

SENSE OF DIRECTION

CHAPTER 1

Wallington

PROFESSOR STEVEN KAYE was halfway through his power walk around the two-mile circle inside the lavish Wallington Country Club community. The Florida sun brought beads of sweat to his face. The iPhone in his right pocket began to vibrate. Without breaking stride, he noticed a call from his son Ross.

Steven's Boca Raton home stood inside a magnificent gated community of thirteen hundred well-appointed residences. He migrated south ten years earlier after winning a substantial amount of money playing the New Jersey lottery, joined by his wife, Susan, and their three sons. Steven took advantage of all Wallington Country Club had to offer: golf, tennis and working out in the state-of-the-art gym. And when he wasn't physically active, he was socializing.

Entering the club's bar for a quick bite often turned into many hours of chatting and joking with newfound friends. The club's magnificent swimming complex was another favorite hangout. With their children grown, Steven and Susan had even more free time to enjoy club life.

"Tough life," Steven would often say sarcastically. He had no regrets as to what his life had become. He pinched himself once a day asking if he really lived in this incredible paradise.

Whenever he returned from being away he was still in awe as he drove past the fountain at the Wallington entrance. As he walked the two-mile circle, he marveled at the beauty of the foliage and the majestic palm trees lining the streets.

Steven had worked as an accounting and taxation professor at Fordham University in New York City – before he hit the jackpot. After moving, he accepted a similar position at Florida Atlantic University, his ninety minute commute having been replaced with a quick ten minute jaunt. On occasion, he still flew around the country for lucrative consulting projects, but his normal schedule consisted of teaching at Florida Atlantic two days each week.

His oldest son, Scott, graduated Lynn University in Boca Raton. After graduating as a criminal justice major, he became a deputy in the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office.

Steven's youngest son, Jordan, was a junior communications major at the University of Miami. He was the voice of the Miami Hurricanes on the college radio station, calling many of the play-by-play broadcasts for football, basketball and baseball.

His middle son, Ross, had graduated Cornell University with a double major in American studies and economics and was earning a six-figure salary working for a major Wall Street investment bank. He spent long days dealing in U.S. Treasury securities and fixed-income derivatives.

He excelled in his job and had a great attitude, earning an especially large bonus for a first-year analyst. He took the Wall Street job at his father's urging, but he wanted to do something else with his life.

He called to share some important news with his dad, who had suspected something was up.

Steven held his breath.

"I'm giving notice this afternoon."

"Why, son?" Steven asked in an exasperated voice. "You're doing so well."

"I don't enjoy staring at a computer monitor all day surrounded by the din of the trading floor. Every morning I leave my apartment it's still dark out. My colleagues are at their Bloomberg terminals checking out where the ten-year note traded overnight in Tokyo and London. They get excited if interest rates fluctuate two basis points. ... It's a big game and it seems shallow."

Steven stayed calm, measuring his words in the hope they would resonate with Ross.

"There's a lot to be said about financial security, son. Make some money and then you can follow your heart."

"I don't know what I want to be doing in five years, but I do know what I want to be doing in the short-term."

There was a pause.

"Dad, why are you breathing hard?"

"You caught me walking around the circle at Wallington," Steven said.

"Can't you stop for just a minute? This is important."

Steven leaned up against a palm tree surrounded by a strip of well-manicured plantings.

“I’ve been tapping my network. Do you remember that alum of my frat, Sean Lowell? He graduated fifteen years before me and is CEO of a DC think tank. I spoke with him by phone last week. He put me in touch with ‘The General.’”

“The General?”

“The general is an old-school Washington guy who lives next door to Barefoot Fredricks, Senator Dunn’s campaign manager. Fredricks offered me a position on the campaign staff. I start next week.”

“Look, son, I want to be supportive, but Dallas Dunn? I predict you’ll be out of a job in a month. Don’t give up Wall Street for something so transient.”

“It’s only July. The New Hampshire primary isn’t until January. That means I’ll be working at least six months.”

“I’m telling you, by August his campaign will be over,” Steven said, sounding increasingly agitated.

“Show some faith, Dad.”

“I’m just being realistic. Dallas Dunn is tracking near the bottom of the polls. He almost won the nomination eight years ago, but this time he’s just too damn old.”

“I don’t agree. His real Achilles’ heel is a lack of money. His military career and service in Congress never allowed him the opportunity to amass a fortune. It’s impossible to run for president these days without adequate funding. His campaign is limping along because he sponsored a bipartisan bill giving illegal aliens a path toward citizenship. The conservative base of the party labeled the senator’s plan ‘amnesty,’ causing terrible political fallout.”

Ross turned defensive. “Look, Dunn made a bold attempt to address one of the defining issues of our time. He must convince the party rank and file to overlook his earlier position on immigration. He can’t let that define him.”

“I suppose.”

“Dad, I can’t think of a better opportunity. Imagine being in on the ground floor attempting to reshape and communicate the positive ideas and policies a Dunn candidacy stands for.”

“But the campaign is in *crisis*. If he throws in the towel in a month’s time because of money, or lack of support, then what will you do?”

“I’ll find a job in Washington on the Hill.”

“What salary will the campaign pay you?”

“Nothing at first. I’ll be a full-time volunteer. Hopefully I’d transition into paid staff at some point. They want me on the ground in Manchester, all the way through the primary in January. I’ll bet you twenty bucks he sees New Hampshire through.”

“Save your money. This is already costing you six figures.”

“I’ll be meeting and working with many influential people. If things break right I could parlay this into a job in the West Wing.”

“Keep your expectations realistic.”

“The timing couldn’t be better. I don’t have a wife, kids, a mortgage, a dog or even a girlfriend. There’s nothing holding me back. In sixteen months there’ll be a presidential election. I have a golden opportunity to work on a campaign for a man I truly believe in.

“Zimbalist seems like a decent man. He’s the front-runner. If you want to be a part of history then I suggest you place your efforts behind his candidacy.”

“I don’t want to work for him. The man has no character, substance or ideas. He never takes a real stand on the issues.”

“If your goal is to work on a campaign, his is going the distance,” Steven retorted.

“Zimbalist would be a terrible president. I’m not doing this out of desperation. I won’t work for someone I don’t believe in.”

“That’s admirable. No one will accuse you of being an opportunist.”

“All Dunn has ever done is to serve his country with honor and dignity. He was a prisoner of war for five years. He was tortured and mistreated in ways the rest of us can’t imagine. He has moderate views and tells things the way they are. You’ve always told me how much you admire him.”

“Yes, Ross, that’s true. I think he’s a good man, but time has passed him by. His real chance was eight years ago. Are you sure you won’t reconsider?”

“If I’m going to work sixteen hours a day for little or no pay then it’s going to be for Dallas Dunn. Trust me – my guy is going to win.”

“I hope you’re right son.”