireman to learn to handle the semi was something they just couldn’t afford. So... They gave me a chance. If it worked out, I’d hit the Academy after fire season.

The truck wasn’t an issue. Department protocol had a chase and a lead pickup truck attach to me wherever I went – it was a giant game of follow-the-leader. Between my background as a kid on the farm and my time as an OTR driver, I’d learned how to successfully get a rig anywhere.

The only problem I had was that I didn’t care for life as a delivery guy. Part of why I left the road was to start doing something where I could matter. Dropping a dozer off out in front of a cloud of smoke and blaze of wildfire, only to watch it

clatter off into the distance to go fight its war against the beast didn't settle well with me at all.

I can still remember watching my Dad drive away on the tractor, leaving me behind in the pickup. Heck, I can still remember being left with Mom because I was too young to go along to farm at all. I can remember the emptiness of watching my parents drive away after they came to see me when I passed through a nearby town while I was trucking.

I didn't like watching people drive away from me... It just didn't settle well at all with me.

But...

To heck with it.

The tones just dropped.

I gotta roll.