



CHAPTER FOUR

The Crack

“God has given us two hands - one to receive with and the other to give with. We are not cisterns made for hoarding; we are channels made for sharing.” - Billy Graham

There is a breakfast dive in the middle of East Lansing that serves the best omelets and coffee in the world. The menu isn't filled with sweet, frothy coffee concoctions or glazed, sugary donuts.

Their breakfast special is always the same. It is an omelet big enough to feed your family and they don't pass out doggie bags.

For football players, the volume of food is almost as important as taste. As Big Ben once said, (while looking at his tiny steak in a 5-star bistro), “that's about enough food to make me angry.”

The place had another draw. It sells the best coffee in the world. It is a magical black liquid in white porcelain cups. It lights up your brain and supercharges your morning mood.

It's cheap and ...the best.

No one could ever remember the name of this joint and so customers just called it “that breakfast place.” And so, after a dozen years of this, Sid, the owner finally folded and posted a neon sign out front that said just that.

When Max entered, he immediately spotted Bee waving in a booth in the farthest corner.

Max shook his head. No matter how hard they tried, no one could ever arrive before Bee. Over the years, players thought he might sleep in the locker room, since he never told anyone where he lived.

Bee was a self-appointed mystery man.

Max walked over, shook hands, and then took off his fanny pack and slid into the seat. Two black coffees were already sitting in front of them.

Bee has spent a lifetime setting the table for his players/kids on the MSU football team. It was simply who he was.

The waitress came over and smiled. "You need cream with that?" Max looked at Bee. "You are kidding me?" Bee cracked a smile and winked.

It was a running joke that Bee had started. Cream in your coffee was akin to wearing diapers. Real men don't need any window dressing for their java. You never want to water down a good caffeine buzz.

The waitress held her pen in hand and waited for an instruction she already knew.

Bee looked at her. "We'll both have the breakfast special." Max nodded.

Bee cut to the chase with a question. "Do you know why we are here?" Max takes a drink of his coffee and then smiles. "Sure, you want to convince me to ride the pine as a Spartan for the next three or four years."

Now Bee reloaded with his own sip of coffee. "Quite to the contrary. I came here because a long time ago I made a promise to a good friend." Max is now percolated with curiosity. He couldn't help but ask. "Who's the friend?"

Bee ignored the question. "God knows why he chose me to be the caretaker of his life's work." Max looked up. "Who is this guy you made promises to?"

Bee looked out the window. "I'd rather not say... yet."

Max looked at him. "Then tell me about you, mystery man."

Bee hesitated. He didn't like talking about himself. Finally, he fessed up. "I grew up in Detroit during the fifties and sixties. It was a turbulent time. Riots, racial segregation, crime. It became a kind of war zone. And I was the skinny kid that everyone liked to bully."

"The thing that saved me in all this was football. From the time I could walk, I was in love with this crazy game. The problem is that I had no size, strength, or talent. No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't compete. I watched the movie "Rudy," except my career started and ended in high school instead of college."

Max smiled. "What's the happy ending?"

"In the last game of the season, I was on the kickoff team in a game that meant nothing. The ball fumbled and bounced right in front of me and into my arms and I took it into the endzone for a touchdown."

Max claps his hands hard and smiles. "Damn Bee you just stung me!"

"I knew then that football would be my life's work. I knew that I would do whatever I could to create that feeling, even if it wasn't me carrying the ball. It was enough for me to be a cog in the machine that created those moments."

Bee continued, "When I came to MSU I volunteered as a student manager. After four years of this I got a job as an assistant in the equipment room. The rest is history."

Silence and smiles. Bee looks up. "I like to eat breakfast with special friends. Want to know why?"

"It reminds me of the story about heaven and hell my mentor told me. Both places had a huge banquet hall with the tastiest food and drink God ever created. Except each guest had these huge spoons and forks attached permanently to their arms and hands. And in hell everyone was cursing and swearing, because they couldn't get the food to their mouths. They could look, but never eat. And they constantly fought and blamed each other."

Max smiled. "And heaven?"

Bee smiled back. "They had the exact same food and the exact same problem. However, the room was always filled with joy and laughter. Everyone got their fill. And you know why?"

"Why?"

"The folks in heaven did one thing different. They didn't feed themselves. They fed each other."

Max slowly clapped. "That's dope!" Bee had him where he wanted him. He knew the time was right for something special.

"I want to give you something. However, you must promise me that after your visit coach Davis... you meet with me one more time."

Max was confused. "How did you know that coach D and I were meeting?"

Bee smiled, "Let's just say, I know things."

He pulls out Max's helmet from under the table. "Recognizes this?"

Max looked at the helmet, clearly shaken to the core. “How did you?” Bee smiled. “Hey, I’m the equipment manager. Look at it close.”

Max sees that it is cracked in the front next to his face mask. “It’s broken.”

Bee takes a sip from his coffee. “It’s like all of us. As humans we are all damaged goods. We’re all in a cocoon trying to break through to the next level. We all must embrace this process. It’s that struggle that makes us great. Did you know that a butterfly will die if you help cut it loose from the cocoon? When the butterfly engages in the struggle, it pushes life giving fluids into the wings so they can grow and expand. If we shortcut the process, the butterfly will die. His wings never grow. The crack is also a sign. You’re the one.”

Bee slides the helmet across the table to Max. “Keep this as a reminder. To take your life to the next level, you must break through your old thinking. And it all starts in your head. It’s like my mentor told me. “A wound is just a crack in your armor where the light can shine through.”

There is a long and uncomfortable silence.

Bee continued. “Let’s get to ground level before we try to fly. I have seen players come and go for almost fifty years and do you know what the mindset of the great ones is?”

Max sat back... like he was about to hear a church sermon that he had already heard a thousand times before. He knew all the answers to that question. Make goals, think positive, stay strong... yadda, yadda, yadda.

Out of respect, he took out a small notebook from his back pocket. “Tell me... I’m all ears.”

Bee smiled as he continued. “We all have two lions inside of us fighting each other. One is good, the other is evil. One light, the other is darkness. One is hope, the other is fear. Do you know which one always wins?”

Max slowly shook his head “no.”

“The one you feed.”

Suddenly the waitress arrived with two plates piled with the biggest omelets you have ever seen. She set them down in front of Bee and Max. “Anything else?”

Bee looked at her. “Plenty...just not today.” He winked at her. “We are good so far.”

Max was still in shock. Bee looked down at his folded hands in front of him.

“Lesson one is finished. Let’s pray...and then feed.”