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STEN COULDN'T IMAGINE what Jars wanted to talk with him about. Given the time and place his friend had chosen, it could have made for fertile speculation. But although Jars had complimented him more than once on his legal creativity, he'd long ago found that trying to guess what the unpredictable CEO of Synapzius had in mind was an exercise in futility.

A glance at his watch confirmed what Sten already knew; Jars was late. Only eight minutes but, for anyone who knew him, Jars being late was tantamount to Warren Buffett being on the losing end of a stock trade. It may have happened. Once.

The view was great. He had to admit that much. At two-hundred and twelve feet in the air and over a mile and a quarter long, the Walkway Over the Hudson is the longest elevated pedestrian walkway in the world. Formerly a railroad bridge, the Walkway had come to life in 2009 after three years construction at a cost of \$3.6 million—of which a certain generous portion had come from an anonymous donor. Sten smiled as the memory of handing the check to the non-profit's chairperson came to mind.

The gates at the western entrance to the Walkway bore the name of a similarly generous organization. If Jars hadn't insisted on anonymity, no doubt the eastern gates would have borne his name. Better that the opportunity remain open to someone with an appetite for such publicity, Jars had remarked. The Walkway could always use the kind of financial support a major donor with a yen to woo the public could provide. With the prospect of Synapzius going public sometime over the next twelve months, perhaps someone had convinced Jars of the marketing windfalls to be had by being less secretive about his philanthropy and their meeting today was a prelude to another gift. Only this time, a contribution to be seen and admired by all. Sten doubted it. His friend might be unpredictable but he was unpredictable in predictable ways.

He had met Jars years ago, when a handsome young man who had just barely crossed the meridian of his twenties approached him looking for an attorney to protect his fledgling firm's intellectual property which, at the time, although Synapzius amounted to little more than Jars and a handful of staff, was impressive and bore tell-tale signs of coming greatness. Sten had since received Jars' promise that, on the day the company ever did go public, Sten could stand by him as he rang the closing bell at the New York Stock Exchange.

But the euphoria of the early years had given way to something else. Something Sten couldn't put his finger on. A change had come over his friend. A change he couldn't account for. Sure, two marriages down the tube in relatively short order would take a toll on anyone. Especially when there were kids involved. It was during the turmoil of domestic disintegration that Jars and Sten had cemented their friendship.

On the outside, the two were polar opposites. Whereas Jars was lean and fit and ran marathons, Sten would have counted himself fortunate to even *walk* a 5K. Ten years Jars' senior, Sten had, early in their relationship, come to realize the younger man's need for someone in his life who appreciated him and enjoyed his company regardless of what he could do for them. Friendship was something that couldn't be bought and Sten had proven himself genuine. True, at this stage of their relationship, Synapzius accounted for the lion's share of Sten's revenue. But that hadn't stopped him from passionately opposing Jars on occasion with counsel the man didn't want to hear but counted on Sten providing. Honest opposition, no matter how vigorous, didn't offend Jars. On the contrary, he was part of the minority who knew how valuable a role it played as it forced him to consider alternatives he either hadn't thought of or, as Sten suspected, occasionally preferred to ignore.

As his first marriage teetered under the weight of apathy on the part of both partners, Sten had implored Jars to ease up on his work and devote more time to his family, admonishing that no relationship could tread water indefinitely. "You either invest in a marriage relationship on an ongoing basis and watch it grow, or, leave it alone and become half of the poisonous concoction killing it," he'd warned.

The blunt words had had an effect and, for a time, Jars had eased off the torrid pace at which he'd driven himself for so many years only to find his wife questioning his dedication to success. Sten met the woman at a Christmas gala she chaired each year for a charity she promoted. It was plain to Sten that their marriage was the least common denominator between the two and was headed for collapse. It did. And so had Jars' second attempt although, by that time, Jars could see the writing on the wall much sooner and like a seasoned taxi driver in the thick of rush hour, shot through the first opening to freedom he'd spied.

As he gazed out over the Hudson River, Sten felt a strong hand clasp his shoulder. "Hey there, Counselor. You look lost in thought. Hope you're not thinking of jumping." Sten turned to face a smiling Jars.

"Glad to see you, Jars. In fact, I was wondering if maybe I could get you to give me a boost up over the railing. Don't think I can quite manage it on my own."

"Not a chance."

"Probably just as well." Sten patted his ample belly. "If I hit the water from this height I might be held responsible for the resulting tsunami!"

Jars laughed then embraced his friend, wrapping strong arms around his longtime pal. The public show of affection took Sten by surprise. Taking a step back, he surveyed the man standing before him. His casual attire was nothing new. Jars seldom wore a tie. But there *was* something different. Sten could sense it.

It was early fall, the time of the year when temperatures could be in the eighties one day and plummet into the sixties the next. Today was somewhere in the middle, a pleasant, balmy mid-seventies day with only a few clouds in the sky to interfere with a sun determined to make the most of the remaining time left to him before his southern trek further weakened his ability to keep the coming winter at bay. The broad expanse of the river was dotted only by a sailboat heading south and double-decker tour boat going in the opposite direction, with the folks on board waving to those on the Walkway and some

on the Walkway waving in return, both parties glad to be where they were but wondering what it might be like to change places.

At Jars' suggestion, the two men began walking, heading towards the eastern end of the Walkway. They had gone nearly halfway across the span when Sten broke the silence. "So," he prodded, "you leave me a message saying you want to meet me here on the Walkway at eleven o'clock in the morning on a Friday after being out of touch for the past two days. You show up late—which you *never* do—and now we're strolling across a bridge over the Hudson River like we haven't got anything better to do."

"We haven't."

"Excuse me?" Jars' casual reply took Sten by surprise.

"You heard me."

"I heard words all right. But I wasn't sure they came out of *your* mouth." Sten decided to probe further. "Where've you been hiding?"

"I was busy doing research."

"You weren't in the lab. I checked."

"Not all research gets done in a lab." Jars' pace slowed then stopped. "Look, Sten, we've been friends a long time. Almost as long as you've been my lawyer." He motioned towards a bench. "Something has come up. That's why I asked you to meet me here. It's personal and I wanted to talk somewhere other than in an office building." He allowed his gaze to follow the river north, towards its source. "Do you remember when I made a donation to this place so the Walkway could be built?" Jars' voice was laden with reflection.

"Yeah. I was thinking about it while I was waiting for you to show up," Sten chided.

Jars ignored the innuendo. "Do you know that today is the first time I've been here since?"

“You’re kidding!”

“Nope. That’s what happens, Sten. You wake up one day and realize you’ve spent the better part of your life in a cage. Granted, it might be a luxurious cage, some of them are. But it doesn’t matter, it’s still a cage.”

“Are you having a mid-life crisis?” Sten asked, only half joking.

Jars gave him a reassuring smile. “Maybe,” he admitted. “But at least I’m meeting it head on.”

“How so?”

“You’ll find out when you get back to your office. There’s an envelope waiting there for you. It should make for interesting reading.”

As Sten drove back to New York in the fading light of late afternoon, he tried to make sense of what the day had revealed. He had to confess, though, it was murky water he was peering into. But he had always loved a good mystery and couldn’t wait to see how this one would play out. Jars could be eccentric but what person who was a game-changer wasn’t?

After reaching the eastern gate of the Walkway, Sten had insisted on ducking into a café for coffee and a pastry claiming a dire need for caffeine and sugar if he was to hold out any hope of making the return trip under his own power. Much to his surprise, after listening to Sten place his order, Jars had told the server to bring him the same, saying only that he thought it was time to see what it was Sten got so excited about every time he got near strudel. After a leisurely stroll back to Highland and the western side of the Walkway, the two had gone to a nearby waterfront restaurant for a late lunch, the Hudson’s waters lapping softly against the deck on which they sat, one table among many.

Although deflecting any of Sten’s more pointed questions, reminding the lawyer that he had an envelope waiting for him back at his office that would shed more light on

things, Jars nonetheless seemed to be in a philosophical mood, urging Sten to share his opinion on a range of topics—none of which had anything to do with technology. Jars had asked one question in particular that had aroused murmurs of concern in Sten’s belly: *What would you be doing right now, Sten, if you thought that today might be your last day alive?* When he’d jokingly replied that he’d have ordered two cheeseburgers instead of one, Jars had chuckled but had pressed him for a more serious answer. Having never soberly considered his own mortality, Sten found himself spewing platitudes sounding good on their surface but which, as he and Jars pondered them together, made him realize he didn’t really know what he would do. He’d never given life much thought. Embarrassed, he’d mumbled an apology only to find Jars looking at him with what struck Sten as genuine empathy, assuring him that he hadn’t done any better with the question the first time around himself and suggesting that perhaps it was worth the two of them reflecting on, inviting Sten to pass along any thoughts on the subject he cared to share. In fact, Jars had been emphatic: no matter the time of day or night, if Sten found himself in the grip of an answer that struck him as true, Jars wanted to hear it. He’d even made Sten promise.

Arriving back in the city well after hours, Sten entered a nearly deserted building riding the elevator up the twelve floors to where his suite was located. The appointments, although not lavish, spoke of excellent taste and enduring quality. Whatever Sten bought, he purchased with the idea of its lasting a good many years. He walked over to the Breville coffee maker, his pride and joy, and brewed himself a cup of his favorite blend, grabbing a leftover donut on his way to his office.

On his desk he found a FedEx package. An attached note from his secretary relayed that it had arrived shortly before five. Seeing as it was from Jars, she had placed it on his desk where he wouldn’t miss seeing it. She would call him at eight this evening if he didn’t text her before and let her know he’d gotten it.

Sten didn’t know what he would do without Ruth. Like gravity, she was always there with behaviors you could count on. He took a generous bite out of the donut and chased the chunk down his throat with hot coffee as he opened the package, spreading the

contents out on his desk: four Tyvek catalog envelopes marked *Synapzius Employee Transition Plan*, *Discovery*, *Will*, and *Sten Calder: Open First*. His pulse quickening, he tore open the envelope marked with his name.

Sten,

Knowing Ruth, I'm confident you're reading this while it's still Friday. I bet we had a good time together earlier. We always do—you're a great friend. The one man in the world I trust completely.

Sorry to have been so obtuse today but it couldn't be helped. You see, when I asked you about what you would do if you thought today might be your last day it wasn't a rhetorical question. It was deeply relevant because today may have been mine.

Now before you go spilling your coffee and choking on whatever your munching on to go with it (I know you, pal) let me explain. Straight out: I've got a terminal condition and my time is limited.

I need you to fight back all the emotions welling up inside of you and work through this with me. You're the only one I can trust and I know I can count on you.

First request: Don't tell a soul. It's my business and there are things I need to do that I wouldn't be able to if word got out.

As for the other envelopes, they aren't to be opened until my death.

The Synapzius Employee Transition Plan lays out a way for my employees to survive my passing. Obviously, the IPO is off now—and I don't want to sell the company or leave it to anyone. It's going to go with me. But the people who I've worked with deserve to be taken care of and should find the arrangements I've made sufficient to ease their transition.

The envelope labeled Discovery contains a breakthrough finding in the field of nanotechnology that is related to my condition. It's worth a lot of money but I want the knowledge to be released into the public domain after I'm gone. It will make the world a safer place.

The last envelope, the one marked Will, is self-explanatory. We've spent so much time together over the years that I thought I'd take a shot at lawyering. I couldn't have you draw it up as it would have spoiled all my fun. If anyone challenges my Will, defend it with your last ounce of strength and my last dollar. Which, by the way, as you'll see in the enclosed Power of Attorney, you have control over. I'll be in touch...

Jars