



CHAPTER SIX

The Meeting

"It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light." - Aristotle

Max looked both ways as he crossed the street next to the football building. It was raining, but he loved it...even without an umbrella. He never understood why students hated Michigan weather. Max loved the seasons. He once had a friend who lived in California. He said "Your life flatlines because every day the weather is the same.

Perfect."

Where do you go from perfect? "It's like kissing your sister or drinking stale beer. It's...lifeless." Max had a lot of faults, but he liked to battle them.

Max liked the challenges of change and disruption.

He took a deep breath and got focused. Today was the day he had scheduled to talk to Coach Davis.

Inside the building, it was clear that Max arrived at his favorite place: the Duffy Daugherty Football Building.

It was like a piece of heaven. State-of-the-art glass walls and tall ceilings, it was a cross between a museum and a massive trophy room.

It dripped the stuff that legends are made of. There were giant photos of former Spartan players in their moments of celebrating greatness. Trophies sat in glass casings that said, "look...feel...but don't touch." It was a spectacular collage of great moments of victory and triumph.

After he walked up the steps to Coach D's office on the second floor he was greeted by the receptionist. Somehow, she knew. "I'll tell him you're here." Max smiled and nodded. "Great."

Inside his office, Coach D rose from his desk chair and shook hands. He was a living legend. He turned the Spartan program around almost immediately and returned it to the greatness and success of Duffy Daugherty in the 60's.

When his tenure was over, there would surely be a statute of him in front of the building Max was standing in.

Coach D smiled big. "Good to see you Max. Have a seat." Max smiled and sat in a comfortable leather chair in front of him. "How you feel?"

Max looked down, "Doc told me I would have to miss the Spring Game. To be honest with you, that hurt, Coach. It hurt worse than banging my head on the turf."

The coach listened hard. Max looked sideways as if he was reading a cue card on the wall. "I guess God took away my last chance."

Max looked down at his feet and felt a surge of shame that he did not like. It was the pose of a loser.

Finally, Coach D spoke. "I know."

Max spoke from the heart. "I want to be a lawyer coach. Maybe that is where I am supposed to compete. Maybe that's my real playing field."

Finally, Max broke the silence. "What do I do Coach?"

It was indeed a special moment...especially for a football player. It was as if the game was tied with only seconds left to play and Max and his teammates were huddled on the sidelines, waiting for the play from his coach that was going to push his team into the endzone.

Coach D finally broke the silence and leaned back in his chair. "You know, I have been doing this coaching stuff most of my life. And you know what I have realized is?"

Max looked up. "What?"

"Most of the time...I have no answers."

This was not what Max expected. Most coaches, especially the great ones, always have answers. They spend hundreds of hours looking at videos of the opposing teams and playing with the x's and o's to find answers and responses to big questions. It seemed like this man who he clearly worshipped was throwing in the towel on him.

Coach D finally spoke. "You know the selfish response for me would be to give you false hope and keep you around on the scouting team for three more years. And I'm not going to do that. You are something special Max. That's all I know. I really wish that I could tell you what to do. But that's up to you and God. And I know you'll make the right decision. A good coach sets the table. But the player is the one who has to eat."

Max is reminded of Bee's stories about heaven and the fighting lions.

He looked up again. "How do I do that coach?"

Coach D leaned forward with his fingers laced together. "I go through this every year myself. When is enough... enough? When should I retire? And you know what? Everyone has an opinion. The press has an opinion, the Spartan nation has an opinion, my team has an opinion. But ultimately, it's my call. All we can do is focus on getting answers instead of more questions."

"But it's so confusing."

Coach pulls a keychain from his desk drawer. It has a small flashlight hooked to it. He flicks it on and gives it to Max.

"I agree. Life is like a dark room. But God gives you a flashlight so that you can find your way. And whatever you shine that light on will become your future. All we can do today is know that you will make the right decision. Go shine your light on answers and nothing else. I can't tell you what to do. All I can do is know that you will do the right thing."

Max tried to give the small flashlight back to his coach. He waved it off. "My gift to you. I got a bunch of them for the guys."

Max clicks it off. "Thanks."

Coach D leaned forward again. "Here is where my flashlight is pointed... someday, whether it's in a courtroom, stadium or an auditorium, I'm going to be in the front row giving you a standing ovation. Can you see that for me Max?"

Max was silent for a long time. His mind raced a mile a minute. A thousand responses flew through his head like a flock of sparrows crossing a morning sky.

Suddenly, his least expected answer blurted out before he could stop it. "Got it."

Coach D stood up and extended his hand for a shake. "I don't really know how this applies, but I want to share with you something Duffy Daugherty told me when I had a tough decision to make about two special opportunities. He smiled at me and said, 'Choose both.'"