

THREE

SELL YOUR SOUL. Commit a crime if you must . . .

I made the turn onto Massachusetts Avenue and thought about what Crafton had said. Nothing's an accident. I couldn't believe my luck, and I had been awake most of Monday night thinking about the meeting and what I'd say.

I had taken the BMW to the car wash, and I had the inside supercleaned just in case. Attention to detail; the mark of a superstar. I wore my finest suit and made sure I chose a shirt with heavy starch and cufflinks. Crafton would have a limited amount of time. I'd study his words carefully, figure him out, and wait for the right moment to tell him what he wanted to hear.

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I glanced over at the file on the passenger seat. Stacy had spent hours compiling information on Crafton's company, and then she printed it all and brought it in to me Monday morning, along with a printed map to the diner.

I drove and studied the map, and though the neighborhood seemed like it was getting shaky, the map was clear. I turned onto Quincy Street, and four blocks later, a sign for Fred's Sunshine Diner hung above a doorway in an unimpressive brick building. No way! I found a spot on the street and parked. I dialed Stacy's cell phone.

"Hello?"

"Please tell me you didn't give me the wrong directions!"

"What??"

"What the hell is wrong with you? This is a dive. It has to be the wrong Fred's café."

"Diner," she said.

"Whatever. This one has plywood on some of the windows. This isn't a place Al Crafton would select for a meeting. I need a jumpsuit with 'Hank' stitched on the front to fit in here."

"But I took the address from the business card you gave me," she explained.

A Land Rover pulled in and parked two spaces in front of me, and a man in a plaid flannel work shirt and

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jeans jumped out and headed for the door. It looked like Al Crafton. I could not believe my eyes.

“I have to go. Never mind. He’s here.”

I leapt out of the BMW and followed him inside, catching him just as he arrived at a booth.

“Patrick! You found it.” He grabbed my hand and shook it firmly. “And you are right on time.”

A waitress handed him a steaming cup of coffee in a heavy mug. She wore an apron littered with various pins with sayings on them. A yellow smiley face pin on her pocket had a frown, instead of a smile.

“Thanks, Marge,” Crafton said. “You’re looking nice today.”

“Oh, you old sweetie.” She looked my way. “Coffee for you, son?”

“Yes, black.”

I looked around at the place. It was packed. I was the only one in the diner wearing a tie. “So you come here much?” I asked.

“Every Tuesday,” Crafton said. “I take the day off on Tuesdays and work nearby.” He looked around and exchanged smiles and a wave with a man two booths over. “And Saturday mornings too, usually with my wife.”

“You drive all the way out here on a Saturday? Doesn’t that hurt your golf game?”

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“Sure!” He laughed. “But I was never much into golf anyway.”

The waitress came back and slid the coffee and a menu in front of me and continued to another table without breaking stride.

“This probably isn’t the kind of place you normally frequent, is it? You like the Harbor Club, I suppose.”

I nodded. “Yes.”

“That place is a bit stuffy for me, personally,” Crafton said. “But I just show up where they tell me to.”

I was dying to know who “they” were, but the waitress came back for my order.

“I’ll have the Tuesday breakfast special. Eggs over easy, with wheat toast.”

She nodded and left. Crafton didn’t order.

“So you’re not married?” Crafton asked.

“Nope. Well, technically, yes. We’ve been legally separated almost a year now. How about you?”

Crafton nodded. “Next month will be 38 years!”

“Don’t get me wrong,” I said, hoping not to sound casual about a failed marriage. “My wife is wonderful. Everything was great when we first met. But she never liked me working so much. I told her we’d start a family after I made EVP. I guess she got impatient.”

Crafton contemplated me for a moment. “Any regrets?”

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“Regret is for losers. So no, I don’t have any regrets. I miss her, sure, but I can’t look at what might have been. Life’s not a country western song.”

“Do you think you’ll eventually have a wife and family?”

I shifted uncomfortably in my seat. I needed to stay focused on winning his business, but Hannah’s face popped into my head. She was laughing, wearing that white gauzy dress from the time we vacationed in Cabo, on the beach. Where did that flashback come from? Remember the game plan, I told myself. Listen, dissect, feed him back what he wants to hear.

“I haven’t given it much thought, actually. I don’t want to lose my edge, I know that much.”

“Lose your edge? What’s that mean, exactly?”

The waitress returned and gave us both a refill.

“You know, get married, have kids, gain weight, get a little comfortable. Most people stop thinking about their original commitment to success. They get older, get married, and slow down. When you take your eye off the ball, you get less competitive. Not going to happen to me!”

Crafton smiled. “I see. Do you think that’s what has happened to me?”

“Let’s face it, most people aren’t you. Obviously that’s not what happened to you, and that’s why I’m being so candid. I know you can relate to what I’m saying. Most

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get older and lose their edge for their career. They get too comfortable. But you didn't, and I won't either." My eyes settled on the hands wrapped around his coffee mug. They were large, with deep crevices. More like a working man's hands than a CEO's. Most executives I knew had manicured fingernails. "You're like the Tiger Woods of the business world," I finished.

Crafton said nothing.

"I saw an interview with Tiger recently," I continued. "And he said he doesn't play to come in second. He plays to win."

"How old are you?" Crafton asked.

"Almost 30."

"I see. I am 64. That puts us 35 years apart. I believe you and I are a lot alike except for those years and the many chances they have given me to twist my ankles on the uneven pavement of life."

"Really?"

"Yes. And based on the years between us, I'd say there's nothing wrong with having a competitive spirit, but even Tiger doesn't win every time. He's a worldclass athlete, and winning is part of the sport of competition. But in the real world, where we all work together, it's about leveraging the strengths of each other to win. Life and the business world are much more like team sports than golf."

I pretended to sip my coffee.

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“But the sports analogy falls short if you think others have to lose for you to win in business. The best strategy is for everyone to win. It’s a matter of respect.”

The waitress showed up with two plates and slid them in front of us. I folded the napkin over my tie and shirt, and took a bite of eggs.

“Are they good?” Crafton asked, digging into his breakfast.

“Better than I expected. I usually eat breakfast on the run if at all.”

I glanced at my watch. I was beginning to feel like we were wasting too much time. I needed to get him back on track.

“Can I change the subject?” I asked. “I have something I really want to know.”

“Sure, Patrick, anything. Especially if you weren’t comfortable with where we were going, about respect and teamwork.”

“No, it’s not that . . . I hear you. But I’m an only child,” I said. “I’m an individualist. Maybe I don’t know what it’s like to be on a team.”

“Just be sure you don’t cop out,” Crafton said.

“So you said you worked nearby every Tuesday. Do you have a big project going on down here in this area?”

Crafton shook his head. “Nope.”

“Then why do you come down here? It doesn’t seem like a powerful economic region, to say the least.”

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“Because I like to. And because I can. One of the most important things I do is spend time down here on Tuesdays. You’ll see why.”

I drank a sip of the water from the hard plastic glass in front of me. It tasted faintly like chlorine.

“Can I ask you another question?”

“Sure, Patrick.”

“What did you mean when you said ‘there are no accidents,’ and why did you ask me to have breakfast with you?”

“Which question do you want me to answer first?” Crafton said. “Both questions are intertwined. I asked you to breakfast because I don’t believe in accidents.”

I stared at him, waiting for the rest of it.

“And my many years of experience tell me that we could teach each other a few things. I’m at a stage of life when I want to multiply what I have learned, especially the things I learned the hard way. I want to share with others. I’m in the investment business, but not just financial investments anymore. I really enjoy investing time with other people now.”

I was more confused than ever, but I nodded as if I knew exactly what he was talking about.

“Let me ask you the same question,” he said. “What do you hope to get from meeting with me? Can you be courageously honest? Will you say it out loud?”

I felt heat rising to my face. He was testing me.

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“To state the obvious, Mr. Crafton, I’m an investment banker and you’re the CEO of a firm that’s very active and successful in mergers and acquisitions. I want your business.” I was warming up. “What will it take to get it?”

His eyes lit up. He seemed pleased. “Now we are getting somewhere,” he said. “I like your honesty. Continue it, okay? Reflecting back, what did you think of me on the flight from San Francisco when we first met? No BS allowed, by the way.”

“What do you mean? I don’t understand the question.”

“It’s simple. What did you think of me when we first met?”

“I had no idea who you were. I probably should have recognized you, but I didn’t. You were dressed casually. Your pants were wrinkled. You didn’t look like a CEO.”

Crafton said nothing, so I worked to fill the silence.

“I was tired and at the end of a disappointing day. I was frustrated by many things, including having to sit in coach, blocked into a window seat.”

Crafton reached into his pocket and pulled out some loose bills, then placed a twenty on the table. “So let me summarize,” he said. “You were focused on you, I was a nuisance to you, and apparently I could not offer you anything of value, so you discounted me as a nonperson. You even paused and considered not handing me a business card when I politely asked for one. That about right?”

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I lowered my head, busted. This was not going well. I saw my chances for hero status at my firm circling the drain.

“Yes, that’s exactly the way it was,” I admitted.

Crafton sat back in the booth, eyeing me.

“I’m sorry,” I tried.

“Tell me, when did you figure out you had missed an opportunity?”

“I spoke to your driver briefly at Logan and then, later, put two and two together.”

“Ah, Anthony. He has been with me for years. He’s pretty talkative.”

“I learned all I could about you and had my assistant try to reach your staff to set up a brief visit. She didn’t have much luck. Then I ran into you, or more accurately, you ran into me at the Harbor Club.”

“Is there anything else?”

“Nope,” I shrugged. “Should there be?”

“Well, Patrick, can I talk with you for a moment about something I refer to as ‘evaluated experience?’”

I nodded. I was eager to learn anything I could about his philosophy. The more I learned, the more information I had that I could report to Carter.

“Each significant experience contains a lesson or two—that is, if we care to harvest them. We have to learn to be bold, honest, and analytical to dig out those lessons that can make us better.”

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I was wondering where he was going, and I guess it showed on my face.

“Experience without evaluation is simply exposure. No gain results. The gain comes from learning by evaluating. You want a real-life example?”

“That would help.”

“When we first met, everybody you had dealt with had let you down somehow. They just did not ‘get it.’ The rental car employees, your secretary, the businessmen you had met that day, and even me. We were all a disappointment to you in some way, and it was no secret that you felt that way. True feelings usually come across, you know.”

I said nothing.

“Continue with your honesty, Patrick, and answer this for me. I observed that almost no one you had dealt with that day was worthy of you. Fair statement?”

I did not want his business this much. Why was he analyzing me this way?

“Patrick, the most successful people are the ones who ask themselves the hard questions and confront the truth even if it isn’t pretty. I am not judging you. I am sharing a deep insight that took me years to figure out, so here it is: Each and every person is incalculably valuable. Each person we meet is as valuable and deserving of our respect as every other. No one is ‘less.’ You and I are not ‘more.’ Even someone who is deeply challenged financially or

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someone who is limited physically or mentally will have compensating gifts and abilities. Discount no one.”

He stopped, looked down at his coffee. I waited, but that was it.

“So you think I fundamentally discount others?”

“I didn’t say that. But maybe you should think about it. As you do, contemplate the issue of integrity as it relates.”

“Integrity?”

“Yes, a simple definition is being the same on the outside as on the inside. No pretense, but the same through and through.”

“Okay, I’ll think about it, but, Mr. Crafton, can I take us back to a question I asked earlier?”

“Sure, bet I can guess which one. How can you get my business, right?”

“Does that offend you? The fact that I’m interested in your business?”

“Not at all. Remember, you remind me of my younger self. Just be real with me, Patrick. I like to know people before I do business with them. At some point I’ll give you and your firm a shot at convincing me that we might benefit one another, and actually, you are Goodwin and Meyer’s best hope of changing my view of them. But right now that’s a steep hill to climb.”

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I had no real clue what was on his mind, but I didn't want any more of his wisdom for now. I stared at him. I wondered if I had lost control.

"You're like Dr. Phil," I said, trying to make things light. "His delivery is kind of harsh, but if you can handle it, the lessons are there."

Despite all my game planning and preparation for whatever might come up at breakfast, I had been totally unprepared for this.

"On the airplane you were clear you want to make lots of money," he said. "I asked what you would do with it. You changed the subject and never replied. Will you tell me now?"

I wondered if this was a trick question. Money is its own reward.

"Security, the good life, respect from others mostly. Money is the scoreboard. Making and having money is the way people win, and I want to be a winner."

"I see."

"Is that the answer you were looking for?"

"It's not about me, Patrick. There is no one correct answer. I simply suggest money is a means to an end, not an end to itself. Money can power you to act more consistently with your values. Wait until the coming weeks, when we get into the hard but productive values."

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“The coming weeks?”

“Yes, Patrick, I propose we meet for breakfast and talk weekly when we can for the next few weeks. Either one of us can end it whenever he wants to. Are you game?”

Well, Carter may not kill me after all, I thought. I still have a chance.

I pushed forward in my seat. “Meetings with Al Crafton? Are you kidding me? Of course I want to meet next week.”

“But I do have two points of order. First, let’s get on a first-name basis. I am Al, and second, I suggest we choose topics to talk about in advance. For instance, for next week’s meeting, I want you to think on the principle of evaluated experience. That’s the example I gave you from my observation of you when we first met.”

“Okay,” I said, nodding.

“You want to jot all this on a napkin?”

I pulled out my BlackBerry and opened the memo icon. “I’ll take notes here,” I said. “I’ve got a Crafton file now.”

He smiled. “Study the term and process of ‘target fixation.’ You can find it on the Internet. And think about the power of planning. Think about the process of planning and what it offers you.”

I took notes. “Three things. Evaluated experience, the power of planning, and target fixation. Same time and place?”

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“Yes.” Crafton smiled. He gave me his cell number, and I punched it into my BlackBerry as fast as he said the numbers, hardly believing it. He paid the check and left a hefty tip. “You have time to follow me around the corner? I have something to show you.”

I followed Crafton around the block, to a building with a sign that said HOPE Center above the door. Crafton explained that it was a neighborhood center for those out of work, displaced, homeless, or just “lost” to come and get help. The first thing that would happen for new clients was an evaluation of their immediate needs and they would be offered help on the basis those immediate needs. For instance, if people had no money, they would be put to work, at least part-time, doing simple tasks to give them a chance to earn a little cash, stabilize, and begin to restore their dignity.

We walked in and Crafton found a disheveled young man sitting on a stool by the door. He wore black jeans and sneakers. “How you doing today, Stan?”

The man smiled and gave Crafton a big hug. “All right,” he said.

Crafton moved through the building shaking hands, and I followed like a lost puppy. He ducked into a small office for about five minutes where he talked with an administrator about the program, while I waited in the doorway. When it was over, he explained the new building

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campaign and how his firm's foundation was funding it, with a matching program.

"HOPE Center does not deal in charity," he said. "It's all about empowering people, and giving them opportunity. It's about the restoration of dignity."

"Are these people who have committed crimes?"

"Some," he said. "But not in all cases. Sometimes they've just had hard luck, or poor role models to follow. Either way, the ultimate goal is to enable the clients to be fully productive members of society pulling their own weight."

I thought about his choice of words. Clients.

I drove toward the office, on cloud nine. I knew Carter was anxious to hear about it, and I had to figure out what to tell him, so I pulled over and thought about it, making notes. I decided to describe most of our time as chitchat, quoting Crafton that he wanted to get to know me before "putting me and my firm on the team."

I would also proudly report the series of weekly meetings and the personal cell phone number. My stock was on the rise. I drove a little faster after I had my report figured out. I wanted to deliver this one personally, not on voice mail.

There are no accidents.