

The Search



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The Heart of Leadership Lives in the Hearts of Leaders

He was tired, and it was getting dark. He'd driven three hours up mountain roads. Not by choice. Why had John sent him? Who was this woman he was supposed to meet? He didn't know, and didn't like not knowing. He liked to read a review before seeing a movie or reading a book.



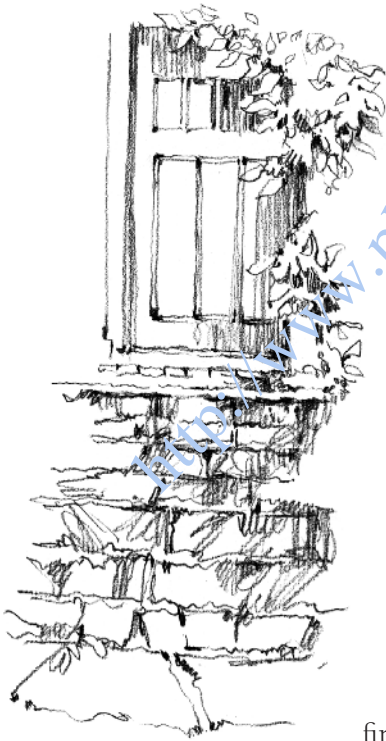
His name was Steven Camden. Like the city in New Jersey. He grew up in New Jersey, but in Newark, not Camden. Not that it made much difference. Tough neighborhoods in both places. He'd survived one of the toughest.

The house was low, made of wood and glass. A candle flickering in a window. *Faux rustic or Asian or something*, he thought. He bounded up the maple-

leaf-matted fieldstone steps at his usual brisk pace, but he felt more puzzled than confident.

He knocked on the door. He waited. Was she here? She knew he was coming, didn't she? She must know he had better things to do than just stand on her doorstep. Hadn't John told her how busy he is? He looked again and she was there.

Her name was Maria. He first noticed her eyes: deep,





brown, full of something he recognized but could not name. Once inside, he looked around the room. Mostly he noticed the Japanese art. It was like a gallery. Yet something was missing.

You've spent time in Japan, he said.

She nodded. Many years. Every piece is a memory.

I lived in Tokyo two years myself. For him, Tokyo had been endless business meetings. No time for galleries. His only souvenirs came from the airport duty-free shop.

She seemed to be waiting.

Was he supposed to make the next move? Where to begin? Blurt out his worries to a woman he barely knew? He tried to buy time. John seems to have a lot of confidence in you, he said.

We're old friends. I knew him back when he was starting the business. We've become even closer since he retired. I've learned a lot from him.

She seemed to be waiting again. Now what? He'd always been good with words. Where were they now?

Do you feel uncomfortable here? she asked.

No. He hesitated. Well, maybe a little. Maybe I shouldn't have come.

Have some tea.



He watched her pour the tea. He wanted coffee, but took the tea.

You've been working hard?

All my life. He sipped his tea. Green tea. Reminded him of Japan. He'd ordered it many times. *Nihon cha, kudasai*. A comforting sense of nostalgia.

Why? she asked.

Why what? He'd lost track.

Why do you work so hard?

He paused. What kind of question was that? Why does anyone work hard? It's what you do. It's how I got where I am.

Do you like where you are?

Of course. He was lying. He knew it. Did she? Probably. Well, maybe not. Not as much as I used to.

What's changed?

He hesitated. Was he walking into a trap? Should he leave? Or tell the truth? He vaguely imagined John looking over his shoulder. *Why be scared of this woman?* he wondered. Then, a second thought. *What do I have to lose?*

I was promoted a year ago. Running one of our biggest divisions. I was sure I was ready.

And now?



He stared at the cranes delicately circling the outside of his teacup. Until he met this woman, he liked to think nothing scared him. He hesitated.

I'm not sure.

What's changed?

Until this job, everything went right. People thought I could walk on water. Maybe it was talent, maybe luck, maybe just a lot of sweat. Something's not working anymore. He looked down and signaled his puzzlement by exhaling loudly.

You're discouraged? She sounded sincere. Why did she make him so nervous?

Like I'm on a treadmill. Running faster and faster. Getting farther and farther behind.

You need to get off.

I didn't need to drive three hours to learn that. He knew he sounded impatient. That's how he felt.

What have you tried?

Just about everything. Better time management. A mission statement. Strategic planning. Balanced scorecard. Training. A Six Sigma program.

Why was she staring at him? Why so silent? Did she think he'd done the wrong things? That he hadn't done enough?



He continued. I've sent executives to a top-rated management program. Hired consultants. World-class guys with world-class fees. I read a lot. The *Journal*. *Fortune*. *Harvard Business Review*. Industry blogs, but that's mostly a waste of time.

She laughed. Why do you do all those things?

Her laughter grated. He felt his shoulders tighten. Was she laughing at him?

It worked before. Why not now?

She turned serious. What do you want from me?

The question stung. What did he really want? He wasn't sure. He groped for an answer. His mouth felt dry.

My work is my life. Always has been. I grew up poor, and I didn't want to stay that way. Now, I've got money but a lot of the fun is gone. My boss is getting restless. First time I ever felt I might fail in a job.

What's not working? she asked.

He told her about needing unity, but people never agreeing. He said he needed a vision, but it was hard to see beyond next week. Things seemed to be falling apart. He was losing hope. He'd never felt so lost.

She said she'd been there. That she understood.

Where had she been? Did she really understand? He wanted to say something. No words came.



And your spirit? she asked.

He looked to the door. He wanted to run. Get some fresh air. Get away from this crazy woman. Somehow, he couldn't move. Spirit? he stammered.

Yes, your spirit. Her tone was firm, assured. As if it were a perfectly normal question. Was she serious?

What do you mean?

Spirit. Fire. Vitality. The force that sustains meaning and hope.

He was squirming. Was it a mistake for him to come?

A business is what you make it, she said calmly. If you believe it's a machine, it will be. A temple? It can be that too. Spirit and faith are the core of human life. Without them, you lose your way. You live without zest. You go through the motions, but don't know why.

He felt the anger building. He'd driven three hours for this? Teeth clenched, he told her what he felt. Look, I'm running a business, not a church! He sounded angry. He meant to. It usually made people back off.

But not this time. Her eyes riveted on his. She smiled. What do you hope to run it with? More sweat? More control? More gimmicks?

Maybe some wisdom. He hadn't meant to say that, but it came out anyway.



Wisdom will come. First, you have to look into your heart.

He was squirming again. Embarrassed. He could feel the blood rushing to his face. Why was he still here? Why didn't he get up and walk out? You sound like my mother, he said scornfully. Follow your heart, she always said. She never understood business.

Do you? she asked.

Of course.

Then, set a new course. You want to lead, don't you?

He nodded glumly.

She continued. The heart of leadership is in the hearts of leaders. You have to lead from something deep inside.

Like what?

I can't tell you what's in your heart, nor would you want me to. No one can find meaning for you. Not your consultants, not your boss, not the *Harvard Business Review*. Only you really know what's in your heart.

He felt a twinge in his chest. A coincidence? He knew he'd been working too hard.

This isn't what you expected, she said.

Not at all.

It feels strange?



She was right. He wanted to be in control, but she was running a step ahead of him.

Maybe a little, he admitted, wishing he hadn't.

She poured him more tea. You've been in uncomfortable situations before, haven't you?

Sure.

Have you learned from them?

He tried to review all his awkward moments. He gave up. There had been too many. Usually.

Good. Then, shall we continue?

Continue what? A senseless conversation? Still, she seemed to be onto something. Something he sensed but couldn't grasp. Maybe. I'm not sure.

Would you like some time to reflect? A walk, maybe?

His phone rang. He felt embarrassed. I told my secretary only to call only if it's important.

Take the call. Then the walk. Try the garden. We'll talk more when you get back.

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