

CHAPTER VIII.

Andy's head was pounding; his career flashed in front of his eyes. He wished that Nico would walk up to the podium, play a soothing song on his turntable and tell everyone how to really fix Telecommando. While his colleagues around him were trading insults, Andy wanted to take a time-out, but there was no break in sight. He recalled all the things that he and Nico talked about in the morning, all the alcohol they drank the night before, and felt the medicine tablets inside his suit pocket.

"Will I lose my goddamn job or will my goddamn job lose me?" he wondered to himself. Andy surveyed the agitated crowd and his eyes began to glitter. "Fuck the painkillers, just pour me another drink."

He leaped onto his chair and spoke above the din.

"I have a solution!" yelled Andy. The auditorium became quiet. "Intellectual integrity, it's all we really need. All we have to do is see our world as it is and not how we want it to be!"

The auditorium was puzzled. Everyone stared at the strange, shouting man whose suit and tie made him look important amidst the sea of blue jeans and white sneakers. The cameras turned in Andy's direction.

"What the hell are you talking about, man?" someone asked.

"If we keep calling the gravedigger a mortician only the cost of the burial will go up," continued Andy. "I refuse to be dead and buried; I know that there will be a tomorrow, with or without a job, a paycheck, a career. I'm not afraid of these job cuts anymore. And as long as there is a life to live, and a heartbeat to feel, there will be time to heal. At the end of the day, a new day will dawn. Its rays of sunshine will illuminate a path where opportunity will reveal

itself – a chance encounter available to see for those that look. The future does not belong to mere mortals who are searching for answers, but to visionaries who create opportunities instead.”

Andy had barely finished his last sentence when a man stood up.

“Who do you think you are?” shouted the man from the corner of the room. “Don’t make this rocket science – no one’s buying our phones. What remedy do you have for that, Mr. Visionary?”

Andy pierced the man with his stare and said, “We ought to put more bling into the ring. A cellphone is a fashion statement, a status symbol, an extension of one’s being. People are not buying our phones because our handsets are not cool and hip. Our mobiles need to stand out from the crowd, just like people need to differentiate themselves. People say, if the phone has bling, I am in, ‘cause I’m an individual with style, and so must the dial.”

“But we have quality products!” someone from the crowd cried.

“Our customers love them,” added another. “You obviously know nothing!”

“I know that quality is never enough to make people buy things,” replied Andy. “If our phones are so loved, why aren’t they selling? We wouldn’t be in this room if they were flying off the shelves. We have quality, but we need to point attention to it. We need to be smart, trendy, and give reasons to buy. For example, why can’t our cellphones play music? People already carry phones, why should they drag along another device to listen to music? Let’s put one and one together – we can still do it before we’re dead and buried.”

“Just sit down, you idiot,” yelled someone. “Some of us will get laid-off today...”

“We ought to behave like professionals, layoffs or not,” said Andy, his finger pointed to the ceiling. “Let’s focus on the opportunities and not the problems. Today we work for a

telecom company, tomorrow we may become gravediggers. So what? I've prepared myself for a change and I'll dance my way through it if I have to."

"Who the hell are you? And why are you wearing a suit on Friday?"

To Andy, it was as if everything around him moved in slow motion. He felt his spine tingling and it made him feel so good that he shivered. But before he could reply Rob stood up beside him. The temp pointed to Andy and proclaimed, "Dude, he's the man!"

Steve also got up from his chair and barked, "Woof, woof, raise the roof!"

"Boys, let me finish," Andy said to the temps. He then faced his colleagues around the room.

"Y'all want to know who I am, huh? I'll tell you who I am. I am a Telecommando employee..."

Andy's response was drawn out by whistles and clapping. He sat down and no one dared to rise inside the auditorium. A sense of civility was finally restored. Everyone stared at the senior managers at the podium, waiting for what was next.

Thomas Vaughn was relieved that the ruckus quieted down and raised his eyebrows at Warren Stone. The future CEO exchanged notes with the other senior managers next to him. To them, it was as if the preacher had stood up to cleanse the congregation of their sins. In their eyes, Telecommando's preacher was a young black man wearing an Italian suit.

The temps high-fived Andy while others reached to shake his hand. The cameras were still pointing at him. Not too far from where he sat, his secretary, Jackie, told everyone who wanted to know all about Andy Clifford, the Global Marketing Strategist from the fourth floor.

The presentation engineers came up with a spare microphone, albeit a competitor's make. They handed it to the grateful Thomas Vaughn.

“What a way to end our meeting!” exclaimed the senior executive. He grinned at the cameras and said, “For those of you at our worldwide operations, please email us your questions. Senior management is here to serve you.”

The equipment was promptly shut off. Thomas Vaughn carefully scrolled his fingers through his sensitive hairs and surveyed the auditorium.

“Unfortunately, we went over our allotted time, so there won’t be any question and answers session. Instead, I would like for all of you to return to your desks and make our company greater today than it was yesterday. This meeting is over – await further developments shortly.”

Finally, Andy returned to his near-empty cubicle. Only Josh Johnson’s notebook lay there and was swiftly thrown in the trashcan. Andy turned off his laptop and was ready for whatever came next. Despite his hangover, all he really wanted to do was return to the Upper East Side, wake Nico up and get drunk again.

The desk phone rang and the suddenness of it made Andy shiver. He could not recognize the number on the caller ID. He cursed and let it ring a couple more times before he lifted the receiver. If they wanted to terminate his employment on the spot, he reasoned, so be it.

“Andy Clifford speaking. Yes, sir... Pack all my belongings? I don’t need five minutes, it’s already done, sir. Sure, I’m coming right up.”

Andy put the phone down. His face turned pale. The temps were not in their cubicle, and there was no one near him to overhear the CEO calling. On his way to the elevators he encountered a colleague who asked whether his smoke break with fame was up. Andy could not stick around and talk. He rushed inside the elevator and ascended to the top floor – a place he had never been. Andy knew that things were about to change, he just didn’t know if it was for better or worse.

Meanwhile, outside in the parking lot, an armada of black vans pulled up to Telecommando's main entrance. Three dozen men jumped out from the vehicles. The visitors sported black uniforms, walkie-talkies, and sunglasses. The men made their way past corporate security, where several Human Resource staffers awaited their arrival. Everyone smiled, exchanged greetings, and talked about the weather. Shortly thereafter, they all headed for the top floor.