



CHAPTER THREE

The Aftermath

“To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.” -Ralph Waldo Emerson

The team doctor shined a small flashlight into his eyes from a device no bigger than a pencil. He punctuated his search with a series of “hmmms” that were clearly unsettling.

Max finally lost patience. “Am I going to survive Doc, or should I just book a room at the funeral home?” The doctor kept searching through Max’s pupils like he was looking for bad apples in a bushel basket.

“Well let’s put it this way...you can attend the party, but you aren’t going to dance. This is the second concussion you’ve had since last Fall.”

Translation? No Spring Games.

Doc pulled back and looked at Max. “How do you feel about that son?”

Max looked down. “Let’s just say, I see the writing on the chalkboard.” Doc was confused. Max smiles. “I know...nobody uses chalkboards anymore. They’re older than dirt...just like you.”

Max loved to joke around during tough times. He felt that it loosened things up in tight spots.

Legend had it, in the defensive huddle during the last seconds of his high school championship game, he asked the team “who’s buying the burritos after we win this thing?”

He then made a game winning sack of the QB and they carried him off the field. (Or at least they tried to...Max was over 300 lbs.)

Doc smiled and took a small scalpel from his leather bag. "How would you like emergency surgery right now?"

They traded a slow high five. "You got me, Doc!"

Later...

The state-of-the-art locker room was empty as Max sat on a bench near the shower. The room looked clean but used. Coach D was a stickler about "cleaning up after yourself" and respect for your environment.

Max still looked a little dazed. Inside his locker was a virtual self-improvement shrine. Peak performance quotes and pics were everywhere. Max was clearly a high performance junky. Three pictures set the stage. Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and Mother Teresa.

Finally, Max went over to the far side of the room where Bee was picking up wet towels and putting them in a canvas cart.

The two squared off for a beat. "How are you feeling son?"

Max smiled. "Ever wonder why every old guy on this team wants to call me son?" Bee kept working as he talked. "Just a habit, I guess. Me...I'm almost 70 and I never had any kids. These boys are overgrown babies. Part of my job is to teach them some things they needed to know."

Max slowly smiled and took it all in. One thing Max was good at was listening. He also loved to pray. Since he was in little league, coaches considered him to be the team Chaplin.

In fact, he almost became a Catholic priest. Max had been admitted to a seminary for his high school years, but he waved it off because they didn't have a football team.

Max now had tears in his eyes. He looked at Bee. "I came over here to thank you. I know what you do is not easy. Most of the time nobody tells you thanks for supplying the armor that makes these Spartans safe."

Bee kept sorting towels as he talked. "I really appreciate that. It was my calling, I guess. Nothing is better in life than finding and following your calling. After that everything kind of falls in place."

Max and Bee squared off like two gunfighters in the middle of the street.

"What's your plan Mad Max?"

The wounded DT smiled as he grabbed his backpack. "Somehow I knew you were going to ask that!"

Bee asked everybody that. His favorite saying was, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there."

Even though Bee wasn't a coach, he had a way of getting the best out of players. It was like he had a recipe for a "secret sauce." However, it was always very subtle. Bee wasn't a preacher; he was more of a magician.

And as everyone knows, a magician never reveals his secrets.

Added to this, no one had ever seen him in a car. Bee just "showed up" and disappeared every day like Superman or some kind of ghost.

When his sage advice really hit home for a player, their response was always the same... "Gaaaa Damn" Bee just stung me!"

Bee also loved his job. He was always the first to arrive in the morning and the last to go home at night.

Max looked down, like he was ashamed and embarrassed. "You might as well be the first to know, I'm quitting Bee! I want to be a lawyer after my football days are over. When I got my bell rung out there today, it knocked some sense into me. This team isn't for me."

Bee now folded towels as he listened.

"In the shower it hit me like icy water. I decided it was time to give up this crazy dream. I'm gonna transfer to some smaller college...one of them offered me a scholarship. It just isn't happening with this team. My reads are bad, and my pass rush is even worse. Coaches want to help, but there is only so much time they can give me. Out there I'm fifth in line of the DTs.

A silence filled the room like fog. Bee kept working as he talked. "That's a good plan...but it might not be the best plan. One thing for sure...you're gonna be a great lawyer. You are already making a good case for quitting on your dream."

Max tried to chew and swallow Bee's words, but they got stuck somewhere. "What do you mean?" Max rolled the towel cart to the door to the locker room exit. Finally, he turned and shot Max with a laser stare. "You eat breakfast?"