

**CHAPTER IV.**

The first thing that came to Andy's mind the following morning was not the layoffs, but the need for headache medicine. Nico was smoking in the living room, reading the Wall Street Journal. The television set was tuned to the business news. Records were scattered about the living room floor. The ashtray was full. The empty bottle of vodka stood proudly on the coffee table, like a trophy.

"I will never drink vodka again. My head's killing me."

"Great. It means there's something in it," replied Nico.

Andy tore a package of Alka Seltzers into a cup of water and collapsed on the couch. He stared mindlessly at the television set while the medicine dissolved.

"Did you also cook last night? Don't tell me I ate your French fries with mayo at three in the morning. Oh Nico, maybe I ought to call in sick after all. I have a bad taste in my mouth already."

Nico put down the newspaper and sang, "I've read the news today, oh boy."

"Did they say Andy Clifford was terminated? I should have gotten a mention in the layoff story. Damn public relations." Andy slowly walked over to the espresso machine in the kitchen.

"What's the matter at your firm?" asked Nico. "Why are you guys cutting jobs and losing money?"

"I wish I had the answers, Nico."

"But I have all the questions. What is your business? You guys make cellphones that people don't buy."

“We make quality phones, Nico. Don’t get me wound up first thing in the morning.”

“Quality is not a reason to buy phones, Andy.”

“People can surf the mobile internet with a Telecommando cellphone. They can write emails and do all kinds of crazy things.”

“And when was the last time that you pecked away an email on a phone?”

“True, I don’t feel like wasting my time. I use a computer instead.”

“Then see the world as it is and not the way you want it to be. Intellectual Integrity is the answer. It’s what management gurus like Peter Drucker preach. You and I have read his books, remember what he writes? If you keep calling the gravedigger a mortician, the cost of your burial goes up.”

“And what else can I expect from my roommate, the DJ-turned-management guru, on this bright Friday morning?”

Nico dug inside his pockets. “Take a look at my phone, it’s with me everywhere I go. I also carry a walkman all the time, so why not forget about the mobile internet and make me something useful, like a phone that plays music?”

“Nico, you a carry a turntable everywhere you go.”

“It’s my point! Give me what I want and I will give you what you want. My phone needs to have a statement, a style – it shall tell you who I am.”

“Your phone has serious bling. Telecommando doesn’t make these.”

“And why not?”

“Why don’t I ask our CEO?” Andy drank his double espresso on one try and waived his hands. “You’re giving me another headache.”

A quick shower did little to clear his mind. Andy stumbled to his closet and remembered that it was casual Friday.

“Hey, Renaissance Man, wasn’t it the Roman Empire that had its first and last ruler with the same name?” he asked from the bedroom.

“Yeah, Romulus on both occasions,” replied Nico.

“Good. So there is a historical precedent for going down in style.” Andy returned to the living room sporting a handmade Italian suit.

“Sharp, very sharp,” nodded Nico. “You look like a million dollars. A hung over million dollars.”

“I wore this suit when I interviewed for the job. It barely fits. It’s what I get for being on the Telecommando diet – no lunch breaks.”

Andy grabbed his cellphone and dialed his voicemail at the office.

“If it doesn’t work it means I’m laid-off already,” he said. “If so, I’m calling in sick.”

Andy’s mailbox, however, did work and there were no new messages. Then he booted his company laptop and held his breath as he logged on to the corporate network. He was able to connect and there were no new emails in his Inbox.

“You see,” gestured Nico, “you’re not laid-off!”

“Not yet, my dear roommate.”

“You know, I’m willing to bet you a case of Holland’s finest that you won’t lose your job today. They can’t just get rid of you like a piece of meat.”

“Layoffs or not, I’ll take your bet and get drunk again.”

“Listen, Andy, these job-cuts are no big deal – we’ll throw a party at the club in your honor tonight. Everything is going to be all right.”

“Thanks, Nico, thanks. Can I bum some smokes for the road?”

“Take the whole box, I have plenty. Hey, take my walkman – I made you a mixed tape that will ease your mind during the commute.”

“I’ll take your cigarettes and the walkman, but I’m not going anywhere without these,” said Andy as he slipped a package of pain relievers inside his suit pocket. He adjusted his silk tie in front of the mirror and faked a smile. Then he opened the front door of the apartment.

“Casual Friday, bring on the goddamn pink-slips.”