

CHAPTER 23

MEETING YOUR PREDECESSOR

Dan and Vic arrived in for San Antonio on the morning of October 26 to meet privately with the CEO of Dazzle Enterprises. Until now, R. D. Valentine was only aware that there was a spectacular discovery on the horizon and nearly all of the necessary arrangements had been made without official Dazzle authorization. It was creating quite a stir in the executive offices.

Dan waited patiently for more than an hour before being allowed to enter the CEO's office. "I'm a busy man, Karrington," the reigning Chairman made clear from the onset. The man shuffled papers around on his desk to emphasize the fact. He didn't bother to shake hands and made very little eye contact. "State your business so I can get on with mine."

Though Dan was affronted by the man's contemptuous behavior, the inherent smile never faded. "Mr. Valentine,

there is a great deal of controversy concerning the upcoming announcement."

"So?"

"I gather that you are more than a little curious as to the nature of that announcement."

The simple fact that Dan knew he was unaware of the details was enough to gain his full attention. Valentine was emphatically determined to find out just what this stranger's intentions were. "Dr. Karrington, I'm the Chairman of Dazzle Enterprises. Very little, if anything, takes place without my being aware of it."

"I'm sure that is quite true, in most cases. However, in this particular instance, you don't know."

"And you do?" he stated with an obnoxious grin.

"Actually, I'm one of the few who does."

"Is that so?" he asked with a measurable degree of doubt still wearing his disdainful frown. Dan nodded. "Your name isn't familiar to me. Just what are you a doctor of?"

Dan's smile was now even more pronounced as he sought a means of avoiding the question. "Mr. Valentine, perhaps we should dispense with the formalities."

"Hell of an idea."

"The official announcement will be on Friday, November 6th at 8:00 PM." His knowledge of the confidential date instilled a sense of credibility. "Aside from myself and my associates, one other person needs to know what will be unveiled on that occasion. That person is you."

"What a concept, the man in charge is actually to be informed of what's going on in his own company. I want facts and figures, and I want them now," he yelled as he slammed his fist on the desk.

Dan remained calm under the circumstances and was trying to be empathetic. Valentine held the highest office in the illustrious company and was unaccustomed to being

left in the dark, particularly about what was being promoted as the greatest achievement in Dazzle history. Little did he know that a huge rug was about to be pulled out from under him. "I'm not at liberty to divulge that information."

"Then, by God, I want to talk to the man who is."

"That is precisely why I'm here. If you'd be kind enough to accompany me, there is helicopter waiting to take us to that very individual."

"Oh no! I'm not going anywhere. You bring his ass to me!"

"I'm sorry, sir, that just isn't possible. However, it is imperative that you meet with him."

"Who is he?"

"Again, I'm not at liberty to say, but I can assure you that all of your questions will be answered at that time."

"On the word of some doctor I've never even heard of, I'm supposed to climb into a helicopter and fly off to God knows where..."

"Actually, it's a rather quaint little hotel on the north side of town."

"Why should I?" Valentine pursued.

"You need answers and we are prepared to provide them."

"This is absurd," he declared as he stood and yanked his sports coat from a rack. "I'll tell you one Goddamn thing, doctor. This better be damn good." He charged toward the outer office and spoke harshly to the young secretary, "I'm leaving. I'll be back in..." He turned to Dr. Karrington for an answer.

"A couple of hours at the most," Dan politely offered.

"Call me if anything important comes up."

"But, sir, you have a meeting with Senator Gates?"

"Cancel it," he barked. "C'mon, doctor. Let's get this dog and pony show of yours over with." They marched out onto the lawn and climbed into the helicopter.

Fifteen minutes later, they were landing on the roof of the Cypress Tree Hotel. Two security officers met them there and escorted them to a private elevator. Though no words were spoken, Valentine made sure that his malcontent was obvious.

As the elevator doors opened, Dan invited Mr. Valentine to exit first with a casual extension of his arm. As they approached Vic's suite, one of the security guards raised a detection device and began scanning the visitor.

"What the hell is this?" Valentine complained with a hard cold stare to express his disapproval.

"Please, Mr. Valentine, make yourself comfortable," Dan said as they entered the suite. "Would you care for a drink?"

"Scotch...neat, make it a double."

As Dan poured the cocktail, he began to explain,
"Cryonics."

"I beg your pardon."

"You asked me earlier what my field of study was."

"And that has what to do with anything?"

"Actually, quite a lot to do with everything. You see, I am the Chief Administrator for a Cryonic project that began over forty years ago."

"Very impressive, doctor."

"Please, Mr. Valentine, bear with me. I'll provide you with a preliminary explanation. You'll be introduced to your host in due time."

"Like I said," he reiterated with disgust, "this better be good."

"I'm sure you'll find this meeting most enlightening and well worth any inconvenience we may have caused you." Dan handed him his drink and sat in a chair next to him with one of his own.

"Get on with it then."

A laser video viewing screen had been set up in advance. "I'm going to show you a very short film."

"For Christ's sake! Don't tell me we went through all of this extravagant nonsense to watch a Goddamn film."

Dan had put up with just about as much of Mr. Valentine's obnoxious behavior as he could handle, but refrained from expressing his negative point of view. "Watch the film. It's self explanatory."

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Valentine was obviously bewildered by what he had seen and in anticipation of what it implied, polished off what remained in his glass with one huge gulp. He now spoke in a much softer tone as he extended his empty glass.

"My pleasure," Dan obliged with a smile that bolstered some prominent arrogance of his own. "The original sixteen millimeter film is being stored in a well secured vault. In terms of quality, I admit that it's not very impressive, but the content is quite profound. Wouldn't you agree?"

"Surely you aren't going to try and convince me that Vic Dazzle has been...resurrected?"

"Of course not," Dan replied with distinct certainty.

Valentine breathed a sigh of deep relief. Dan handed him his second drink and he quickly took another sip. "You had me worried there for a minute," he professed with vague chuckle.

"I thought, perhaps, someone with a little more credibility would be better suited for that task." Having made that final statement, he approached the door to an adjoining room and knocked lightly, then leaned casually against the wall in preparation to observe the melee.

Valentine rose slowly to his feet with his mouth open wide as Vic entered the room. "Mr. Valentine," Dan began his formal introduction. "I'd like you to meet your predecessor, Vic Dazzle. Mr. Dazzle, R. D. Valentine."

"Hello," Vic said politely. Valentine was in awe of the spectacle that stood before him. "Quite a shocker, huh?" Valentine studied the man closely, but could only manage a stunned version of a slight nod. "Sorry about the method of delivery, but we really weren't afforded too many options." Vic observed his reaction for a moment and then attempted to set his mind at ease. "Please, Mr. Valentine, have a seat and try to relax."

The bewildered man looked over at Dan seeking some sort of logical explanation. Dan just shrugged with a smile. Valentine slowly lowered himself back into the chair and took another stiff drink. He started to speak and then paused, looked down at the floor, then back up at Vic and repeated the awkward steps. "This is some sort of joke, right?"

Vic shook his head and proceeded to sit on a sofa to Valentine's right. "I'd be lying if I said that I wish it

were." The scene offered an opportunity to observe a prime example of the dramatic reactions they could expect in the future. "As you can see, what we have here is a very delicate situation. Dan, would you be kind enough to freshen Mr. Valentine's drink please?"

"Certainly. Can I get you anything, Vic?"

"Absolute with a twist, please." He turned his attention back to the nervous man. "As you know, in a couple of weeks, we'll be making a formal public announcement. It seems only appropriate that you make the introduction."

"Me?" he quivered.

"Of course," Vic encouraged, "you are the CEO of Dazzle Enterprises. You are certainly entitled to the honor of presenting the greatest scientific achievement of all time. I understand that it's going to be quite an extravagant affair."

"I'm sure," he said softly beneath his breath, still struggling to grasp the reality.

"For obvious reasons, we'd like you to help keep our little secret until the announcement."

"Yeah, sure, but what about the press? They have ways of finding things out." He was finally starting to demonstrate at least some of the capabilities that had earned him the lucrative position.

"Do you mind if I call you Bob?"

"No, Bob's fine."

"Well, Bob," Vic casually informed with a wink. "We've managed to keep this project secret for over forty years. I see no reason why we can't keep it amongst ourselves for another ten days or so, do you?"

"I suppose not."

"We're very well organized, but we need someone in your position making sure that all details are carried out to the letter from within the company." Vic made certain as he spoke that there would never be any question as to who

was in charge. "One of our agents will be arriving at your office this afternoon to install a secured phone line and an independent computer terminal. That will enable us to monitor your activity and communicate pertinent information. All you'll have to do is follow the guidelines as they are set forth."

Vic smiled and placed his hand on his shoulder to reassure him. "Don't worry, Bob, you're still the CEO and I see no need for that to change. You'll be conducting business as usual, but there are certain matters that we'll need you to attend to."

Valentine was obviously discouraged, but seemed to appreciate Vic's candor and though the conditions of their arrangement were beginning to sink in. "I'll do what I can."

"I know you will. We just have to protect our interests." Again, he made his point without having to imply the consequences. "We're on the verge of turning the Delightful World of Dazzle upside down." Vic got up and walked towards the door he entered through. "I suppose that's it for now. It's been a pleasure meeting you, Bob."

We'll be in touch." He winked and disappeared through the opening.

"Good-bye," Valentine stammered quietly. He looked over at Dan. "That was the most incredible experience of my entire life." He quickly began to recall how rudely he had treated Dan and made an earnest attempt to reconcile. "Dr. Karrington, I owe you an apology. I had no idea. Of course, that's no excuse, but I am sorry."

Dan didn't exactly offer an acceptance of the apology, as humble as it may have been. "Tommy, will escort you back to your office."

Sensing Dan's lack of forgiveness, he acknowledged the instructions with a humble gesture. "Well, I guess you know how to reach me."

"By the way, until the formal announcement, Mr. Dazzle is to be referred to as Smith during any and all correspondence. His name should never be mentioned, not even in passing."

"Smith," he agreed. "Good-bye, doctor."

"Good-bye, Mr. Valentine."

After the distinguished man made his humble exit, Dan proceeded to join Vic in the next room. "What do you think?" Vic was quick to indulge.

"I don't know what to think."

"You don't like him, do you?"

"What makes you say that?"

"You didn't say a word the whole time. That's not like you."

"I just don't trust him."

"Me either," Vic admitted. "He's worked hard to get where he is and he thinks we're going to take it away from him. That tends to make a man like him dangerous."

"Maybe."

"Just in case, let's assign a couple of agents to keep an eye on him and have security install surveillance equipment in his home and office."

Dan was shocked by the bold command. "Listening devices?"

"There's too much at stake, Dan. He's either with me or against me and just in case, I want to be prepared for the latter."

The dramatic change in disposition sent a distinct message and though Dan wasn't quite sure how to respond, he knew better than to argue the point. "Okay, Vic. I'll get someone right on it."

"You're a good man. I don't know what I'd do without you."

"You'd think of something," he chuckled.

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