Paul smirked at the notion that fear was a coward and a liar; what would fear be afraid of, and why would it lie? Rafe was speaking as though fear were a real living being, some sort of demon that could take physical possessions of your body, make you do things you didn’t want to do. Could it be that his fear really wasn’t part of him but some external thing trying to work its way in from the outside?

“Have you ever seen the great Wall of China?” Something in the way he said it suggested to Paul that not only had Rafe seen the Great Wall, he’d watched it being built. “Like most such walls, it was much better at keeping people in than at keeping invaders out. The Great Wall was a prison wall. So is fear.

“Fear is a prison. It will no more keep frightening things out of your life than the Great Wall kept Mongol invaders out of China. But it can destroy your freedom of action so effectively that you can’t do the things that could prevent what you fear from happening.”

Paul’s image looked at his watch and pushed away from the table. Joan wasn’t ready to quit, though. “Why don’t you call Bill Roberts? He might lend you money.”

Paul snorted. “Roberts thinks I’m nuts for spending all my time with this school instead of starting a real business with a real bottom line. Nothing would give him more pleasure than to have me come begging for a handout.”

“Then what about your father? He might give you a loan.”

Paul rolled his eyes, remembering the early years when his father called almost every day with leads on a “real” job, and once a week sent a bundle full of newspaper help wanted ads. “Dad’s got his own problems. He doesn’t need to have a failed son come asking for handouts.”

“Then I’m going back to work.”
“No way! The kids need you at home now, especially with Jeff having so much trouble at school.”

“Well, Paul, just what are we going to do?”

Paul’s image picked up his briefcase and refilled the coffee mug. When Joan put her hands on her hips, he knew it was time to exit. “Don’t worry, honey, everything will be okay. It’ll work out fine. The bank will give us a loan extension, but I do have to get into the office and get prepared for that meeting.” Paul watched his image slink out of the kitchen toward the front door. Joan wiped her hands on her apron as she followed him out for a perfunctory kiss at the doorway.

“Are you telling Joan the truth, Paul, or is that just wishful thinking?” Paul marveled at Rafe’s penchant for asking questions that permitted only one truthful answer.

POSITIVE THINKING IS WORKING FOR SOMETHING AND BELIEVING IT WILL HAPPEN.

WISHFUL THINKING IS WAITING FOR SOMETHING AND Hoping IT WILL HAPPEN.

Never Fear, Never Quit

“I’m surprised at you, Rafe. Haven’t you ever heard of the power of positive thinking?”

“Yes indeed. In fact I’d like to think that I played some small part in the writing of a book by that name. But do you know the distinction between positive thinking and wishful thinking?”

“Tell me.”

“Positive thinking is believing something will happen, wishful thinking is hoping it will happen. Positive thinking is working for something to happen, wishful thinking is waiting for it to happen.

“Wishful thinking is the lock that fear puts on the prison gate. You know the good-cop/bad-cop routine? Where the bad cop beats you up and then the good cop gets you to confess by treating you well? Well, fear is the bad cop, threatening you with doom and dread. But fear needs a good cop, or else you might just get frightened enough to do something constructive to chase fear away.

“So fear lets you indulge yourself for a while in flights of wishful thinking. Somehow, you think, something will happen to make the problems go away. By the time you wake up, it’s too late. What you feared has happened, and fear has defeated you.
“The only way to escape from the prison of fear is action. You cannot wish your way out, you cannot wait your way out. You can only work your way out. Every time you escape the prison of fear, you grow stronger and more confident. It will always be there, trying to wall you in, but you will eventually grow so strong that you can just step right over the walls.”