

CHAPTER ONE

A Dollar at a Time

“It’s Friday, time to bust loose,” Bill Jackson says into the payphone. He gives the address of the bar where he wants to meet, and then hits a button on the touch-tone keypad. Presto! His message is deposited into the voicemail boxes of all the Procter & Gamble salespeople in the metro New York district.

Dave Knight, a P&G key account manager, picks up Bill’s message after completing a sales call on one of his New Jersey supermarkets. He’s finished with his route for the day, so after filling out a report, Dave drives to Patterson and looks for the address Bill left. It turns out to be a brick storefront in a run-down neighborhood. A fading sign on the façade indicates that the building was once a five and dime. Now blackout curtains hang in the windows. The only sign of life is the cluster of cars out front.

As Dave waits for the other P&G reps, he listens to a cassette and tries not to be depressed by the view through his windshield. It’s late fall, and only a few withered leaves dangle from the branches of nearby trees. They flicker uncertainly in the faint breeze, as if toying with the idea of finally giving up and letting go.

A Chevy pulls into the trash-strewn parking lot, followed by another. They’re P&G fleet cars, so now Dave yanks off his tie, tucks it into a jacket pocket, and follows the other salesmen into the establishment.

After paying five bucks to a scar-faced, leather-jacketed bouncer sitting just inside the door, Dave sees that the interior of the

place is as bad as he expected. A plywood bar runs along the back of the room, and every stool is taken by guys who look like they just got off from factory jobs. The walls and exposed heating and air-conditioning ducts are carelessly painted a drab black. Raucous music blares from two stadium speakers that hang from the rafters.

Since seating is limited at the bar, groups of men stand behind it holding highballs or beer bottles. Most are smoking, and embers glow in the darkened room. A spotlight cuts through the haze, shining on the reason all these gentlemen are here. She's a dark-haired beauty dancing on top of the bar, completely nude other than a garter on her thigh crammed with cash. The girl holds a scarf and uses it to briefly cover various parts of her body to temporarily frustrate the crowd.

Dave watches the dancer take the ends of the scarf in either hand, step over it, then pull the cloth back and forth between her legs. At this, howling erupts from the men. Those close enough reach up to feverishly tuck currency into the girl's garter. She pauses her gyrations to accommodate them while appearing quite bored. Then a fan at the end of the bar holds up a five-dollar bill. The dancer saunters over, turns her back, and squats with her ass practically in his face. The guy slowly inserts the money into her garter. Once he's done, the entertainer rises, twirls the scarf around her head, then tosses it to him. The man immediately attempts to smother himself with it.

"What are you drinking?" a feminine voice asks. Dave turns to see a naked girl holding a tray. She has a cute, doll-like face topped with a mop of curly brown hair. "I'll have whatever's on draft," Dave tells her.

"Make that two," Bill Jackson says, coming over to join them. He's a tall, sturdily built man with blond hair. Like Dave, he's an army veteran.

“My name’s Doris,” the hostess smiles. “You can look at my tits if you want.”

Dave glances at the girl’s chest. “I’ve seen worse,” he deadpans. “Ouch! You’re standing on my foot.”

“That’s not all I’ll be standing on if you can’t be nice,” Doris threatens.

“OK, sorry,” Dave laughs. He holds both hands up in mock surrender as Doris turns and heads for the bar.

“She’s pretty,” Bill says.

“Yeah, not bad,” Dave replies. “How did you find this joint?”

“The Lever Brothers guy told me about it.”

“Quite horrible, don’t you think?”

“Oh, about par for the course,” Bill says, with a glance at the surroundings.

Doris returns with their beers, and Bill gives her a five. “Keep it,” he says when she starts to make change. Doris smiles her thanks, then disappears back into the crowd.

Now Bill and Dave swill brew and check out the scene. A dozen naked hostesses are working the room. When the first dancer goes on break, one of the other girls takes her place. This is a distinct letdown for the crowd, as the new performer is an awkward dancer whose efforts to be sexy are merely crude. She appears desperate to please, unlike the first dancer, who had evinced only contempt for her fans.

Turning away from the entertainment, Bill lights a cigarette. “How do they get away with this?” he wonders.

“Guess it’s considered ‘artistic expression,’” Dave replies.

“You ask me, it’s a Mafia deal.”

“Ya think?”

Bill blows a smoke ring then watches it float away. “So, how are you looking for quota?” he asks.

“So far, so good,” Dave shrugs.

“You and Stephanie both made it again last quarter,” Bill says enviously.

“Yeah, but it’s the end-of-year number they look at.”

“It would take a miracle for me to pull it out at this point.”

Dave pokes his friend on the arm. “Oh, come on,” he says.

“You deserve it with all the hours you put in,” Bill declares. “But Stephanie gets by on sex appeal.”

“Hey, sales is sales; you use whatever works.”

Doris reappears out of the gloom. “You guys ready for another?”

“On me,” Dave says, and lays some cash on her tray.

“Back in a flash.”

Bill takes a final drag then drops his cigarette underfoot. “Women don’t belong in business,” he exhales. “They’re taking jobs away from guys with families.”

“That way of thinking went out with the Hula-Hoop,” Dave laughs.

“But it’s not right,” Bill persists. “Store managers don’t cooperate with me, but they let Stephanie do what she wants.”

“Oh, come on,” Dave protests. “What’re you worried about? If women want to get into this racket, fine. As for sex, can you

imagine Stephanie doing it with a store manager just to get more shelf space for Tide? If they want to fantasize and maybe give her a little extra cooperation, then what's the harm? Maybe some of my store managers fantasize about beating me at golf. That doesn't mean I'm gonna let them."

"What happened to our beers?" Bill asks, looking around for the waitress.

"Isn't that Doris at the service bar?" Dave points to where several girls are waiting.

In a few minutes, Doris comes over with the beverages. "Sorry it took so long," she says. "I ran into one of my regulars and he insisted that I give him a private dance in the VIP lounge."

"How much does it cost for a private dance?" Bill asks.

"Ten dollars for one song, fifteen for two."

"That's too much!"

"Let me know if you change your mind." Doris moves off to look for other customers.

"It's crazy," Dave says. "Imagine paying ten bucks to have some strange broad dance in your lap."

"You're right," Bill agrees. "I just came here for a few laughs like you. Hey, I've got to drain the lizard, any idea where the head is?"

"Not a clue."

"I'll be back, don't go anywhere."

"No worries."

Standing by himself, Dave taps a foot to the music and gazes around the room. He sees a roped-off area in one corner behind

a sign labeled “VIP LOUNGE.” Beyond the rope, men sit in armchairs while naked hostesses gyrate in their laps.

A willowy brunette sidles up and takes Dave’s arm. “Would you like to spend some time in the VIP lounge with me?” she purrs.

“Thanks, but I’ll pass.”

“You’d be amazed at how much fun we could have.”

“I believe you,” Dave replies, “but ever since the heart attack, I’ve been trying to avoid excitement.” The girl hastily moves away.

Bill hasn’t returned, so Dave looks for him at the bar. Several P&G guys are there reaching out with dollar bills, trying to get their hands into the current dancer’s garter. Dave smiles and shakes his head at their antics. Then he glances into the roped-off area again and sees Bill in one of the chairs, with Doris swarming over him in rhythm with the music. As the last chords of the Stones’ “Sympathy for the Devil” fade, she backs away.

Moments later, Bill is back. “I thought you just came here for a few laughs,” Dave says.

“That Doris is the worst prick teaser ever.”

“How much did you give her?”

“Fifteen bucks.”

“Ouch.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Anyway, I have to go.”

“So soon?”

“Yeah.”

“OK, see you next week.”

“You got it.”

On his way home, Dave listens to a Van Morrison tape and gets back some of the optimism that was drained out of him at the strip joint. Soon he’s crossing the George Washington Bridge and is amazed as always at the bright lights of the big city. He heads into Manhattan, then pulls into his parking garage.

After securing the car, Dave walks a short distance to the brownstone apartment building where he and his wife, Cindy, live. He lets himself into the turn-of-the-century building, then goes up four flights of stairs to reach the one-bedroom co-op they bought with help from her parents. Inside, he finds Cindy asleep on the sofa.

Dave makes himself dinner and eats in the kitchen. After cleaning up, he gets ready for bed, then goes into the living room, gently wakes Cindy, and leads her into the bedroom. She’s quickly back asleep, so Dave picks up his current book and reads awhile before turning out the light.

In the morning, Cindy’s at the kitchen table drinking coffee when Dave comes in. “Where were you last night?” she asks.

“At a titty bar in Patterson,” Dave replies, “with some of the guys.” He pops an English muffin into the toaster, then pours a glass of orange juice.

“Nice way for a bunch of married guys to spend an evening,” Cindy observes.

“Yeah, it was rank, but you told me to be more sociable, so I’m trying.”

“By sociable, I didn’t mean strip clubs.”

“That’s what they do when there’s no golf.” Dave spreads margarine on the muffin. It quickly melts, then disappears into the nooks and crannies.

“How pathetic,” Cindy sighs. “Now, let’s go for a walk.”

“Sounds good.” Dave finishes breakfast while lacing on his sneakers.

Once they’re outside, Cindy and Dave head up 59th Street toward Central Park. They make an attractive couple. Cindy’s in her late twenties, but with her tomboy haircut and freckles, she retains the look of a college girl. Her husband is taller than average, with bright, green eyes, and a ruddy complexion. His lanky frame is topped with an unruly mop of strawberry-blond hair.

After an energetic hike through the park, Cindy and Dave start for home. On the way, they stop at their favorite pizza place. “How are the auditions going?” Dave asks, once they’ve placed their order. Cindy works as the executive assistant for Sydney Glass, a Broadway producer.

“The leads were cast early on,” Cindy replies. “Now we’re doing all the bit parts, but it’s dragging. Sydney’s a hard man to satisfy.”

“Yeah, you’ve been working some long hours.”

“You too, if you call playing golf and going to strip clubs work.”

“Someone’s got to do it.”

“Yeah, and it might as well be you, right?”

“We’ve got a regional sales meeting next week,” Dave says. He leans back as the waiter reaches in with a pitcher of beer. “I’ll be gone all of Monday but will be back Tuesday night.”

“You could stay out the entire week for all I care.” Cindy fills their mugs.

“That’s cold!”

“Sorry, but you’re getting worse.”

“How?”

“You’re more hyper, forgetful, and messy. The other day, I found a leaky carton of ice cream in the pantry.”

“Ugh.”

“It took me half an hour to clean up the mess. Of course, the ice cream was ruined.”

“I’m sorry.”

“You forget what you’re doing right in the middle of doing it,” Cindy complains. “It used to be funny but not anymore.”

“I’ll try to do better,” Dave promises.

“Yeah, right,” Cindy says. She moves her mug and the pitcher aside so the waiter can put their pizza down. Gingerly, she takes hold of a slice and drags it onto her plate. It’s sizzling hot.



Cindy gets up at her regular time on Monday and leaves for work, but Dave sleeps in. He has no sales calls planned because of the regional sales meeting. It’s in Philadelphia, so he has a short drive compared with those coming from some other districts.

Even after dawdling over breakfast and following speed limits on the way down, Dave gets to the meeting hotel early. But that’s no problem for the always helpful Marriott staff. After a short wait, they find a freshly made-up room and give him the key.

Once inside the room, Dave turns on the TV for company, then unpacks. An hour later, the phone rings, and it's Stephanie Whitney, another key account manager. "Hey, Steph," Dave answers, then listens a moment. "OK, lunch sounds good."

At noon, Dave goes down to the lobby and finds Stephanie by the entrance to the restaurant. She's dressed in a conservative pantsuit, but with a mass of wavy blonde hair framing her cover girl face, she still looks glamorous. Stephanie's long legs slash the air as they follow the hostess to a table. "I'm going to have the soup with a side salad," she says when the waiter arrives, "oh, and an iced tea."

After Dave orders, he and Stephanie settle back to wait for their food. Both are dreading a long afternoon of meetings, and neither feels like talking. As Dave idly glances around, he just misses making eye contact with fellow P&G salespeople. That's because they quickly jerk their heads away, not wanting to get caught staring.

Promptly at one, the P&G key account managers file into a ballroom along with their district managers. After everyone is seated at tables, Nick Carroll, the regional sales manager, kicks off the meeting. "We have a lot to cover over the next two days," he tells the attendees. "This afternoon, we'll have Xerox training, followed by dinner. Tomorrow, we have a general session in the morning and district meetings all afternoon."

Now that he's set the stage, Nick allows Alex Wright, the regional sales training manager, to take over. "We're going to have a review of PSS III," Alex announces, standing next to an overhead projector at the front of the room. "Then we'll break into groups and do role-playing."

The trainer places his first transparency onto the projector and switches the machine on. The title of his presentation flashes on the screen, "XEROX Professional Selling Skills Review." Without comment, Alex removes the transparency, then puts

the next one up. He has a stack of them, so the P&G reps settle back into their chairs.

