

# **THE TOWER OF POWER**

**By**

**KEITH G. LAUFENBERG**

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All characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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***MIAMI ROCK***  
***SEMPER-FI-DO-OR-DIE***

For God, the Father, creator of all things and everything eternal, and for those human beings who love the truth, something I search for constantly, every time I put pen to paper.

And, for my wife, Andrea, and my four children, Amanda, Natalie, Danny & Denise, all of who have made my life much happier and easier and for my two grandchildren, Michael and Noelle, whose very names always bring a smile to my face.

And, lastly, for anyone and everyone who has ever been involved in buying or selling a car from a car dealership, I say this to you: if you don't see yourself in here somewhere it's probably because you're still at the dealership.

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# BOOK ONE

## THE CAR BUSINESS

The talent of lying in a way that cannot be laid hold of.  
—Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. No. 7.

Life, like poverty, makes strange bedfellows.  
—Bulyer-Lytton, *The Caxtons*. Pt. iv, ch. 4.

We live amid surfaces, and the true art of life is to skate well on them.  
—Emerson, *Essays, Second Series: Experience*.

-1-  
**GREED MAKES A SALESMAN**

They who are of the opinion that money will do everything, may very well be suspected to do everything for money.

—Lord Halifax, *Works*, p. 242.

**E**ddie Gonzalez walked through the front door and stared, hypnotized by the glistening new vehicles sitting on the showroom floor. His mouth dropped open for a second, as he stared lovingly at a new conversion van with everything in it—including the kitchen sink. A salesman yawned and shook his head, grinning as he walked towards Gonzalez. A teenager—dressed in dirty work-clothes—usually couldn't purchase anything and the salesman's only chance was a co-signer, usually a parent. Billy Butkus—a car salesman for almost two decades—nodded at Gonzalez. "Say kid, how yah doin' there?" Butkus looked as bored as he was.

Gonzalez shook Butkus' outstretched hand. "Aw-rye man, some van huh? You could live in it, I bet." Gonzalez's eyes magnified as he stared at the glossy van.

"Yeah—sure you could, kid—you here alone or what?"

Gonzalez nodded and pulled a rolled-up newspaper from his rear pocket—the classified ads—and frowned slightly. "Ah, I need to see, a, er-ah, Mister Alexander?"

"You here for a job then, huh kid?"

"Yeah, gives his name in ah paper, to see him. Says ask for Mister Alexander for a job—see—its right here in ah paper?"

"It's down the hall there kid, third office on the left."

"Oh okay—thanks Mister—you know thanks."

Butkus strolled to his desk and reached for a pack of cigarettes, no sense wasting his gab on anyone he couldn't make money off of, that made no sense to him at all, as he was a commission-only salesman and made money only when he made a sale and Butkus was a confirmed worrier, having a wife and three kids, not to mention a penchant for leggy barmaids and ten-year-old scotch to support.

Eddie Gonzalez glanced inside the office he had just been directed to and saw immediately that it was empty. He frowned and a look of confusion masked his otherwise solemn face when a man, dressed in a flashy, checkered silk suit approached him and nodded. "Can I help you with something, son?"

"Ah-er-yeah, I'm ah-er lookin' fer Mistah Alexander?"

"What do you need to see him about sonny?"

"Well, ah-er, it's about a job—you see I—that is, ah ..."

"You wanna be a car salesman, son?"

"Yes sir, well—I hear they make pretty good money?"

"Son, you come here and you work smart—*smart* now—and you'll be driving any one of those cars you were looking at on my showroom floor." The man smiled deceptively and seemed to be looking for someone but then his smile turned carnivorous and he slipped his arm around the youngster's shoulders and walked him back onto the showroom floor. He nodded towards the half-dozen sparkling, glistening vehicles that sat beckoning to customers to try them out and said, "See those cars there son, they're only waiting for a real salesman to move them."

"A reee-al salesman, bu' ... but I've never sold anything before?"

"What kind of work you doin' now sonny?"

"Well I was, that is, construction work—sir." Gonzalez shrugged. He'd never been more than a 'go-for' laborer.

"Umhum—I'll tell yah what—you go home and take a shower—put on a suit and come back here and we'll talk to you about a job. We can teach you how to make a ton of money son—a ton. You hear me son?" The man eyed Gonzalez speculatively, then smiled deceptively and waved his hand, almost imperceptibly, and a man dressed in a similar suit to his appeared, almost from out of nowhere—or so it seemed to Gonzalez. He was much bigger and more robust and appeared to be twenty to thirty years younger, maybe in his mid-twenties. The man talking to Gonzalez turned towards him and said, "Richard, this is Mister ... umm-ah, what did you say your name was again son?"

Gonzalez, who hadn't yet identified himself, paled and stammered. "Oh-rah-er-ah, Eddie, ah-rum, Eddie Gonzalez, ah-rum sir," he said.

The man put his arm over Gonzalez's shoulder again and had to reach up, even though Gonzalez was only five-foot-nine as he was barely five-four. "Richard, take Mister Gonzalez's app-paw," he said, "and put him in the next training class—you hear me now Rich—huh? Because, you know me I go by my gut a lot ah times and my gut tells me we got an honest-to-God salesman here, yup, I think we got us a real *car salesman* here." The man took his arm from around Gonzalez's shoulders and shook his hand one last time and then quickly disappeared down the hallway and into a cavernous office.

"Well, Mr. Gonzalez, you do as the boss said and go get you a suit on and come back here and I'll let you fill out an employment application and we'll put you in our next training class son. Now, it's something we usually don't do to anyone your age and obvious inexperience but if Gil says he's got a feelin' you're salesman material, well then ..."

"Yes sir, I'll go home and get my suit and, ah-er-um, come back and see you then sir, ah see you?"

"Do that son, come back and ask for me—Richard Pawn."

"Yes sir, I ... ah-rah-um ...?" Gonzalez stared down the hallway and Pawn followed his questioning gaze.

"Is there somethin' else on your mind son?"

"Ah, well, ah, um-er, ah who, that is—who was that?"

Richard Pawn, a sales manager at Dome Dodge, smiled thinly. "That was Gil Dodge son," he said, "he's the owner and like I said, you come back and see me and I think we can find a space in our upcoming training class for you."

Gonzalez smiled genuinely, thinking, 'the owner, wow, he was in now, for sure.' He did what the sales manager had instructed him to but had to wait for over an hour to see Pawn, when he returned to the dealership, as it seemed the man was busy with some important paperwork and he made it abundantly clear that Gonzalez was there at *his* convenience. Gonzalez, who had just turned nineteen, was less than a year out of high school and couldn't seem to keep a job, he

couldn't seem to settle into anything that afforded him what he was looking for, which was money and the things, like a new car, that it would buy for him. He wanted a job like the one he had seen advertised in the Atlanta Journal Constitution that had brought him to Dome Dodge this very day, for the ad had stated that he could make unlimited income and that he was guaranteed to make at least fifteen-hundred dollars a month; Gonzalez wanted a chance at unlimited income and—for a nineteen-year-old kid who had been making seven bucks an hour—fifteen-hundred a month sounded like a very good deal.

Richard Pawn studied people, because that was how he made his living and an extremely good living, at that. He had been a police officer for the city of Atlanta for almost two years before taking Joe Riola—the general manager of Dome Dodge—at his word that he could make twice the money as he had been making as a cop, selling cars. In his two years as a salesman he had made that much and more, and had become a manager when he saw that they made much more than any of the salesmen and it appealed to him immensely that every time a car was sold on his shift a very large piece of the gross profit from that very sale made its way into his pocket. He studied the young man sitting in his office and glanced at the application sitting on his desk. The boy was barely nineteen, had just graduated from high school and had worked as a construction laborer for six months, at seven dollars an hour. "I'll tell you what kid," Pawn said, "even though you have virtually no experience and I myself wouldn't have even considered hiring you, *but because* Gil Dodge thinks you may be a diamond-in-the-ruff I'm going to do something I usually don't, I'm going to give you a chance. That's right, we have a training class starting this coming Monday at nine A.M. sharp and I want you here at eight-thirty and bring a pad and a pen and be prepared to make more money than you ever imagined you could."

"Gee Mister Pawn, tha' ... that sounds great."

"Aw-rye then I'll see you Monday." Pawn offered his hand and smiled.

"I'll be here, sir." Gonzalez nodded his head and shook Pawn's outstretched hand, then returned his smile.

"Good," Pawn said, then returned to his job, this day consisting primarily of firing two veteran salesmen, both of whom were evaluated as getting too sloppy and not checking in with management before allowing a customer to leave the lot, something the management frowned upon, wanting to retain control of their employees, as well as the buying public. The car business was all about one thing, money, profit, and if there was one thing the management stressed it was that their salesmen must remain in complete control of their customers, even as much as the management meant to remain in complete control of them, the salesmen. A large percentage of Dome Dodge's salesmen, as well as many in management positions, were ex-servicemen and fit in remarkably well, being already familiar with having a chain-of-command to deal with but for many others—like Eddie Gonzalez—there was but one way for them to learn, they would have to be taught.

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Alexander 'Al' Alexander surveyed the room. Thirty-one students were present and likely as not, within the first week half of them would quit and of the other half, maybe three or four would actually become successful car salesmen. Alexander—a former banker—had turned to car sales after seeing the high figures of profit that the car dealers were making—as they passed by his desk. He had started as a salesman but had quickly moved into management, first as a finance and insurance manager, then as a desk manager, and finally running a dealership as a general manager. He had become a trainer after only five years in the car business when he saw the kind

of money they were pulling down by charging dealers as much as fifteen-thousand dollars for a single week's worth of training. The overhead was absolutely minimal, being primarily the knowledge of the car business and the psychology of motivating people to want to make a lot of money—making the salesmen believe they were worth more only if they sold more. Alexander had talked the owner of Dome Dodge into hiring him permanently and he justified his employment by holding a new training class every two weeks, having an almost constant turnover of salesmen and paying them nothing unless they sold a vehicle.

Alexander well knew that almost everything happened in cycles and the economy ruled business as sure as the Pope was Catholic. But, he also realized that—just as people's personalities differed—there was an acknowledged difference between a top salesman and a mediocre one and it was his job to spot the winners. He soon found out—however—that spotting them was no easy task, having more than once been sure that a certain trainee wouldn't make it, only to see him become salesman of the month, a dozen times over. Nowadays, he simply stuck to teaching the basic fundamentals of salesmanship and let the chips fall where they may. If a trainee failed he knew it all along and if they succeeded he took all the credit. He had interviewed or spoken with every trainee in the room; there were ex-servicemen, a few car salesmen from other dealerships, salesmen from other professions, many down from Detroit, the scene of innumerable layoffs over the many past decades, a few laid-off Delta pilots, and the remainder from varying backgrounds and professions. Al Alexander had witnessed—over the years—the great degree of difficulty in prophesying the success or failure of a potential salesman, based solely on his past employment history. All too frequently, individuals with a greater need or desire did better than those with previous successful track records in sales. The majority of those in the room held college degrees because Al Alexander—who held a bachelor's degree in accounting and a master's in business administration—liked having educated people around him, holding a college degree as absolutely essential in 1989. Having easily impressed Dodge—a man with but a sixth-grade education but a natural-born salesman's knack for self-sufficiency and greed—with his MBA, Alexander was finding it difficult to impress the General Manager, Joe Riola, a man with but a high school degree but the street-smarts of a roomful of telemarketers and criminal defense lawyers. He quickly found out who really ran the dealership—the day-to-day problems and crisis'—they all came to Joe Riola and so, Alexander—a survivor—would humor Riola but he would keep his eyes open, one on Riola and the other on his job and maybe, just maybe, if he ever saw the chance he would replace the one man he knew was making more money than he was, with someone that he just knew could run the dealership better than Riola—that someone being none other than himself.

Dome Dodge had been in the black for the three months that Alexander had been there thus far—Alexander having appealed to the one trait that all car dealers had in common—greed; he had promised to double Dome Dodge's profits and the first thing he did was to alter the salesmen's commission schedule, trimming it down usually ten to fifteen percent and then implementing large unit bonuses. These unit bonuses were placed on the number of vehicles a salesman sold in any given month and Alexander always made sure they were almost totally out of reach for the average salesman—even if they worked the grueling, mandatory sixty-hour work-weeks. Of course, he never really came anywhere near to doubling the dealership's profits, as that wasn't really necessary or realistic. His primary goal was to show a higher profit than before he was employed there, and his commission alteration usually was enough to accomplish that goal, which then helped him to accomplish his real goal—that goal being one of self-preservation. He had worked at several other dealerships on the same short-term basis, installing

his commission schedules and management-control systems before finding what he felt would become a permanent home at Dome Dodge, where—in only ninety days—he already worked his own hours, made a six-figure income and answered only to the old man—the owner—Gilbert Dodge. He surveyed the room stoically and said, "Why don't we start over here with Mister Gonzalez and proceed around the room with introductions." Alexander smiled and nodded at the class. "Tell everyone a little bit about yourself, what you've been doing, what you wish to accomplish at Dome Dodge, your educational background or anything else of any importance that you wish us to know about yourself." He nodded towards Eddie Gonzalez, as a total silence enveloped the room.

Gonzalez—at nineteen—had little to say about himself and more than a few snickers followed the brief soliloquy of his short life experience.

As he quickly sat down and listened to the others in the room, many of them in their forties and fifties extol their life experiences, Gonzalez suddenly realized his inferiority, as they told of having college degrees and former jobs that paid the type of wages he never could have ever imagined earning. He had been mad and extremely embarrassed, for the under-current of laughter and smiles hadn't gone unnoticed by him or the stares when he had introduced himself and he didn't like it—not one little bit—and so, as he surveyed the room, he quickly made up his mind—right then and there—that he would get even, someday he would get even with them, with each and every one of them.

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**NUMBER ONE**

Jealously is said to be the offspring of Love.  
Yet, unless the parent makes haste to strangle the child,  
the child will not rest till it has poisoned the parent.  
— J.C. and A.W. Hare, *Guesses at Truth*.

**E**ddie Gonzalez smiled serenely as he looked at the blackboard. The names of twenty-five salesmen were printed in chalk, starting at the top of the board and continuing for several inches to the bottom—X's being marked beside each name. The X's represented the number of cars that the salesman had sold—for that particular month. Gonzalez, as usual, was at the top of the list. He had sold nineteen cars that month and had already made forty-five-hundred dollars a not unusual feat, for him. He gazed at the X's lovingly, as if hypnotized, which indeed he was—he was hypnotized by the money and the notoriety it brought him at the dealership and these two combined forces spelled the pathway towards success in the grand old U.S. of A. The only thing missing being power, but he meant to get that too and his smile widened as the room began filling up with trainees. Many were men similar to those that had been in his training class—almost two years in the past. Within the first month he had been the only salesman left, and had also been only a car short of leading the board then, too. Darren Dade had beaten him, but had only beaten him three more times since then. He smiled, knowing Dade, a top salesman at Dome Dodge for the past four years, would never make it to the tower—the tower of power—where the managers practically lived, spending the better part of their days and nights there, always engaged in the same process, doing deals, deals and more deals—it was all about deals and the managers at Dome Dodge were masters of the deal and Edward Jose Gonzalez meant to become one of them, or die trying—for Eddie Gonzalez was in love, had been for the first time in his twenty-one years on the planet earth. It had happened the first month when he had hit his eighteenth car and had won a big-screen television-set and the praise of all the managers, as well as the looks—the looks from all the managers and the other salesmen—the salesmen Gonzalez well-knew were jealous of his success—they all wished to be in his shoes but couldn't because he knew he was one of a kind, he was a born salesman, a master deal-maker and he was soon to become a man of power when he joined Dome Dodge's power elite, as a sales manager, in the famed dome—the tower. He knew Darren Dade had been the top salesman for many years until he had shown up but he also knew that Dade was barred from the tower of power—as surely as an honest man was from politics—for Dade's skin was black and Dome Dodge's owner was a man who still flew the confederate flag in his yard. Gonzalez nodded and smiled at Al Alexander. "Hey boss," he said, widening evermore his pretentious smile.

"Eddie, how are you son?" Gonzalez replied that he was fine and Alexander surveyed his

new class—the usual scattering of dissatisfied ex-servicemen—laid-off auto-workers, a few pilots fired during the big strike at Eastern, a couple of ex-air-traffic controllers, put out of work during the Reagan years, and a few car salesmen switching dealerships. He nodded at Eddie Gonzalez. "Class, as you have noticed for the past week, the top dog this month is Eddie Gonzalez, as he has been for most of the two and a half years that he has been a salesman here. What'd you make last year Eddie—over six figures, huh?"

Gonzalez had made sixty-one thousand dollars the previous year but quickly put a Dick Nixon on his face. "That's right Al, and everyone in this class has that same chance to make it too." Gonzalez surveyed the room silently with his eyes.

Alexander beamed at Gonzalez. "Class—I've asked Eddie to say a few words to you all, and if you have any questions about how to make a sale, I'm sure he would be more than happy to answer them." Alexander nodded at Gonzalez, as he walked to the back of the room himself.

Gonzalez strode to the front of the room and studied the two-dozen or so people in the class. He smiled at a middle-aged woman in the first row of chairs just to his left. Unusual, as Alexander usually didn't hire women, unless they showed extreme aggressiveness—then some of them actually became good at selling cars. Gonzalez knew that Alexander babied the training classes, telling them how easy it was to sell fifteen or twenty cars a month, stroking them and pumping them up—then, after two weeks of attending Alexander's low-key training class, they were thrown onto the sales-floor, where working sixty and seventy-hour work-weeks was practically mandatory at Dome Dodge and absolutely necessary if you were to have any chance at becoming salesman of the month. It was dog eat dog on the sales-floor and little did these trainees realize that the other salesmen would not only not help them they would do everything in their power to hurt them and get them fired—thereby assuring themselves of one less competitor. All the salesmen working at the dealership had already gone through the training class and had survived and they knew that—on average—only ten percent of the class would stay employed, beyond the first month. Gonzalez—like all the other salesmen at Dome Dodge—was a survivor and had been salesman of the month nine times his first year at the dealership and ten times his second year. It was now the month of April, in 1991, and Gonzalez had been the top dog three times straight already that year, missing only once and by only one unit. He was headed for the tower of power and he couldn't wait, already being treated like royalty by most of the other salesmen. He made the company a great deal of money and if there was anything the management team at Dome Dodge understood it was money; money was what they all lived for and was what motivated everyone at the dealership, something that the management team had made sure of when they set up the pay-plan and bonuses. If money wasn't the prime motivating force in a salesman's life it was a good bet that they wouldn't be working at Dome Dodge for very long. Eddie Gonzalez enlarged his Dick Nixon smile. "Well, of course the first thing you have to remember is the seven steps to the sale." Gonzalez nodded as he spoke; he had seen hundreds of salesmen come and go in his two and a half years at Dome Dodge and had even been the motivating force behind several of those firing's, for if there was one thing Eddie Gonzalez would not tolerate it was any green-pea salesman trying to steal one of his customer's or in any way undermine his number-one spot at the dealership, or in the mind of Joe Riola—the G.M. at Dome Dodge and Eddie Gonzalez's mentor. Riola, a former door-to-door salesman in his old neighborhood of Bushwick in Brooklyn, had become a car salesman at age nineteen, just after he had decided there must be a better way to make a living than hawking vacuum-cleaners. He had quickly become a top-dog, selling twenty and twenty-five units a month and making a near six-figure income in his first year. He had almost burned himself out in his second year,

putting in eighty and ninety-hour work-weeks and seldom leaving the lot he worked at in New York. He had been disconsolate when the dealership had closed but had taken a vacation to Panama City, in Florida, for a week—and had driven through Atlanta on his way back to New York. He had seen the town as ripe for a car salesman of his ilk and had quickly had several offers to be hired as a manager. He knew the business from the inside out and accepted an offer at Dome Dodge, quickly instituting a system of commission-only for the entire management and sales staff, as well as most of the entire service department, and the dealership had prospered. Every time a car was sold at Dome Dodge Riola and his team made a big piece of change and he loved it. He quickly became the company's G.M., as they expanded the size of the lot—buying an adjoining seven acres of land. Riola trained all the managers himself and made them prove themselves on the sales floor—before accepting them in the tower—if they couldn't sell cars they weren't Dome Dodge management material, as far as Riola was concerned. Riola had seen Gonzalez as an up-and-comer right from the start; he knew the boy only had a high school education—just like him—and that he was a greedy, jealous, aggressive, hard-charging money-motivated salesman—just like he was—and he meant to mold him until he was ready to step into the tower of power and become a manager, where he could easily double and even triple his income as a salesman, even the top-dog salesman at the dealership. As far as Eddie Gonzalez was concerned, Joe Riola was a dream-maker because all Gonzalez wanted out of life was to see the inside of the tower of power as a manager—as a god—which was what they all were to Eddie Gonzalez and he meant to become one himself—soon. His smile widened when he saw the middle-aged woman to his left hike up her skirt, revealing a shapely pair of legs. He knew the woman was old enough to be his mother but winked at her nevertheless and went on with his talk—Eddie Gonzalez—like most salesmen, loved to hear the sound of his voice. "So, does anyone here know the seven steps to the sale?"

Al Alexander frowned, remembering now that he had asked Gonzalez to speak to a training class a few months ago and the boy had talked for over of an hour. He pulled a package of unfiltered cigarettes from his pocket and lit one. He knew how much Riola liked Gonzalez and he knew Gonzalez was headed for the elevated desk, for the management team, for the tower of power, and so his forehead creased upwards as his frown widened, and he inhaled a lungful of noxious smoke and did what all good car salesmen must become masters at—if they were ever to become successful—he waited.

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Joe Riola glanced through the small window in the door and smiled. Eddie Gonzalez was talking to the new training class and he should have known it—where else would he be? Riola felt that he knew Gonzalez as well as anyone—probably better than anyone—after all Gonzalez spent almost all his waking hours at the dealership. Riola planned to make him a manager and he knew Gonzalez yearned for it—just as he had at that age. He glared at Al Alexander—sitting in the back of the room—as he was on a collision course with the man and that was for sure—how he had ever let Alexander talk the owner into hiring him full-time, he had no idea. At first it had been kind of fun, watching the helpless trainees come onto the sales-floor, raw, most of them not knowing the first thing about salesmanship, much less anything about the car business. He had some fun, firing them for the slightest infraction—the flimsiest thread of a reason—then watching them slink off the floor embarrassed—self-consciously trying to hide. It had been good for business, as far as Riola was concerned, because it kept all the other salesmen alert and on

their toes, afraid that they might be next. But, after several months, Riola began to see that Alexander was challenging his authority, especially when the monthly grosses were low, and Riola had a sneaking suspicion that Alexander wanted his job, feeling he could run the dealership better. It was not a pleasant thought but he had seen Alexander huddling with Gil Dodge on more than one occasion and he didn't like it. His smile widened and he opened the door. "Eddie, a customer for youse," Riola said, smiling thinly.

Gonzalez returned Riola's smile and nodded. "Yes sir, well I hope y'all learned something from my talk. Thank you and I'll see you all on the sales-floor when you graduate." He walked out the door and Riola snaked an arm over his shoulder.

"I oughta make youse the trainer Eddie my boy," Riola growled, glancing backwards for just an instant, in order to catch the scowl that quickly alighted on Alexander's face.

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Gary Greb stood up and stretched and then walked out of the training classroom and onto the showroom floor. He had been selling cars for less than a year but had already worked for three different dealerships in the greater Atlanta area. Having moved to the area with his family, a wife and four kids, in 1990—he had left Ft. Lauderdale and headed for Atlanta, after having vacationed there once, in '88, upon hearing the announcement that Atlanta had been awarded the '96 Olympics, feeling it would help the area's economy and make it easier to find a good job. He nodded at a salesman who nodded back. "Hey G-Man, remember me?"

"Yeah-yeah, I do, from the Toyota store right—Stokes, right?"

"Right, Stanley Stokes G-Man, so you're out here now, huh," Stokes said.

"I guess, man. I tol' this Alexander dude I din' need this trainin' class though but it's mandatory, naturally."

"I remember you were top-dog over at the Toyota store a couple ah months in a row."

"Yeah, I got twenty-one out las' month."

"What happened, G-Man?"

"Who the hell knows? You know I don't kiss ass though. I had a lot ah customer's I told what was what about the back-end money—you know? And then the last time a manager overheard me telling an up he could get a better rate than the dealership was givin' him—hell the guy had a seven-hundred beacon score—you know?"

"Yeah, I know what you mean G-Man. They only fired me 'cause I told an up what he could buy a Cressida for."

"Yeah, I heard they sold it to 'im for that price too."

"Sure they did, I could tell this guy was gonna find out the bottom line anyway—hell, he'd already been all over town."

"Yeah, you sold twenty units a month the month before that didn't you Stan?"

"Yeah, lot ah good it did me. They don't give a shit G-Man they think salesmen are a dime-a-dozen at that store."

"Yeah, I know man—how's this place, same shit?"

"Oh shit no, you sell twenty cars here they treat you like a king man. Yeah, you can make some real money here and they got a good bonus-plan too."

"Yeah, good, glad to her it—how's the G.M. here man?"

"Riola, oh shee-it, Riola treats you good here, as long as you produce, know what I mean?"

"How 'bout this phony kid Gonzalez," Greb said.

"Oh shit G-Man a real scumbag," Stokes replied. "Dude races you to the up man—he'd step on his mother to get a sale—a real lot-lizard."

"Yeah, I figured as much man."

"Yeah, he lives here G-Man, eighteen hours a day man, he's lookin' to get in the tower."

Greb smiled and glanced at the elevated oval tower, where he could see the G.M. and what must be the other manager's, hanging out. "The desk, huh," he said nodding. "Looks like it's an elevated desk, to say the least?"

"Yeah man, not even called a desk here man—it's a tower—look familiar G-Man?"

"Man, I never did any time—not in the pen anyway."

"Yeah but anybody can see it looks like it came straight from a penitentiary—probably Gil Dodge," Stokes said.

"Gil Dodge?"

Stanley Stokes craned his neck around the showroom floor and lowered his voice. "The owner, G-Man, I dunno about the penitentiary thing you know maybe he was in prison once? I'll tell you this though you can sure see the whole lot from the tower man, wait 'till you go up in there, just like a jail-tower or something—yeah and this Dodge is a weird dude too G-Man, from up around North Carolina somewhere—I hear he don't take much interest in the car business anymore though, he just lets the managers handle it, you know?"

"Yeah, is that his real name ... y'know Dodge?"

"That's what they say but who knows? Who cares, you barely ever see the guy?"

"Yeah, maybe it's just a thing like John Denver, these rich dudes change their names, do whatever they thinks gonna make 'em more green or get more publicity. Man, I can see the tower looks like a jail-tower though you know? That's the first time I ever seen one that high up and like circular man, so you can see the showroom floor and the lot and the pressure rooms—huh?"

"Oh yeah, the pressure rooms are right there, four of 'em."

Greb glanced at the tower and then at the four, vacant, glassed-in separate rooms where the salesmen went to make their deals after doing their best sales-pitch on a car. "Yeah, they do a walk-around here too then huh?"

"Oh yeah G-Man, Alexander's gonna make you all go through one man," Stokes replied, referring to a part of their class-instruction where the students were shown how to start at the hood and walk the customers around the entire car, all the while pointing out all the vehicle's selling points, like the size of the engine, the number of airbags and all the other pertinent features and information. "Yeah, I won it here in my class, Riola bought me lunch that time, yeah I can do a hood and trunk on any car man, all I gotta do is look at the sticker and in five minutes I'm rollin'. Remember at the Toyota store how I won the walk-around twice G-Man?"

Greb—who had been taught how to do a thorough vehicle walk-around at his last dealership and knew that they were all basically the same routine—didn't remember but shrugged and did what all car salesmen became good at, if they expected to be successful, he lied. "Yeah, yeah Stan, I remember, shee-it Stan you're a *star* hood-din-trunk man?" Stokes frowned and Greb knew his lie had been too sarcastic—he liked Stokes he was a regular guy and there were too many phonies in the world—forget about the car business—phonies were the norm in the car business, where the whole sale was a charade whereby the salesman sold as much markup as he possibly could, thereby insuring himself of a larger paycheck and, usually the better an actor the salesman was the more markup he was likely to sell. Greb shrugged and then smiled and nodded at Stokes. "So, you know Stan I was just workin' at a note-lot for about a month man."

"Oh, shee-it, a tote-yah-note lot huh," Stokes said, "Bogue-City then huh G-Man?"

"Yeah, never saw a beacon score over six hundred for four weeks man. Shee-it, talk about bankruptcies and divorces man. Gee-zuz Stan but still you know twenty-nine percent ain't right man—you know what I mean—I mean sometimes I felt like I was sellin' my soul man. I mean the guy that owned the place was a real scumbag man—this black chick comes in and she's got a six-twenty beacon score and—"

"... Hey that's pretty good for a bogue man."

"Yeah, she had a seven-fifty until her rat husband divorced her and ruined her credit man—you know. So, this scumbag took her car too so she can't get to work without a car, you know how it is in Atlanta Stan, I mean this chick's job was hangin' by a thread 'cause she was takin' the buses and never getting there on time and she has three kids man. So she picks out an eighty-four Bonneville with fifty grand on the speedometer and Greg holds her up for ten grand and—"

"... I, what, wait a minute, G-Man, you wasn't workin' at Greg's Sweet Cars, Everybody Rides Today were you?"

"Yeah man. You know it huh?"

"Sssssh, who don't know that Greg Garen's the biggest scumbag around, used to work at McKenzie's Pontiac off LaVista Road man. Yeah, so he got the girl huh?"

"Oh shit Stan. Twenty-nine percent, he had her at two bucks twice a month."

"Oh ... shee-it G-Man, that's four Benny Franklin's a month, man. That's more 'an twenty-nine percent man."

"Yeah, he sold her all kinds ah insurance and garbage man. Chick was barely clearin' two bucks a week too."

"Man, two hundred a week and she was payin' that every two weeks. Man with three kids—she gonna lose them wheels G-Man?"

"Yeah, that scumbag Garen's got a repo' guy takes 'em back after one week late too man."

"Oh shee-it, that sounds like bad vibes huh G-Man?"

"You got it Stan, I had tah quit man—I mean sellin' cars is bad enough as it is! Felt like I was losin' my humanity, you know my soul, man."

"Yeah G-Man, we all been there man—but I bet you made some heavy green there huh?"

"Yeah but Stan c'mon man it ain't only about the green man?"

"Yeah, I know man but you gotta admit most of them note-lots are goldmines G-Man—you can usually dress in shorts too—you know?"

"Yeah but still—what man?" Greb responded to Stokes' nodding towards the car lot where Greb spied a customer.

"An up G-Man, want it bro'?"

"Naw man, I'm still in trainin' Stan, remember, I can't man—take it brother."

Stokes smiled and hurried out onto the lot and Greb smiled at one of the other trainees, who had been strolling through the showroom.

"I'm Bobby Mims—you're Greb, right? You sold cars before, huh?"

Greb shook Mims' outstretched hand. "Yeah, I have—Gary Greb but you can just call me the G-Man. I came up from South Florida—been a carpenter most ah my life—just came here 'cause ah the Olympics. You know, figured it should help create a lot ah jobs up here. Been sellin' cars since I been here, about a year. Kind ah wanted to get outta construction."

"Yeah, I heard you talkin' with that guy. What's an up?"

"An up's a customer Bobby."

"Oh yeah—a customer is an up?"

"Yeah, it kind ah refers to a system some dealerships use that's called the up system. You

sign a list and take turns, you know and when it's your turn you're up and well—somehow the customer became referred to as an up. Yeah, I don't like the up system myself Bobby and most stores don't use it but the name just seemed to you know—stick. It's just another slang term in a business where everybody's basically full ah shit man."

Mims laughed. "Yeah, I've been picking up on that man. Car salesmen live up to their reputation then—huh?"

"Yeah, and the sad thing about it is half of 'em don't even realize it."

"Yeah, what'd you think of that Gonzalez?"

"He's full ah shit man—he's just tryin' to move up to the management end of the car business. I heard you used to sell insurance, huh?"

"Yeah, it's the same kinna bullshit too man. I figured I might hire on here as a finance and insurance man but Alexander said that the general manager here makes everybody go through the training class and work the sales-floor for at least ninety days."

"Is that right?" Greb smiled as a conversation a few feet behind him was too loud to ignore. A woman was smiling at two men and talking, non-stop.

"Oh, Mister Gonzalez really impressed me, I mean look at his name on the board he must have made ten thousand this month."

"Yeah," one of the men said, "he makes way over a hundred thousand a year—and I thought I was doin' good makin' twenty bucks an hour."

Greb nodded at the trio and broke into their conversation. "Got news for you Jack, twenty bucks an hour is more than you'll make sellin' cars, you should ah kept your job. Probably nowhere near the stress you're gonna feel sellin' cars, either."

"Oh—izatso ...? Well Ed Gonzalez might have something to say about that—Alexander too."

Greb smiled laconically. "I don't give a damn what either one of 'em's got to say—Gonzalez is lucky if he made half of what he said he did and I will guarantee you if he did make a hundred grand, he worked eighteen and twenty-hour days doin' it. Figure it out and he averaged less than twenty bucks an hour. And, believe me if you believe half of what comes out ah Gonzalez or Alexander's mouth—you ain't livin' in the real world."

"Say look-it here, I realize you sold cars before but that doesn't mean you know everything."

"Didn't say I did, Jack."

"My name's not Jack."

"That right?" Greb strolled past the trio and the man blanched and turned towards his disappearing back but found himself looking straight at Al Alexander, who barked, "it's time to get back to class, everyone."

Barney Barton managed a sickly smile as he and Fred Hill and Anita Ralston walked back into the training room.

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Joe Riola glanced at the employment applications and smiled. He looked across his desk, at Shane Grand, a manager at Dome Dodge for nearly a decade, since graduating from high school and being offered a job as a salesman by his next-door neighbor, none other than Gil Dodge himself. Grand's father—also the dealership's attorney—was well aware of the money involved in the car business and had quickly given him the go ahead. In his first year, Grand had made just twenty-five-thousand dollars but in the second year he had been the top salesman for three months in a row and, being the owner's neighbor and son of the dealership's attorney, he had

been moved to the finance and insurance desk for a month and then quickly to the management team in the tower—where the real power and money was. Riola was about to say something when he saw Ed Gonzalez standing at his door. He waved him in and motioned for him to take a seat. His smile widened as he waved his hand at the applications. "Heh, that freakin' Alexander's got a guy in there wid a Pee-H-Dee, a couple ah Master's degrees and a load ah Bachelor's degrees, hah, as usual nothin' but a bunch ah diplomas."

Grand smiled, knowing Riola's disdain for college degrees, made all the more apparent by his and his managers' lack of any.

"Think there's a car salesman hiding in there somewhere—boss?" Eddie Gonzalez said, then nodded at Riola and winked at Shane Grand, who smiled.

Riola shook his head. "I doubt it," he said. "Eddie, about what we talked about las' month, are youse ready for the tower, cause we woikin' eighteen- hour days?"

Gonzalez's face lit up and his expensively capped teeth showed even his back molars. "You know I'm ready boss—I'll work twenty-four hours."

"I know youse would—I'm puttin' youse in F-un-Eye for a couple weeks, than right here to the tower—youse'll be in the dome by the tenth. By the way, Darren got youse by a unit diz month, what happened?"

"Month ain't over yet boss, I got people comin' in this afternoon."

"Tee-oh 'em, you're in F-un-Eye startin' now." Riola stood up and extended his hand towards Gonzalez, who took it and beamed even more. Riola smiled as Grand welcomed Gonzalez to the management team and then slipped his arm around Gonzalez's shoulder. "Come on Eddie let's go welcome the class to the real world."

Grand winked at Gonzalez and the trio of men followed Riola around a corner, across the showroom floor and into the training class. It was nine in the morning and Alexander was saying something to the class, standing at a podium in front of the room. They were graduating, after two weeks of training, and would begin their duties on the sales-floor later that day. Riola walked into the room without so much as knocking, followed closely behind by Grand and Gonzalez. Alexander smiled and Riola nodded at him, causing Alexander to bark, "Did you wish to say something to the class, Joe?"

"Yeah, A-yay," Riola replied—referring to Alexander by the shortened version of a nickname that had been placed on him by another salesman, 'Alcoholics Anonymous' and sometimes Double A, or A.A.—"yeah I, just wanna welcome youse all to Dome Dodge. As you know I'm the Gee-M here, youse got a beef, youse take it to the tower to a manager or Ed Gonzalez here—he's in the F-un-Eye department now. I'm a busy man don't bother to come into my office with any petty bullshit—and one more thing, this is dah real world here, all youse people can stick yah college degrees up yah ass, dey ain't worth the paper they written on in ah real world—if youse catch my drift? Use 'em fah terlet papah 'cause that's all they're good for. Well, welcome to Dome Dodge then, huh?" Riola marched out of the room, Grand and Gonzalez right behind him, Grand was laughing out loud but Gonzalez had somehow managed to keep his face locked in merely a shit-eating grin.

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Gilbert Dodge glanced at his watch, it was almost noon and he was due at the country club in less than a half-hour—and it was a thirty-minute trip. He smiled at Al Alexander and stared at the ceiling, while mulling the situation over in his mind. Dodge had hired Alexander three years ago, primarily on a trial basis, to see if the man could deliver him even more profit, and he did

have an impressive résumé, as besides his education and background in the car business, he was also a good talker, a good B.S. artist, and Dodge—a born slinger of the field variety—knew the necessity of employing men who could lie with a straight face. He had hired him on a permanent basis, after three months of ever-increasing revenues, and for three years things had been fine, only a few small disagreements between him and Joe Riola—but now there appeared to be a problem and Dodge was a man who wished to have at least one man who was capable of running the entire business for him, his primary interest being what color of ink he was likely to be immersed in. As long as it wasn't red, he wasn't apt to say much, as his attorney had assured him that things were running smoothly at Dome Dodge, in 1991. "So, what do you want me to do, Alkie?" he barked, eying him speculatively.

Alexander blanched at what he considered a perverted pseudonym of his given name but smiled and subverted his desire to address Dodge by his full given name of Gilbert because he knew Dodge hated it. "Just think it over Gil. I mean you don't really need Joe. The man thinks he can run every department."

Dodge didn't so much as crack a smile when he shook his head and said, "He can!"

Alexander inhaled and his face turned slightly pale, as he stared at the tassels on his shoes for an instant and wondered if he had gone too far this time—after all, he *was* making a six-figure income for almost no work at all and knew Riola was putting in eighteen and twenty-hour days but he also knew Riola was making more money than he was and that old tyrant of the mind—jealousy—had awakened anew in his subconscious.

"So can I Gil—so can I."

"You know, I think you could A-yay but—look I gotta get to the club. I'll let you know what I decide first thing in the morning, I gotta get eighteen holes in this afternoon."

Dodge extended his hand and Alexander shook it. "I'll be here at nine then, sir."

"Fine," Dodge said and walked out of his ornate office and Alexander smiled. He was in and Riola was out, as far as he was concerned. He looked out the window, as Dodge pulled away from the curb in his '91 Stealth—he strolled to Dodge's desk and sat down in the plush chair. Pulling out a cigarette, he clicked Dodge's gold-plated desk-lighter and lit the unfiltered Camel. He exhaled a stream of noxious smoke, just as Joe Riola walked down the hallway and glanced into the office and scowled, as no one sat behind Gil Dodge's desk, other than Riola or Dodge himself. He fumed silently, as he walked into his office and instinctively knew something was amiss, something was up and only one man could unravel the mystery. He picked up his phone and quickly stabbed out the seven numbers to Gil Dodge's car phone.

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Gil Dodge smiled at the threesome he was about to play golf with. An attorney, a doctor and a retired football player, Jimmy Zorr, who had won a Super-Bowl ring with the Baltimore Colts in the 1960's and had owned a restaurant in downtown Atlanta for years. Dodge nodded at Zorr who had asked him how his car business was doing. "Well Jimmy it could be better believe me," he said. "I just hope I ain't gotta kiss anymore ass tah get what I want, heh-heh, know what I mean? Say, since you closed your restaurant down, why'nt you come to work for me?"

"No, let's go hit the links—I'd make a poor car salesman, Gil."

As they walked out onto the course, Dodge wrapped his arm around Zorr's shoulder. "Oh, hell, you'd make a great car salesman Jimmy, believe me—I oughta know."

-3-  
**BACK TO SCHOOL**

Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.  
—Old Testament, Daniel xii, 4.

If materialistic knowledge is power, it is not wisdom. It is a blind force.  
—Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health*, p.146.

**J**oe Marano sipped the strong black coffee and lit a cigarette. He was sitting in the snack area of Dome Dodge and was yawning, tired as usual. Marano was an ex-sergeant in the army. He had served sixteen years and with just four years left to be able to retire, had refused to re-enlist when his promotion to staff sergeant was turned down. He had gone to work at Dome Dodge shortly thereafter and had worked as hard as anyone, regularly putting in seventy and eighty-hour work-weeks, which had—after three long years—finally paid off when Marano was brought onto the management team, spending only a few months in the finance department before moving up to the tower, where he had been ever since. Marano, as with the entire management team at Dome Dodge, could lie—second only to a trial attorney—and keep a straight face until the customer was long off the premises. He reveled in his position and loved the bennies the job brought him, which included a demo, he drove a new twin turbo Stealth, as most of the tower management team did, free gas and a six-figure annual income. Of course, his eighty-hour work-weeks continued unabated but it was well-worth it to Joe Marano, who had never dreamed he could ever make as much money as he had in his five years in the car business and he was a man who judged himself by the standards that the system he was born and bred under had rigidly set in his mind his entire life, that your degree of success in this life was measured by the amount of money you earned and the amount of possessions you owned and Marano's self-worth had risen steadily as his income and possessions had moved upward, in the past fifty-nine months. He exhaled a stream of noxious smoke and glanced at his watch, it was eight-thirty in the morning and he couldn't wait to get into the tower. He smiled remembering his first week out on the sales-floor. Shane Grand had taught the class then and Marano had actually believed it was going to be as easy as Grand had made the class think it would be but he should have known better. Marano had grown up in a tough neighborhood in Jersey City and had quit high school to join the army. Nothing had ever come easy for him and he knew you had to work, and work hard, for anything worthwhile in this life and after just two weeks, Marano had been the only salesman left in a class of twenty-six salesmen. He soon learned that the classes were a sort of free-for-all where the teacher, or trainer, gave them a little information about the car business, a few simple sales techniques and then threw them out on the sales-floor, very much like the free-for-all they had in the South just after World War II, when they put boxing gloves

on a dozen black men and put them in the ring to see which one would remain standing at the end. He saw that there was never more than one or two of the class working at the dealership within the first month but that those few were considered elite, tried-and-true salesmen and—more to the point—all capable of selling twenty units a month, thus assuring the Dome Dodge management team that they would have to do very little work themselves, and even more to the point, would make a ton of money from the salesmen's efforts—for the management team made their money only when cars were sold and the more cars that were sold and the higher the gross profit on those cars the more money the dealership, and the manager's, thus made. Marano picked his Styrofoam coffee cup up and walked out of the snack area and into the dealership. He smiled when he saw that Shane Grand, Richard Pawn and Joe Riola were already in the tower and all three were laughing. Marano stepped up into the tower and sat his coffee cup down on the curved shelf-desk used by the managers for everything from doing deals to eating on. His smile widened as the others greeted him; they all knew today was special, for the circus that they had all been through before on numerous occasions would soon begin—and everyone loved a circus.

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Fred Hill studied the seven steps to the sale card he held in his hand and smiled. He was thirty-two years old and had been a truck-driver for almost a decade before meeting and marrying a secretary at his trucking firm. Wanting to stay home more, after his wife had their first baby, and spend some quality time with his family, he had decided to give car sales a try. A friend of his father's had been a car salesman in upstate New York, where Hill had grown up, and he had always seemed to have a roll of money and a new car. Hill nodded at Barney Barton, an ex-mechanic for Eastern Airlines and walked right by him, just like Al Alexander had taught him to, be aggressive and always on the alert for customers. He stuck his hand out to the man looking at the shiny red Stealth on the showroom floor. "How are you today sir? I'm Fred Hill and I'd like to welcome you to Dome Dodge," he said, smiling. "Now, how can I be of assistance today, sir?"

The man, dressed in a pair of Levi's and a grease-stained work-shirt, nodded at Hill. "Naw-ahh man—I work here man—I'm a mechanic in ah back; just killin' a lil' time," he said.

Hill strolled back to where Barton stood. "Guy works here—heh!"

Barton nodded and glanced towards the tower where he could see the managers appeared to be having a good time, which they indeed were, as Shane Grand nudged Joe Marano. "Did you see that, Joey? Suckah tried tah up Bobby."

"Yeah, well, he didn't know Bobby worked here."

"Yeah, but the look on 'is face was sumpin' else wasn't it, he thought he had a deal already." Grand chuckled and picked up his Styrofoam coffee cup.

"Yeah, he thought it's as easy as Alexander's got 'em all thinking it is." Marano nodded at Joe Riola, as Riola stepped up into the tower.

"Hey, Joe, is Alexander still workin' deals in the tower, youse know wid his students and all?"

Joe Riola smiled benignly. He lit a cigarette and looked out onto the showroom floor, to where Alexander was talking to a half-dozen of his class. "We'll let him play manager for awhile longer fella's, I talked to Gil yesterday and he's gotta go to Charlotte today but he'll be back by Saturday."

Shane Grand smiled. "I kind ah like the training classes—you know Joe?"

"Oh, the classes are gonna stay, it's just Al Alexander I'm not too sure about." Riola smiled

shrewdly and then laughed—a hoarse cough issuing from his throat—as, quickly, the rest of the team laughed also. Richard Pawn lit a cigarette and Riola smiled. They were usually smoke-free inside the showroom, having to go outside to have a cigarette but if Riola smoked inside the tower, it usually gave the signal that it was all right for the rest of the manager's to light up. Soon enough, the tower was covered in smoke, as all four men lit up and waited for the fun to begin. Pawn exhaled a stream of toxicity and reached for a stool. He moved it towards him and sat down—his feet were killing him. Working steadily for the past five years, Pawn seldom worked less than a sixteen-hour day and he was usually on his feet. He was a big man, six feet three inches tall and 230 pounds and his feet had begun bleeding the year before. His podiatrist had but one solution, spend less time on them and soak them on your days off. Pawn's problem was that he had had no days off in the past six months and before that, just a half a day on Sunday. Oh, he made a six-figure income but he expected to have some time to enjoy that six-figure income, otherwise what good was it? That was a question he was still looking for an answer to. He smiled now, when Shane Grand pointed through the tower window, onto the lot, to where three trainee-salesmen were all racing towards a lone customer, who had just gotten out of his car.

Al Alexander nodded at a trio of his trainees. "Enough talk people, look out on the lot and you'll see an up. Now, go to it."

Gary Greb swiveled his head towards the lot and saw that three trainee's were already headed for the customer, who had just gotten out of his car. He shook his head and rubbed his eyes at what was a typical scenario—he had worked at another dealership that had had a training class similar to the one at Dome Dodge and he knew they were all basically scams by the trainer's to justify their large salaries.

Al Alexander glanced at his watch and saw it was half past nine A.M., and then walked over to Gil Dodge's office and turned the handle but it was locked. He jumped slightly when a voice reverberated next to him and he recognized it as none other than Joe Riola. "Gil went out of town, Alkie. He'll be back over the weekend."

"Oh, really, then you've spoken to him about ah-er-um, that is ..."

"Yeah, he wants to see us first thing Monday morning."

Alexander scowled and pulled a cigarette from a pack inside his shirt. He flipped it into his mouth and was surprised when Riola said, "Youse know we're smoke-free on ah showroom floor there, Double-A."

Alexander shot Riola a vicious sneer and glanced towards the tower, where the smoke literally poured from the only entrance. So, this was how it was going to be. Alexander hurried towards the side door and growled, "Anything you say—boss."

Riola chuckled, as he slipped a cigarette into his mouth and headed back to the smoky tower of power, where Shane Grand picked up the phone, stabbed two numbers and his voice boomed throughout the showroom floor, "Darren, Darren Dade, come to the tower immediately."

"What's up Shane?"

Grand smiled as he turned towards the large frame of Darren Dade. He nodded out the window. "A green-pea just cut loose an up, go see if you can stop the car."

Dade smiled and walked out onto the lot. A customer was pulling off the lot in a 1987 Dynasty. Dade put up his hand and the car slowed down. He walked up to the window and, when it rolled down, yawned and nodded at the driver—then smiled cordially. "Darren Dade, can I help you with anything?"

The man glanced at the trio of trainee's, now walking back inside the dealership. "No pal you can't—look, I don't know what's with you people but I just came here to see about getting my car

fixed. I already told those three salesmen there."

Dade smiled and nodded. He glanced towards the tower and saw that Shane Grand was watching him. A car salesman for a decade and he still had to tolerate being monitored. He knew if he let the man go it wouldn't be held against him, he sold too many cars, he also knew that if he got the man out of his car and walking onto the lot to look at a car it would be one less trainee to contend with. He shrugged, he might as well try it couldn't hurt him, which was his only real concern, anyway. "Well, sir, ever thought about trading it in?"

"Well, not really—it's been a good car."

"Um-hmm, well how many miles on 'er," Dade said, touching the fender.

"A hundred and five thou'," the guy replied.

"What if I could get you in a new Dynasty for your car and oh, a few thousand bucks?"

"You said a few thousand bucks?"

"Yup, it'd be maybe worth a look then—huh?"

"Well? You said a few thousand—how much is ...?"

"... I'd have to have your trade-in appraised; c'mon man let's look at a new Dynasty."

Shane Grand smiled when he saw the man park his car and get out. He turned towards Barney Barton and Fred Hill, the two trainees who had approached the car. Grand hadn't been able to ascertain which one had done the talking. "So—which one of you talked to the up?"

"Excuse me sir, the up?"

"The customer—numb-nuts—the guy in the Eighty-Seven Dynasty," Grand barked.

"Oh, I did. He was just here to see about gettin' his car repaired, is all."

Grand smiled at Joe Riola and Riola's face mirrored Joe Marano's and Richard Pawn's, all masks of the hunter, the predator, as Grand nodded at Fred Hill and motioned for him to come up into the tower and look out the window. "Come here, c'mere pally, right up here now," Grand motioned with his left hand for Hill to come into the tower. Hill stepped up into the tower and Grand pointed out the panoramic tower window. "See that? Huh? That's your up. He's bein' sold a car by a real salesman. I thought Alexander told you guys everyone is to be Tee-Oh'd before they leave the lot? That means you come to the tower and check with a manager, didn't you understand that—numb-nuts?"

"Well—yeah but see what I ah-er-um-ah ..."

"See nothin' get the hell off my lot, *now!*"

"... I mean .... I ... wha' I —" Hill's face reddened slightly.

"You're fired get off my lot—**NOW.**"

"Bu' ... but I mean —?" Fred hill's face became deathly pale. "What about my pay?"

Grand smiled at Joe Riola, who growled, "Youse sell any cars?"

"Well, no but ..."

"But nuttin', youse ain't got any pay comin', goodbye."

Hill paled but turned and walked out of the tower and—he quickly decided—out of the car business, forever.

## BE A STAR, SELL A CAR

Who knowing nothing knows but to obey.  
—Tennyson, *Guinevere*, 1. 183.

Obedience,  
Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth,  
Makes slaves of men, and, of the human frame,  
A mechanized automaton.  
—Shelley, *Queen Mab*. Canto iii, 1. 177.

Mike Stratton smiled at Brad Powers and nodded towards a group of trainee salesmen. "Man they're fallin' like flies, huh Brad?" he said.

"Yeah, I think they fired about half-a-dozen green-peas yesterday." Brad Powers chuckled silently.

"Yeah—you think the broad's gonna last Brad?"

Mike Stratton glanced at Anita Ralston, standing with a trio of trainee salesmen and Brad Powers followed his intensive gaze and smiled. "I dunno man she got some nice T and A though, huh, Mike? Nice legs too man."

Stratton, a twenty-five-year-old former disc jockey, with several girlfriends, frowned. "Shee-it, she's old enough to be my momma?"

"Yeah but she still got some nice L's huh, baby?"

Stratton laughed and reached for a pack of cigarettes. "C'mon man, less grab a smoke."

As the two men strolled outside, Anita Ralston watched them out of the corner of her eye. She knew they were talking about her and she knew they didn't think she would make it in car sales but she had sold electronic appliances, real estate and medical supplies in the past and she knew the basic principals in sales were twofold, to sell yourself and to find out where the real power lie and then to attach yourself to that power. Anita Ralston knew that Al Alexander was part of the management team but she also knew where the real power lie and she glanced into the tower now and her eyes rested on Joe Riola, the man she would attempt to attach herself to—one way or the other.

Barney Barton smiled at Ralston. "Too bad about Fred, huh Ann?" he said.

"Yes, what happened—anyway?"

"Well, well they fired him." Barton glanced towards the tower and lowered his voice. "Yeah, but that Dade guy didn't sell the guy a car anyway. He really was here just to see about gettin' his car fixed."

Wade Jones smiled at Barton and Ralston and then glanced outside at the two black salesmen, Stratton and Powers. "I'm gonna grab a cigarette guys," he said and walked outside,

removing a cigarette from a pack inside his coat. He nodded towards Stratton and Powers. "Got a light brother?"

Stratton handed him a cheap Bic lighter and Jones smiled. He torched his weed and handed the lighter back to Mike Stratton, who slipped it in his pocket. "You ever sell cars before?" Stratton said, smiling thinly.

"No brother, used to sell advertising in Detroit though."

"No shit, *brother*."

Jones frowned at Stratton's inflection of brother and wondered if he was mocking him. "Ah, I just moved to Atlanta."

Stratton smiled. "Yeah, a lotta *niggahs* movin' down here now man. They think all us niggahs all workin' in big money jobs here, thinks jobs is hangin' off ah dah co-nahs down here." Jones frowned, as all of a sudden Stratton was talking with a dialectic tone that seemed to be directed at him, almost as if all blacks were competition for Stratton to be wary of. But Jones needn't have worried about Stratton thinking all blacks were his competition, for Stratton viewed everyone with the same blinders on—to him they were all his competition, black, white, yellow or red. He smiled deceptively and walked a few steps forward. "Excuse me *brother*, one ah my ol' customers," Stratton said and walked towards a man and woman, who were just getting out of a parked '88 New Yorker.

Wade Jones nodded at Brad Powers and exhaled a stream of noxious smoke. "What's with him, brother?"

"Ah-eh, he used to be a local Dee-jay, at a local soul station man. They fired him and he never really got over it—you know—he was gonna be a star and all and now he's out here runnin' for ups just like you and me brother. We all each other's competition here man, you'll soon see what I'm talking 'bout too bro'."

"Um-hmmm, is he a good salesman?"

"Oh shit-man, Mike's a high grosser."

"A high grosser," Jones said and frowned.

"Yeah, you'll learn man. They pay you on how much gross profit there is on the car you sell and man, Mike's always got a high gross man. Shee-it he regularly makes about a grand a week."

"Ssshhh, really—a grand a week—you're not kiddin'?"

"Oh yeah, dude sold two Stealth's last week man. That's two gees right there, they got a thousand dollar mini-deal on all Stealth's."

"A thousand-dollar—wha' ... mini-deal you say I mean what—?"

"Yeah man. You get a thousand bucks, minimum, if you sell one. Hell, there's so much mark-up in 'em the dealership is makin' a bundle every time they sell one anyway."

"How come they want you to check with a manager every time you talk to a customer?"

"Yeah, well they just wanna make sure you don't let anybody leave the lot that might have bought a car man, 'cause Dome Dodge is a fast-track store."

"A fast-track store—a fast ...?" Wade Jones' face took on a puzzled frown.

Powers smiled and exhaled a stream of smoke. "They sell a couple-hundred units every month. I think we did three or maybe four thousand units last year."

"Is that good?"

"Oh shit man, anything over a hundred units a month is fast-track baby, fast-track. Yup, Dome Dodge doesn't let a customer leave the lot unless he's dead or a bogue, heh-heh."

"Bow-gah ...?"

"Yeah man, bogue. Bogus, bad credit man, hey an up, you want him? Go ahead." Brad

Powers nodded towards an elderly man, who had just pulled up in a '90 Dakota pick-up truck. Wade Jones, not realizing that Powers was letting him have the customer because the man was driving a late-model vehicle, and elderly men were notorious for not purchasing anything on their first visit, smiled.

"Hey thanks." Jones pulled out his seven steps to the sale card and walked briskly towards the old man. He glanced down at the card and hissed, to himself, "Step one, meet and greet." Jones stuck his hand forward and when the man shook it, he smiled and rasped, "Welcome to Dome Dodge sir, I'm Wade Jones, how can I be of assistance?"

"Where's the service department—I gotta see about gettin' my truck fixed?"

Jones swiveled his head towards the tower and saw that one of the manager's was looking his way. He didn't care if he sold the man a car as much as he didn't wish to lose his job or be embarrassed by one of the manager's screaming at him. "Right this way sir, just let me show you our new ninety-one Dakota's first. The ninety-two's 'ill be here probably in four or five months and, just follow me sir ..."

"Where's your service department? I don't wanna look at any trucks."

Jones paled slightly; he knew several trainees had been fired for not checking in with the tower. "Yes-sir, just follow me." He turned and walked towards the front entrance, a roundabout way to the service department but a way that would take Jones and his customer past the tower, where he could ensure himself that he would be employed the following day. The old man followed him inside the showroom and Jones walked hurriedly towards the tower. He stuck his head inside the entrance and Shane Grand nodded towards him.

"What's up?" Grand barked, scowling.

"Ah-ah a cus' ... an up, ah-er, he ah-er just wants to go to the service department."

"You sure about that," Grand said.

"Yes-sir, I am."

Grand nodded at the elderly man, now standing behind Jones. "Can I help you sir?"

"Yes, where's your service department?" He glared at Jones and growled, "Thought you was gonna take me to your service department?"

"Service is right down that hall sir," Grand said and winked at Wade Jones. As the old man walked down the hallway, towards the service department, Grand nodded at Jones. "What's your name?"

"Ah-rah—I'm Wade, Wade Jones sir," he replied.

Grand smiled, a young black man. Grand knew they usually made the best salesmen, something about their perceptions of people, he figured. Of course, Grand never knew anyone who he perceived to be as sharp as he was—or Joe Riola—after all that's why they were the management. That and the fact that Gil Dodge wasn't about to put a black man—no matter how many cars he sold—in the tower of power. He chuckled and shook his head thinking about that fact and then patted Jones on the shoulder. "Good work Wade, keep it up."

Grand returned to the tower and Wade Jones walked through the showroom and back onto the lot. He exhaled a stream of toxic smoke and smiled, as Grand had complimented him, maybe he would make it, after all.

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Jimmy Ragoli, a trainee salesman, yawned, as he walked over to two of his classmates. "Anita, Barney, anything happening?"

"Naw it's probably too early," Barney Barton said.

Ragoli nodded and glanced at Barney Barton, then outside, where Wade Jones was now standing, talking to Brad Powers. "Blacks always hang together, huh?"

Barton smiled and looked towards Jones and Powers. "Yeah, you know there are only twelve of us left now—I counted—geez, they fired half the class already Jimmy."

Ragoli, a twenty-year army man, who drew a monthly check for a little over a thousand dollars, smiled. He wasn't worried because he knew how to keep a job. Obedience was a primary factor, along with courtesy and knowledge of the product you were selling, and Ragoli well knew from what he had seen thus far, combined with his past military experience that Dome Dodge was not that different from the army, if you checked in with the tower—before making any kind of decision—your chances of keeping your job were multiplied many times over and being a former enlisted man, Ragoli knew there was always a chain-of-command to follow. He smiled now when he saw a trainee greeting a customer. He watched as the customer got out of his car and walked onto the new-car lot, circling a '91 caravan. He saw him kick the tire, then say something to the salesman.

"Looks like Tommy's got a live one, huh Jimmy."

Ragoli nodded at Barton then smiled when he saw the customer getting back in his car and pulling off the lot. He looked startled, as did Anita Ralston and Barton, when a booming voice, coming from the tower, reverberated over the loudspeakers, "**YOU'D BETTER STOP THAT UP MISTER BRIGGS**, or just go with him, 'cause your job's **GONE IF YOU DON'T!**"

Thomas Jerome Briggs, an ex-pilot with Delta Airlines, ran towards the '87 Ford and yelled for the man to stop but the man didn't, taking his life-long negative opinion of car salesmen with him, along with Tommy Briggs' short-lived job as one.