



The Team Player

When Alvin told them The Big Guy had invited him to *Rosa's On Rose*, the other guys said *'You're the man, Big Al'*, and punched him on both shoulders.

He was careful to lean over his garden salad so he wouldn't drip ranch dressing on his one good tie and found clever ways to talk about the Seahawks and how Obama was screwing up the Economy.

He wasn't much of a sports guy, but he worked in the Research Department, for heaven's sake. Twenty minutes at the computer and he knew the difference between an option set and a shotgun set, and he knew the defensive coordinator liked to run a hybrid 4-3/3-4, with the defensive ends *'flying off the edges like bats out of Hades.'*

When the The Big Guy stopped in the Safeway parking lot on the way back to the office and sat there staring straight ahead, Alvin felt his gut tighten up like a sweaty fist.

"Al," The Big Guy said, "I have a *Q* to which I need an *A*." He dug thoughtfully at his gums with a toothpick.

"Bring it, Coach," Alvin said. "This is me going long. Hit me with your best *Q. Touchdown*. This is me on the kickoff, knocking people on their asses. *BAM!* Now, *Q* me a *Q*."

"This pleases me, Al," The Big Guy said, and held out his fist. Alvin did a straight-on fist-bump, not an over-under. *Good*.

"Here's the thing, Al," The Big Guy said. "See those people over there?" He pointed toward the sidewalk in front of the store. "I need you to go over there and talk to them. Would you do that *Alvarino*? For the team?"

"What do I talk to them about?" Alvin asked. He wondered if he was supposed to know.

“You’ll know when you talk to them, Al. Go with the flow, *feel it*,” the Big Guy said, playfully clapping Alvin on the back of the head. Alvin flinched, but didn’t jerk his head. *Good.*

“Coach,” said Alvin, “this is me taking one for the team.” He opened the car door and sprinted toward the group, hoping the car door hadn’t slammed.

When he got to the sidewalk, Alvin saw there was a card table set up. He walked up and presented himself.

“We’ve only got *Thin Mints* and *Peanut Butter Patties*,” one of the girls at the table said.

Alvin felt the sweaty fist relax. He reached for his wallet.

“Give me a box of the Thin Mints,” he exulted. “No, make that one of each.” Only a moron wouldn’t buy an extra box for The Big Guy. “By the way, I really like your uniforms. You ladies rock. *Booyah!*” He sprinted back toward the car.

He should have tipped her. Next time. He pumped his fist. *Here’s to next time.*