## **Master Distiller**

**XAVIER** 

"Single, neat," I requested from the flannel-clad bartender.

Looking out across the showroom of the whiskey distillery, I sighed. I was in a bar again. Half of me knew that this was the last place I should be. But the other half didn't care.

I'd spent the day flipping through my contacts, sending emails to anyone and everyone who had known my father, who I'd worked with, or who owned a business in the city. And no one had responded yet.

I'd hit a wall. I didn't necessarily want to go back to an office, but it was all I had ever known. What else could I do?

My only other dream had been to race cars. And *that* was obviously not a sustainable choice.

I took a sip of the bourbon in my tumbler. It burned my throat as it went down.

One of my father's old notebooks was on the bar beside me. I'd brought it hoping that he could give me some inspiration from beyond the grave. He'd switched careers in 1980, just like I was doing now.

I wish he was here with me now. He would know just what I should do.

But his words were the next best thing. I hadn't looked at his diaries since I came back from Tokyo. It was like I was hiding from my father. And I was sick of hiding.

I opened his journal to a dog-eared page and began to read.

## **BRAD**

11/29/1980 - Miami, Florida

*I'm writing from a beach cabana, bursting with energy. Amelia's at the spa.* 

I think I'm experiencing the culmination of the confusing and intense emotions that have been plaguing me the past few weeks. My hand feels like it's on fire as I write this!

How can I describe it all? I've been so frustrated. I arrive at the office only to feel like a tiger in a cage. I'm full of ideas, but none of them ease the work in front of me.

When I talk to Dad, he looks at me like I have two heads.

It's because I can't stop thinking about travel, and what people want, what makes them happy. My mind is always a

million miles from oil. Yesterday, I discovered a quote.

"Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is

stupid." Everything fell into place for me. At the oil company, I've been a fish trying to climb a tree.

I never thought I would stay in oil. I knew I would move on and start my own business eventually. I was thinking hospitality.

But then I became complacent. I got used to working under my father. Thinking like a tycoon.

*Now I know my time has come to move on. And I know just what I'll do.* 

All it took was this little vacation.

Last night, Amelia and I came down to the lobby, and I watched as she walked over the marble floor. She looked up to the ceiling, to the dangling chandelier.

She was like a kid at Disney World.

It made me realize that I can make a business from what I love the most. I can make a business from vacation.

Yes, I'm returning to that old dream of hospitality. But now I know what it really means. I'm going to build hotels.

It won't be a walk in the park. It won't be a vacation. But it's where my heart is leading me.

It'll be worth it. When we return home in a few days, I'll break the news to my father.

I know he'll understand. Maybe he'll even be relieved.

*I'll tell Amelia at dinner tonight. We have a table booked on the beach.* 

*Imagine all the places we'll go together...* She's going to be so happy, she'll want to marry me all over again!

**XAVIER** 

## I finished the entry and stared into space over the bar in front of me.

My father's excitement had rubbed off on me through the pages of his diary. I felt his same sense of possibility.

But what was *my* thing? What did I love?

I glanced down at my empty glass of whiskey.

Huh.

Whiskey.

It was definitely something I loved, but could it be a business?

Thanks to my sessions with Dr. Elmore, I was no longer in a toxic relationship with it. Even though I was opposed to the whole therapy thing at first, I really was beginning to establish healthier habits.

Which meant I could have one drink, like this, instead of drinking myself into oblivion.

I had to admit, Dr. Elmore had helped me work through the whole thing. She made me realize just what alcohol was helping me escape from.

Sure, this craft bourbon was nice. But I knew it could be better. Could I be the one to make it? The bartender came over to me.

"Another round?" he asked.

"Not today," I replied. "How did you like the Tennessee bourbon?"

"It's a nice one," I said. "I was just wondering what it would taste like if it were a little less smoky."

arm. "Maybe I'll see you around."

He raised his eyebrows. "Sounds like we got an expert on our hands!"

He stuck out his hand to shake mine. "I'm Al," he introduced. "I'm one of the distillers here. And I was fighting for a fruitier bourbon as well." I returned his easy smile. "Nice to meet you, Al. I'm Xavier." I slid off the barstool, tucking Dad's journal under my

"Before you go," the distiller continued, "let me give you my business card. You never know, it might come in handy sometime."

He gave me a smile as I took the card. I glanced at his name: Al Tenenbaum. Then I left the bar, heading out into the bright sun.

I returned to the penthouse to find huge cardboard boxes in the living room.

"For the children," she responded.

Huh. It must be furniture. But Angela hadn't mentioned anything to me about shopping.

My phone buzzed.

room

Suddenly, I remembered an afternoon over a year ago, when Danny and Ken had showed up wearing tool belts, ready

Angela My Dad and Danny are coming over to help with

Angela

to build us a nursery ...

Sorry I forgot to mention! Suddenly, the intercom rang.

"Hello?" I asked into the speaker. "The Carsons are here, sir," the doorman confirmed.

Just as I suspected. "Send 'em up!" I said.

each other halfway.

much as a screwdriver since I was a kid.

But I shouldn't have worried. Soon, Ken and Danny were entering the penthouse carrying huge toolboxes. "Son!" Ken called, pulling me into a bear hug.

"Nice to see you on two legs again," Danny added, clapping my back. I couldn't be more different than the two men before me, but in the time we'd known each other, we'd learned to meet

While I waited for them to arrive, I tried to remember if we had any tools in the penthouse. Hell, I hadn't used so

"Thanks for the nursery stuff. And for coming over to help. It's really thoughtful of you." Ken waved away my niceties.

"It's my pleasure!" he boomed. "And I always say, you don't know a man until you've seen him use a hammer." He smiled at me expectantly. Apparently, I was going to help with this project. Or at least, I was going to try not to fuck it up.

"I've never heard you say that," Danny remarked. "Ah, well," Ken smiled, undisturbed. "Lead the way to the nursery, boss."

An hour later, the three of us were surrounded by the pieces of the second crib. I had mostly looked on as Ken and Danny assembled the first, and now Ken expected me to take charge.

I looked around me, lost. How was it possible for something to have so many pieces? "Uhhhh," I said, lost.

Ken didn't waste any time, picking up two pieces of the frame and holding them at a ninety-degree angle.

"You guys have a lot of work to do before those babies come," Ken started. "All this fancy design stuff you have is nice and all, but not good for babies. As soon as they start walking, they'll be hitting their heads on the sharp corners." He drilled the pieces together.

"And the balcony ..." he continued. "That's a baby nightmare."

I gulped, imagining two babies toddling around the penthouse balcony, sixty stories above the sidewalk. As if Ken knew he was getting somewhere with me, he decided to drill the point home.

"You guys might even want to think about a new place. The city is no place for a baby. They won't have a backyard to play in." "I didn't have a backyard, and I grew up alright," I replied.

Ken narrowed his eyes at me, not believing a word. I had to admit that he had a point. I had fond memories of playing outside our house in the Hamptons, rolling around

in the grass. I hardly had any memories of the city.

before ...

Is that what I wanted for the twins? Sure, I could build a crib. But what I wanted was to give my kids the best possible home

The idea struck me like a lightning bolt. I knew exactly what to do. And I couldn't believe I hadn't thought of it