



CHAPTER TEN

The Passing

“The fear of death follows from the fear of life. A man who lives fully is prepared to die at any time.” -Mark Twain

Max walked across campus. He found himself walking more and more these days and keeping his car at his apartment. Maybe it was the beautiful, spring weather. Maybe it was his efforts to save on gas and car repairs. One thing is for sure, it gave Max time to think.

He was going to work out at the football building.

Matt was fanatical about his weight training. He felt bad about missing his workouts for the last couple days.

For the last week he had been disconnected with the things that were a regular part of his life. He needed time alone and didn't even go to the Spring Game. He read all about it on the internet.

As he entered the locker room, he was confronted by Big Ben.

“Where the hell have you been, Bro? I have been missing my workout partner.”

Max walked to his locker. “Been taking care of some personal things outside of football. I haven't been feeling right these days.”

Ben walked over to Max. “You ok?”

Max shook his head yes. “Going to be just fine.”

“All of us were there except you. Why didn’t you go to the funeral?”

“What?”

“The lady at the funeral home said that Bee asked to be cremated and that you were supposed to keep his ashes.”

Max sat down to absorb the moment. He was completely confused. “I don’t understand.”

Ben continued. “After the Spring game, Bee went home to take a nap and just never woke up.”

Max is stunned. “But I just...” He didn’t know how to explain the unexplainable.” His meeting on the Red Cedar was after Bee’s death.

Obviously, this was no time to try to explain this to his big friend, because he wouldn’t...or couldn’t understand.

Ben was giving him funny looks already.

He looked at Max and stared at his temples. “Did you break something up there when you hit the turf? Rumor has it that you cracked your damn helmet.”

Max looked up and finally spoke. “I think I have to puke.”

He ran to the toilet and released his morning protein shake into the white porcelain bowl. He felt like a tackling dummy that had just been broken in half by a 300-pound lineman.

He sorted through his thoughts.

Had Max been talking to a ghost on the Red Cedar? He was reminded of that young kid who was in the movie The Sixth Sense “I see dead people.”

“I got to go.” He quickly exited.

Max ran as fast as he could in the direction of his apartment. There were no thoughts about school or spring weather. He saw nothing but the road or sidewalk he was on.

He was still exhausted and sick, but he didn’t care.

His apartment was now the goal line. He had the ball, and he ran as if a team of tacklers was on his tail.

He shut off all thoughts about football. It was now all about the briefcase at his apartment.

Still his thoughts raced even faster than his running. What is happening?

Perhaps he had dreamed all of this. Or maybe it was a practical joke orchestrated by his teammates. Things like this have happened before.

Elaborate locker room jokes were erected to mess with a guy's mind for the sake of a good laugh.

For a beat, he thought about taking a cab to the ER in Lansing to get an MRI of his brain.

Then he thought, "Just let me check out my apartment. If the Playbook is there maybe I am not brain damaged or crazy."

Finally, Max could see his apartment building.

He arrived, entered, and sprinted up the stairs.

Max entered his room and saw the briefcase on the bed and the key. With his hands shaking he unlocked the case and saw it as clear as daylight.

It's the PLAYBOOK Bee that was given yesterday.

He grabbed his laptop and turned it on. He clicked on Google and typed in Bee's name. A page popped up into the obituaries and he checked the date. He takes a deep breath.

He finally knew the truth. His last meeting with Bee wasn't real.

Max looked down at the PLAYBOOK and sat on the side of his bed. "But that is real!"

He turns to find something special on the night-stand next to his bed. To his shock and surprise, his broken helmet has been replaced by a brand-new Spartan headgear. It sparkled with energy from the afternoon sun that now flooded the room.

Bee made his final equipment change and delivery. A posted note said this, "I will always be with you. Love Bee."

Then Max did something he never remembered doing on the field or in the locker room. He started to cry.

But it wasn't what he called "sissy tears" ... those watery eyes after a big game and a big loss. Those were the emotions of losers who wanted a pat on the back that said, "you did your best."

These tears were filled with both anger and triumph. Like a baby who had just been born. They were like the war cry of a kid who was only 8 pounds and screaming at life... delivering and demonstrating without words... the Spartan line in the sand that said, "Come and take it!"

And then the same thing happened to him as it did in the stadium when he laid down in the middle of the field and looked up at the sun.

He felt big...big. Bigger than he ever felt before. For the first time in his life he finally “fed the right lion.”

He grabbed the tattered pages and started to read the words in the PLAYBOOK like a man with his hair on fire.

He let go of any desire to understand what had happened to Bee. That didn't matter now.

The only thing that mattered were the pages in front of him. No doubt about it. Bee's plan worked. Max was finally ready to commit to the plan... heart mind and soul.

Max finally understood everything. It all unfolded in his head like dominos falling across the floor in a long winding chain.

Bee needed to give him the PLAYBOOK after he passed. It was his final magic trick, to make sure that Max was a true believer.

And it worked.

He could hear Coach Duffy talking in his head as he read his words. It was like “books on tape.” All **Max had to do was listen.**

One thing is for sure.

This PLAYBOOK was real!