

Primary Colors

(Adapted book. Intermediate level)

Chapter 1. Governor Jack Stanton: The Best

I'll always remember the moment that I met Jack Stanton outside the library in Harlem, New York City. My first thought was that he looked strange in Harlem. Stanton is white and most of the people who live in Harlem are black, like me.

"You're the guy that I've been hearing about," he said as he shook my hand. All politicians are good at shaking hands but Jack Stanton is the best. I've seen him do it two million times now and I still don't understand exactly how he does it. It's actually his left hand that makes him so good. He might put it on your elbow to show you that he's interested in you. He might squeeze your shoulder with it and tell you a joke. He might just hold your wrist and look into your eyes. I remember that he squeezed my shoulder that day in Harlem, and then he was gone, shaking someone else's hand. I followed Howard Ferguson into the library where a teacher began to tell us about her program. She taught adults how to read.

Howard leaned over and whispered, "I'm glad you're here, Henry. Jack really wants you to work for him. He thinks you're the best."

I wasn't sure that I wanted to work for Jack. I was tired of politics. I had quit working for Senator William Larkin after six years and I was happy with my job as a college teacher.

Still, there was something different about Jack Stanton. When most white politicians arrive in New York City, they go to Wall Street - that's where the businessmen work and that's where the money is - but Jack Stanton had gone to Harlem instead. That interested me.

The students were waiting for their reading lesson to begin.

"This is Governor Jack Stanton," said the teacher. "He's now running for President. Would you like to say a few words, Governor Stanton?"

He smiled and said, "Not just yet," in his slow, southern accent. We watched the lesson. When it was over the students told the Governor about themselves. The last student to speak was a young man named Dewayne Smith. He weighed at least three hundred pounds.

"I failed in school because I couldn't read," he said. "I kept going to school but I still didn't learn to read. I felt stupid as a rock and nobody cared. Nobody said, 'Dewayne, you can't read, you need help.' I saw all the other kids reading books and it made me so sad." I looked at Jack Stanton. His face was red and there were tears in his eyes. "Dewayne," he said. "I am very grateful that you shared that with us. Now let me tell you a story about my Uncle Charlie. Charlie was a hero in World War Two. He saved twenty American soldiers in a battle with the Japanese. When he came home he was famous; the whole town had a big party for him. People said, 'Charlie, what are you going to do now?' A rich man offered to pay for him to go to college. Someone else offered him a job as the manager of a bank. Everybody wanted to give Charlie a job. Do you know what Charlie did?"

“No,” said Dewayne. “What did he do?”

“Nothing. He just lay on the sofa and smoked his cigarettes.” “Was he a little crazy because of the war?” asked a woman. “No,” said Stanton. “It was because he couldn’t read.”

“What?”

“That’s right,” said Stanton. “He couldn’t read and he was too embarrassed to tell anyone. He was brave enough to be a hero in World War Two but he wasn’t brave enough to do what you people are doing right now. When people ask me, ‘Jack Stanton, why do you spend so much money on government programs to teach adults to read?’ I tell them that it gives me a chance to meet real heroes. People like you. I am very grateful you let me visit you today.” They loved him. They shook his hand and put their arms around him. He didn’t back away the way that most politician do. He loved them just as much as they loved him. I think that’s one of the things that makes Stanton so special; he just loves people.

“He’s very good,” Howard Ferguson whispered to me. “Don’t you want to work for him?”

Stanton walked up to us. “Where do we go now, Howard?”

“The Times offices. We have to hurry.”

Stanton looked at me and said, “Henry, can you meet us at the Regency Hotel at eleven o’clock tonight?”

“Eleven o’clock?” It seemed very late.

“What’s the matter?” laughed Stanton. “Are you going to a party?”

“No.”

“Then we’ll see you at the Regency at eleven.”

* * *

Stanton had several rooms at the Regency and they were all busy. There were a dozen campaign workers talking on telephones, typing on computers and eating sandwiches.

“Henry Burton!”

I turned and saw a man that I knew.

“It’s good to see you,” he said. “I’m glad you’re working for Stanton too.”

“Well, I’m not sure that I’m going to...”

“He thinks you’re great, Henry. Just great! We’re going to win this, you know. Jack Stanton is going to be the next President of the United States of America.”

“I hope so!” said a voice behind us.

We both turned around to see Jack Stanton. He had just opened his bedroom door and was buttoning his shirt.

“Hello, Henry!” he laughed. “I’m glad you’re working for us.”

“Well, I’m not sure...” I stopped speaking because I saw there was a woman in the bedroom with Stanton. She was getting dressed too.

“Henry,” said Stanton, “you remember Ms. Baum don’t you?”

I did. She was the teacher at the library in Harlem. When she had finished buttoning her blouse, she walked to the bedroom door and said, “Well Governor. It was nice to...”

“Don’t you think that Ms. Baum has a great program there in Harlem, Henry?” asked Stanton.

He put his hand on her shoulder then leaned over and whispered something in her ear. She smiled and walked away.

“Governor!” shouted one of the campaign workers. “Your wife is on the phone.”

He handed Stanton a pocket telephone. Stanton took a bite from a sandwich, then spoke into the phone. “Hi, honey ... I know and I’m sorry. I tried to call you from Harlem ... Tonight?” He put his hand over the phone. “Charlie?”

A little old man walked up to Stanton.

“Charlie,” said Stanton. “Did you forget about a meeting with some people from the New Hampshire Democratic Party tonight?”

Charlie just smiled.

“Charlie!” Stanton put the phone to his ear. “Susan? I’m sorry. Charlie forgot. I meant to call you from Harlem ... Susan, listen ... Susan? Of course I love you ... Listen, honey, everything’s going to be okay. I mean it. Susan? ...”

He put the telephone down. “I’d better go to New Hampshire. Where’s the airplane?”

“Teteboro Airport,” answered somebody.

“Okay! Let’s go! Let’s go! Are you coming Henry?”

“What?” New Hampshire was a long way from New York. I wasn’t ready to travel.

Stanton went in the bathroom. When he came out again he handed me a toothbrush and a comb.

“Is there anything else you need?”

“I have to teach tomorrow.”

“Tell them you’re sick. Let’s go.”

“I have all your clothes right here, Governor,” said Charlie. He was carrying a suitcase.

“Henry,” said Stanton. “This is my Uncle Charlie, the war hero.”

* * *

Jack Stanton’s wife was waiting for us at Manchester Airport in New Hampshire.

“Susan Stanton,” she said as she shook my hand.

“Henry Burton.”

“I’m glad you’re here. Jack Stanton needs someone like you because he doesn’t have a brain in his head!”

“Aw, honey,” said Stanton. He tried to put his arm on her shoulder, but she pushed him away.

“Jack,” she said, “in the American primary election, the first state to vote is New Hampshire. It’s very important that you win here in New Hampshire. But if you’re going to win the election here in New Hampshire, you have to be perfect. You can’t tell people you’ll meet them and then not do it.”

“Aw, honey,” said Stanton. “We worked hard in New York. Henry and I went to a library in Harlem where adults were learning to read. The teacher was...”

“She was what?” said Susan.

“She was a wonderful teacher,” I said quickly.

“That’s right,” said Stanton. “She was a wonderful teacher.”

We walked toward a waiting car.

“Are you going to work for us?” Susan Stanton asked me. “What do you want me to do?”

“Help Jack. Help him run for President of the United States. He’s going to win.”

Chapter 2. Trouble with the Press

Jack Stanton was the governor of a state in the southern United States. The biggest city in the state was Mammoth Falls. During the first few months of the campaign, I spent about half of my time there.

My best friend in Mammoth Falls was Richard Jemmons. He also worked for Stanton. He was very intelligent, very nervous, very thin, and always worrying. He worried about scandals. He used to call me several times a day.

“Did you hear anything, Henry? he asked one day. “I’m worried that the press is going to find something.”

“What are they going to find?”

“That’s the problem. We don’t know! Maybe drugs! Maybe women! I think we should investigate Stanton. That way we’ll know about the bad things he’s done before the press does.” “We’re doing fine, Richard,” I said. “Stop worrying.”

But Richard was right to worry. Our problems started after the first television debate in New Hampshire on January 17th. When the debate was over I noticed one of Stanton’s workers talking to a tall journalist. She looked a little frightened, so I went to see what was wrong.

“Hi.” I said.

“Mr. Burton.” said the journalist, “maybe you can help me. Was Governor Stanton arrested during the Vietnam War?”

The Vietnam War was something that we were worried about. The Americans who had fought in it were the same age as Stanton. But instead of fighting in Vietnam, Stanton had stayed in America and protested against the war.

“I don’t know,” I answered. “I can ask him and tell you later.” “All right.” He handed me a card that said Los Angeles Times.

I found Stanton with Susan and Uncle Charlie. He looked nervous. “Let’s go, let’s go, let’s go!” he said. We went outside and hurried across the snow.

The reporter was waiting for us by our van. “Governor Stanton,” he said calmly, “were you ever arrested in a protest against the Vietnam War?”

“No,” said Stanton.

“Are you sure?”

“I protested against the war. Everyone knows that.”

“But you weren’t arrested on August 16, 1968, in Chicago during a protest led by Abbie Hoffman?”

Stanton didn’t seem worried. “I wasn’t arrested. The police stopped me and then let me go. They made a mistake.”

“So you weren’t arrested?”

“No. I was in Chicago visiting friends. I joined a protest. The police made a mistake.”

We got into the van and drove away.

That Saturday we drove through New Hampshire followed by two vans full of reporters. In a small town named Laconia I watched Stanton at work, shaking hands with people and listening to their problems. I watched an old woman put her arms around him. “You remind me of President Kennedy,” she said. “He came to Laconia too. You’re not as thin as he was, but you’re just as handsome.”

We were about to get back inside the van when a reporter ran up and said, “Governor Stanton, the Los Angeles Times says that you were arrested during a protest against the Vietnam war in 1968.”

“Yes, I know,” said Stanton. “The police stopped me, but they didn’t arrest me. They made a mistake.”

“The Los Angeles Times also says that you called a United States Senator who was a friend of yours. You asked him to tell the police to let you go.”

“I don’t know about that,” said Stanton.

* * *

The next morning we had breakfast in the Stantons’ hotel room. There was coffee and eggs and bacon.

“The Los Angeles Times story is terrible,” said Susan. “Jack wasn’t a criminal.”

“No,” said my friend Richard, “but people think he was a criminal.”

“People don’t care about that kind of thing,” said Susan.

“The press cares about that kind of thing,” said Richard, “so we have to care about that kind of thing too. The problem is, we’re doing our jobs blind!”

“What are you talking about?” asked Susan.

Daisy Green, a thin, intelligent young woman who worked as one of Stanton’s advisors, answered. “I think Richard means that we need to know more about Governor Stanton, and not just the good things. We need to know the bad things too. That way we’ll be more prepared to answer questions from the press.”

“You mean we need a detective to investigate my husband?” asked Susan.

“Yes,” said Richard.

My pocket telephone rang.

“Hello?”

“Henry!” I recognized the voice of one of Stanton’s campaign workers. “I’m waiting for Stanton. He’s about to come out of a church, but there are at least forty journalists here. They’ve all read the Los Angeles Times story and they’re waiting to ask him about what happened in Chicago.”

“Okay, listen,” I said. “Go in and tell him the press is outside. Tell him to act like he has nothing to hide, okay?”

“Thanks, Henry.”

I put my telephone away. “The press is waiting for him,” I said. “They’re going to ask him about Chicago.”

“You see, Susan?” said Richard. “We need to know about things like Chicago. We’re blind right now.”

* * *

It was rainy and cold that evening when Daisy knocked on my hotel door.

“Are you still awake?” She pushed past me, sat down on my bed and turned on my TV. “The television in my room is broken.”

“Daisy,” I said. “I’m really tired.”

“Then go to sleep.”

I did. But when I woke up an hour later, Daisy was lying next to me, her hand on my chest.

“Stanton’s arrest in Chicago was on the news,” she said. “Richard’s right. We need someone to investigate Stanton.”

Then she kissed me. It was our first kiss and it went on for a long time. Finally she stopped and said, “I don’t think the Los Angeles Times story will hurt Stanton.”

* * *

The next morning Richard, Daisy, and I met with Susan Stanton in her hotel room.

“Okay” Susan said slowly. “We’ll investigate Jack, but we’ll tell him about it. And we’ll get Libby Holden to do it.”

“Libby Holden?” asked Richard.

Susan nodded.

“Is she okay? Is she out of the hospital?”

Susan nodded.

“Is she still crazy?”

Susan just smiled.

Chapter 3. Cashmere McLeod

Two days later I was back in the campaign office in Mammoth Falls when Libby Holden walked in. She was an enormous woman with angry blue eyes and long gray hair. Everyone in the office stopped working to look at her. She stormed up to my desk and shouted, “I’m HERE!”

“Hello, I’m Henry Burton.”

“Ah HAH!” she answered.

“Was Stanton arrested in Chicago?” I asked.

“OF COURSE he was!” shouted Libby.

“Did he ask a Senator to tell the police to let him go?”

“Of COURSE he did! He’s guilty, guilty, GUILTY! But we don’t have to worry about CHICAGO! Chicago is a LITTLE problem. We have a BIG problem - Cashmere McLeod.”

“Who’s Cashmere McLeod?”

“Jack Stanton’s lover!”

“His lover?”

“Yes, stupid, his lover! She’s going to tell the National Flash all about Jack Stanton. The National Flash is going to pay her a hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars. She’s working with a lawyer named Randy Culligan on this.”

“Are you sure about this?” I asked.

“NO! I’m telling you this because I’m crazy. OF COURSE I’M SURE!”

“When did this happen?” I asked. “When did Stanton meet her?”

“1989. Maybe it was 1988.” She took a book out of her big leather bag and quickly turned the pages. “Here,” she said. “Jack Stanton drove Cashmere McLeod home from a party on the night of April 12, 1989. He stayed at her house for an hour. What do you think they did during that hour? Do you think they PLAYED CARDS?”

* * *

As one problem got better the other got worse. That Thursday morning, just as people were starting to forget about Chicago, Cashmere McLeod’s picture appeared on the cover of the National Flash. I was in the hotel in New Hampshire when I saw it. I was surprised at the photograph; Cashmere McLeod had an odd nose and strange lips. The telephone in my hotel room rang while I was reading the story.

“We have TROUBLE, Henry! We have big TROUBLE!” “Good morning, Libby,” I said.

“She’s got tape recordings!”

“Who does?”

“CASHMERE MCLEOD!”

“Tape recordings of what?”

“Try not to be so STUPID! What do you think are on her tape recordings? The Beatles? She’s got tapes of Jack Stanton talking to her on the telephone! LOVE tapes, Henry. They talked about SEX!”

“What’s she going to do with them?”

“She’s going to play them for the press tomorrow. It will be on television! Come back to Mammoth Falls as fast as you can, Henry. Go wake up Jack and Susan Stanton. Tell them that Cashmere has love tapes, then get on a plane for Mammoth Falls.”

“You think I should tell them now?” I said. “They’re going to be interviewed on television in three hours. Maybe I should wait until they’re finished.”

“BRILLIANT, Henry. You’re BRILLIANT. Do you want someone to tell Jack and Susan that Cashmere has sex tapes while they’re on TELEVISION? In front of MILLIONS OF AMERICANS?”

I went down the hall and knocked on the Stantons’ door. Susan was sitting at a table drinking tea and reading a newspaper. Jack was trying to decide which tie to wear.

“Governor,” I said. “I just talked to Libby. She says that Cashmere McLeod has tape recordings of you and her talking on the telephone. She’s going to play them for the press tomorrow.”

Susan stood up, raised her hand, and hit her husband hard across his face. It was a perfect shot and made an ugly noise. Stanton was still for a moment, then he reached up and gently touched the skin on his cheek.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“Henry,” said Susan, “would you please excuse us?”

* * *

I saw the interview on television.

“Were you arrested in Chicago during the Vietnam War?” asked the interviewer.

Susan and Jack looked calm. Jack said, “I protested against it but I never broke the law. I was never arrested.”

“And what about Cashmere McLeod, Governor?”

Jack looked shocked. “You don’t believe what you read in the National Flash, do you? I mean look at the rest of the paper: ‘GIANT HORSES LIVE ON THE MOON!!’ I don’t think the American people are really interested in that. I think they’re interested in a better government and a better future.”

Susan smiled and held his hand.

“So you deny being Cashmere McLeod’s lover?” asked the interviewer.

“Yes, I do,” said Stanton. He looked angry now. “It never happened. My wife and I have had some problems in the past, but they’re over now.”

“That’s right,” said Susan. “The American people have nothing to worry about with Jack Stanton. He’ll be a wonderful President.”

* * *

I flew from New Hampshire to Mammoth Falls. When I walked into Libby’s office she said, “HENRY! We’ve got to move. We’re going to a friend’s house to watch Cashmere McLeod play her tape recordings. Come on!”

“Who’s your friend?” I asked when we were in her car.

“He’s an electrician. He might be able to help us with Cashmere McLeod.”

Libby’s friend lived in a house in the forest. He was a friendly looking man with long hair and a beard. His house was full of tape recorders, cameras, and televisions. We sat down to watch Cashmere McLeod while he made a tape recording.

Cashmere appeared on the television next to her lawyer. She was a short, heavy woman, and she wore too much makeup.

“Governor Stanton was my lover,” she said. Her voice sounded like a mouse. “I have tape recordings to prove it.”

Her lawyer coughed and said, “I will now play a tape recording that Miss McLeod made in November.”

He pressed a button on a tape recorder. I recognized Stanton’s voice.

* * *

JACK: We’re going to have to stop this for now.

CASHMERE: But you said you loved me.

JACK: I just have to be careful, honey. I'm spending almost all of my time in New Hampshire now.

CASHMERE: You said I could come to New Hampshire and see you.

JACK: I've got to go.

* * *

Libby turned to her friend and said, "Is that a real tape recording? Did they change anything?"

"No. That was a real tape recording."

"How could Jack be so STUPID?"

We looked back at the television. Cashmere's lawyer was holding up another tape recording. He said, "This is one from last summer." We heard the voice of Jack Stanton again.

* * *

JACK: Hi, honey

CASHMERE: You said you would call me yesterday JACK: I know and I'm sorry. I tried to call you from Harlem. CASHMERE: Don't you love me any more?

JACK: Of course I love you. Honey, everything's going to be okay. I mean it.

* * *

"He was calling from a pocket telephone on that one," said the electrician. "It's easy to change a recording of a conversation on a pocket phone. I'll have to listen to it again."

"How could he be so stupid?" asked Libby again.

My pocket telephone rang. It was Richard. "Did you see it?" he asked. "What did you think?"

"I ... There was something," I said. "There was a sentence or a word in the tape recording that reminded me of something. Hey, could you play that again?"

"Who are you talking to?" asked Richard.

"Richard, I've got to go."

I put my telephone away.

"The second tape recording," I said.

The man pressed a few buttons and we listened again.

* * *

JACK: Hi, honey.

CASHMERE: You said you would call me yesterday.

JACK: I know and I'm sorry I tried to call you from Harlem.

CASHMERE: Don't you love me any more?

JACK: Of course I love you. Honey, everything's going to be okay. I mean it.

* * *

"Play it again," I said.

"What is it, Henry?" asked Libby.

"There's something ... Again!"

"I know and I'm sorry. I tried to call you from Harlem."

That was it. I knew what it was.

“Of course I love you. Honey, everything’s going to be okay. I mean it.”

“I remember!” I shouted. “He was talking to his wife!”

Libby gave me a strange look. “What?”

“It was the day I first met Jack Stanton last summer in New York. In Harlem. Later that night his wife called and Jack said, ‘I’m sorry. I tried to call you from Harlem.’ They changed the tape! Everything’s okay!”

“No, it’s not,” said Libby. “We can tell the press that they changed the tape recording, but we can’t prove it. They won’t believe us. Unless...”

“Unless what?” I said.

She didn’t answer.

* * *

“I don’t know why Cashmere McLeod and her lawyer were so stupid,” said Libby. “They had enough real tape recordings of Jack Stanton and Cashmere McLeod. They didn’t have to change anything.”

“Where are we going?” I asked. It was later that same day and we were driving down the highway in Libby’s car.

“I can’t tell you,” she said.

We parked in front of a large, old office building.

“Where are we?” I asked.

“Don’t ask questions,” she said. “Listen, Henry. I’m going to go into that building and do something crazy. It’s probably better if you don’t go with me.”

“I’ll go,” I said.

We walked into the building and went up some stairs. Libby knocked on a door that said, “LAW OFFICES OF RANDY CULLIGAN.” When there was no answer, she stepped back and kicked the door open.

Randy Culligan, Cashmere McLeod’s lawyer, was sitting behind a desk talking on the telephone. He looked up and said “What the...”

“HI, RANDY!” said Libby. “Are you talking to Cashmere? Let me say hi!”

“No...” said Culligan. He put the phone down.

It was a small, dirty office. On the wall behind the desk, there was a photograph of Culligan shaking hands with Jack Stanton. Both men were smiling.

Libby sat down in a chair. “I didn’t know you were an electrician, Randy.”

“I don’t know what you...”

“You’ve been making tape recordings of Governor Stanton’s telephone conversations.”

“I have not. Why would I do that?”

“I’m not in the mood to argue” said Libby. She reached into her leather bag and pulled out a big gun. “Randy,” she said calmly, “I want you to write a letter to the press. I want you to tell them the truth. Tell them that you changed those tape recordings.”

Randy looked shocked. “You’re crazy!” he shouted.

“YES I AM,” Libby shouted back. “Crazy people can do what they want! They don’t get in trouble “

Randy looked at me. “You’ll get arrested too,” he said.

“No, he won’t,” said Libby. “He didn’t know I had this gun. Now, are you going to write that letter?”

She pointed the gun straight at him. His eyes grew wide - it really was a big gun.

“OKAY!” he said. “Okay, okay, okay!”

“Thank you, Randy,” Libby smiled. “That’s very wise.”

Chapter 4. Fat Willie

Two days later Randy Culligan’s letter appeared in almost all of the newspapers in America. After that, the Cashmere McLeod scandal was not such a big problem for us.

A few days after Cashmere McLeod’s television show, I was back in my office in Mammoth Falls. I was getting ready to fly to California for a Democratic meeting in Los Angeles and I had a lot to do. My mother and father lived in Los Angeles, and I wanted to have time to visit them.

One of Stanton’s campaign workers opened the door and said, “Henry, there’s a large black gentleman named Mr. McCollister here. He says he wants to talk with you.”

“What does he want?”

“He won’t tell me. But he says he’ll kick down the door if you don’t see him right now.”

When McCollister came in I recognized him immediately. He was Fat Willie. He owned the Governor’s favorite restaurant in Mammoth Falls. I had eaten there many times and I had met Fat Willie’s wife and his pretty teenage daughter. Today, he looked worried.

“What can I do for you, Mr. McCollister?” I asked.

“It’s about my daughter Loretta...”

“Yes?”

“She’s going to have a baby and she says Jack Stanton is the father.”

* * *

I couldn’t talk to Stanton on the airplane to California because Susan was sitting next to him. He was in a good mood during the flight. He sang songs, told jokes, and cheated at cards while I worried. We had real problems if Jack Stanton was the father of that baby. I didn’t understand why Willie had told me about it. I supposed it was because I was black like him.

My mother and father were waiting when we landed at Santa Monica Airport in Los Angeles. I introduced them to Stanton. “Your son is the best,” he said.

When we were in the airport building, I followed Stanton into the men’s room.

“Governor,” I said when we were alone.

“They’re great,” said Stanton. “Your parents are just great!”

“Governor.”

“What is it?” He could see that I was worried.

“Fat Willie came to my office this morning. His daughter is going to have a baby. She says that you’re the father.”

He turned and hit the wall. “I just don’t have any luck, do I?” he said. “Will Fat Willie tell the press?”

“I don’t know.”

“I just don’t have any luck.”

* * *

The Democratic meeting in Los Angeles did not go well. Most of the people who came seemed more interested in their clothes than in Stanton. Stanton didn’t seem to care. He didn’t shake many hands that night.

We flew from Los Angeles to New Hampshire. It felt cold after California, so cold that it hurt. I went to the hotel and slept. In the late afternoon, Stanton knocked on my door.

“Okay, Henry,” he said. “We’ve got to call Willie. You make sure no one comes in while I’m talking. Where’s Susan?”

“Meeting with some people at a hospital.”

“Good.” He sat down and picked up the telephone. “Willie?” he said into the phone. “How are things? ... Look, I know this must be just awful for you. We’re old friends Willie and I’m going to help you ... No Willie, I am not the father ... Well, she’s a teenager. You know how teenagers are. I’ll be back in Mammoth Falls next week and we’ll talk then.”

He hung up and stared at the wall.

* * *

The last debate in New Hampshire was held just a few days before the New Hampshire primary election. I watched it on television. Stanton did well until the end when somebody asked, “What do you think the American people want from a President?”

One of the other politicians in the debate, Lawrence Harris, looked at Stanton and said, “I think the American people want someone honest. Governor Stanton is intelligent and kind. But is a man who has to fight off scandals the best man the Democrats have? I don’t think he is.”

* * *

The New Hampshire primary election was on February 17th. Lawrence Harris won, but Stanton got a lot of votes. We all flew back to Mammoth Falls feeling very tired.

Early the next morning, Stanton knocked on the door of my apartment. “Wake up, Henry! Wake up! We’re going for a drive to Grace Junction.”

“Why are we going to Grace Junction?”

“My mother lives there. We’ll visit her and we’ll see the countryside. Come on!”

When we got into Stanton’s car, Uncle Charlie was sitting in the back. We drove south for about thirty miles, then turned west onto a smaller road. When we were about ten miles from Grace Junction, Stanton said, “Henry, I want you to visit my mother while I go over to Doctor Hastings’ office for a blood test.”

“Why are you getting a blood test?” I asked. “Is it because of Fat Willie’s daughter?”

“Yeah. I want to prove that I’m not the father of her baby.”

Stanton drove up to a small house and got out of the car. His mother came out and shouted, “Hooray! Hooray! You did great in New Hampshire.”

“We did okay in New Hampshire, Momma,” said Stanton. “We didn’t win.”

“You’re going to win the big one,” she said. “My boy is going to be the next President of the United States!”

“Momma, I’ve got to go see Doctor Hastings,” said Stanton. “Uncle Charlie and Henry will stay here with you.”

“I’ll come with you, Governor,” said Uncle Charlie. “I have some business with Jerry Conway He lives near Doctor Hastings.”

When Jack and Uncle Charlie were gone, Momma Stanton and I went inside.

“Do you have any pictures of Jack’s father?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said. She showed me an old photograph of a young man in a soldier’s uniform.

“What was he like?”

“Oh, he was wonderful. Will Stanton was wonderful. We met during World War Two when I went up to Kansas City to visit Jack’s Uncle Charlie. We fell madly in love and got married the next week. Then he and Charlie went off to the war. Jack was born after his father was killed in the Pacific War at Iwo Jima.”

* * *

Half an hour later Stanton returned.

“Okay,” he said. “I’ll take you and Momma to lunch at the Florida Restaurant.”

“Where’s Uncle Charlie?” I asked.

“Oh,” laughed Stanton. “He’s still arguing with Jerry Conway.”

“Governor” I whispered so that Momma couldn’t hear. “Did you get the blood test?”

“Yes,” he said, “but we won’t have the results for a few weeks. Don’t worry Henry, I’m not the father of that baby.”

I wanted to believe him.

“Listen, Henry,” he said as he put his hand on my shoulder. “I want you and Howard to go and talk to Fat Willie about this tomorrow.”

“Why do I have to go? Why can’t Howard do it alone?”

“Because Fat Willie went to you. He didn’t talk to anybody else. He went to you. Now, I want you and Howard to make him understand that I am not the father. Make him understand that his daughter made a mistake. I want you to frighten him a little.”

* * *

The next morning Howard came to my office. Together we walked to his car.

“You drive,” he said.

We found Fat Willie outside his restaurant cleaning some tables and chairs. He smiled when he saw me, but he stopped smiling when he saw Howard.

“Morning,” he said nervously.

“Willie,” I said. “This is Howard Ferguson. He works for Governor Stanton too. Could we sit and talk to you for a minute?”

“Sure,” said Willie. “Do you want anything? Coffee?”

“No thanks,” I said.

We sat down at one of the tables.

“Mr. McCollister,” said Howard. “Governor Stanton is very worried about what people will say if they think he is the father of your daughter’s baby. The Governor has enemies who might use this story against him. He wants your daughter to think about who the real father is. Your daughter is a teenager, Mr. McCollister. Sometimes teenagers say things that aren’t true.”

Fat Willie looked at me. He wanted me to say something, but I didn’t. Instead, I looked down at the table.

“Now,” said Howard. “Has your daughter told any of her friends about this?”

“No,” said Fat Willie. “I told her not to.”

“Good. Remember, the Governor is your friend. He is going to help you and your daughter, but you must not say anything to anybody. Do you understand?”

Again Fat Willie looked at me, and again I looked away. “Thank you for your time,” said Howard.

Howard and I stood up and got in the car. I felt sick.

Chapter 5. Lies on the Radio

We lost the primary election in Maine, and we lost in South Dakota. We hoped to do better in Colorado, but Lawrence Harris did some wonderful television shows in that state and he won. It seemed that Harris was going to win everywhere.

“What are we going to do about Harris?” asked Richard Jemmons. “What are we going to do?”

We went to Florida without any answers. In Florida, Freddy Picker joined Harris’s campaign. Twenty years earlier Picker had been the Governor of Florida. He had been a very popular governor and many people wanted him to run for President, but in 1978 he had quit politics. Nobody knew why. Now he was back.

I watched Harris and Picker together on television. „I am very proud,” said Harris, “that Fred Picker has joined my campaign.”

Freddy Picker stood up and looked at the journalists. He said, “You guys are still ugly.”

“Governor,” asked a blonde woman who was not ugly. “Why have you decided to return to politics?”

“Well,” said Picker. “I think we need to get serious about this campaign. I think that Senator Harris is the only serious politician running for President.”

“What about Jack Stanton?” asked another reporter. “Is he a serious politician?”

“Well,” said Picker, “he has serious hair.”

The journalists laughed.

“Look,” continued Picker, “I’m sure that Jack Stanton is a good man. It’s just that Lawrence Harris is a wonderful man.” My pocket telephone rang.

“Henry?” It was Daisy. “We have a new problem.”

“What problem is that, Daisy?”

“People love Freddy Picker.”

* * *

Stanton knew that he had a new problem and he began to campaign harder in Florida. One afternoon, Stanton was talking to a local radio station on his telephone while we were riding in the van. I had a small radio next to my ear and could hear him telling the interviewer about Momma’s favorite movie. Suddenly, the interviewer said, “Governor, you won’t believe this. We have Senator Harris on the telephone. Senator Harris, does your mother have a favorite movie?”

“My mother is dead,” said Harris coldly.

“Oh, I’m sorry...”

“I just called because I think Jack Stanton should be ashamed of the way he’s lying to the people here in Florida.”

“What do you mean?” said Stanton.

“I mean, why don’t you tell the truth? You say you weren’t arrested in Chicago. You say you didn’t know Cashmere McLeod. You just lie and lie and lie! Why don’t you ... ah.” He coughed. “Ah ... excuse me.”

He didn’t say anything else.

When the radio interview was over Stanton asked, “Did you hear? I wonder what happened to Harris. Do you think he’s okay?” He wasn’t okay. We were back in Mammoth Falls when we learned that Lawrence Harris had become very sick while he was talking to Stanton on the radio. Something was wrong with his heart, and he was in the hospital. The doctors thought that he might die.

* * *

I went to see Stanton with Richard Jemmons. We were walking up the steps to Stanton’s office when Susan Stanton walked out of the door with her arm around a woman - Fat Willie’s wife. I could tell that both women had been crying. When Susan saw me, her eyes turned angry and cold. I was so shocked that I couldn’t speak. I just watched them walk by.

“Who was that?” asked Richard.

“I don’t know.”

“You’re lying, Henry,” he said. “You’re getting like Stanton. Is there another scandal that I don’t know about?”

“Of course not, Richard,” I said, but he knew it was a lie.

When we went into Stanton’s office, Stanton looked very unhappy. “Harris is in the hospital because of me,” he said. “When I was talking on that radio show, I made Harris so angry that it hurt his heart. I’m going to stop the campaign.”

“We can’t stop the campaign,” said Richard.

“Just for a few days.”

* * *

Late that night I was talking to Daisy on the telephone.

“I wish I was there with you, Henry,” she said.

“I wish you were here too.”

There was a knock at my door.

“Somebody’s here. I’ll call you later.”

“If it’s Jack Stanton, it’ll be a lot later” she said.

But it wasn’t Jack; it was Susan.

“Aren’t you going to invite me in?” she said.

She stepped inside and hit me across the face like I had seen her do to her husband.

“How could you do that?” she said. “How could you go with Howard Ferguson to try to frighten Fat Willie like that?”

Suddenly she started to cry. She put her arms around me, then turned her face toward mine and kissed me. Oh no, I thought, then I returned her kiss.

She got dressed and left before the sun came up. She didn’t say anything at all.

Chapter 6. Honest Freddy Picker

“It’s strange to be back here,” said Richard Jemmons.

“Why?” asked Daisy. The three of us were sitting at a table in a Mexican restaurant in Washington, D.C. Daisy looked wonderful. It was the first time I had seen her in a skirt.

“In Washington it’s just politics, politics, and more politics. That’s all anybody talks about. My taxi driver today knew more about Jack Stanton than I do! Politics is the only hobby in this town! Everybody’s talking about politics but us.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“I mean we’re not doing anything. Stanton isn’t doing anything. We’re just sitting here waiting to lose the election. All because Lawrence Harris is in the hospital.”

“Did you hear what that journalist from The Boston Globe asked?” said Daisy.

“No,” I said.

“She asked Stanton if he had apologized to Lawrence Harris.”

“What did Stanton say?” asked Richard.

“He said, ‘Apologize for what?’”

“That was smart,” I said.

“It would be smarter if he got back to work,” said Richard. “They’re having primary elections in Michigan and Illinois very soon and we’re going to lose them!”

* * *

After lunch Daisy and I went to her apartment. She turned on all the lights. I turned them off and kissed her.

“Why didn’t you tell me about Fat Willie’s daughter?” she asked some time later.

“Stanton told me not to tell you,” I said. “He was afraid that you might tell Susan. He doesn’t want her to know. He says he’s not the father.”

“Do you believe him?”

"I'm not sure. I mean, he did have his blood tested."

"Do they know the result of the test?"

"No, not for a couple of weeks" I said. "But Stanton doesn't seem worried."

"Even if Stanton's not the father, the girl could tell her friends," said Daisy. "That would be bad enough. We can't have another scandal. Not after Cashmere McLeod."

* * *

Stanton won the elections in Illinois and Michigan. On the same day as the elections, Lawrence Harris's wife made a speech on television.

"First I want to thank the American people for all the cards and letters that you've sent my husband," she said. "Lawrence is still in the hospital and it's obvious that he will not be able to continue his campaign for President. For that reason I have asked Freddy Picker to continue the campaign for him. Both Lawrence and I love Freddy Picker. He understands what his country needs and he is honest."

She started to cry. Freddy Picker appeared next to her. He was crying too.

"I hope you'll excuse me," he said as he wiped the tears from his eyes. "I am very sad about what has happened to Lawrence. I love him like a brother and when Mrs. Harris asked me if I would continue his campaign, I said yes. I think Senator Harris was doing something important for America and I want to continue that."

* * *

We had a meeting that afternoon. Stanton, Richard, and Daisy were all there.

"Okay," said Stanton. "The first thing we have to do is start campaigning again."

"What about Picker?" asked Daisy.

"What about him?" said Richard.

"We don't know anything about him. Why did he quit politics in 1978? Did he do something wrong? Was he afraid of a scandal?"

"We don't know," said Stanton. "In 1978, when he was Governor of Florida, he made a speech and said that he was quitting politics. He didn't say why. It was very strange."

"What's he been doing since 1978?" I asked.

"He's been living on his farm near Tallahassee, Florida."

"I think he did something wrong and was afraid of a scandal," said Richard.

"Well," said Stanton. "I'll ask Libby to investigate him."

The next morning, Freddy Picker was interviewed on television. Richard Jemmons and I watched together.

"Governor, why did you quit politics in 1978?" asked the interviewer.

"Well," said Picker, "it was a lot of things. It was ... Well, I was a younger man then and ... I had some personal problems. Family problems."

"I know this isn't easy for you to talk about," said the interviewer.

"No, it isn't, but I have to be honest with the American people. When I was Governor of Florida, I didn't have time for my wife and children and my wife - well, she fell in love with another man. I quit politics so that I could spend more time with

my two sons.” Richard turned and looked at me. “Henry, we’re in big trouble.” “Why?”

“Picker just told us his most embarrassing secret, on television! The American people are going to think that he’s the most honest man in the world. And those same American people think Jack Stanton just tells lies!”

* * *

Libby stormed into my office that afternoon.

“I DON’T BELIEVE WHAT YOU DID!” she shouted. “What did I do?”

“You and Howard went to frighten Fat Willie!”

“I had to” I said. “The Governor told me to.”

“Really? Yeah, well, the Governor has another problem!”

“What?”

“Kendra Mason.”

“Who is Kendra Mason?”

“Quit asking questions. LISTEN TO ME! Kendra Mason goes to school with Loretta McCollister, Fat Willie’s daughter. And Kendra Mason now knows that Loretta is going to have a baby and that Governor Stanton is the father.”

“Is he the father?”

“I don’t think so” said Libby, “but that doesn’t matter because Kendra Mason is going to tell the press that he is!”

Chapter 7. Bribes and Drugs

Things got worse. Kendra Mason did talk to the press. “STANTON FATHER OF TEENAGER’S BABY!” said the New York Post. Then Stanton lost the election in Connecticut. Daisy and Richard both quit working for him, and I was thinking about quitting too.

One night in New York, Susan came to my hotel room. It was the first time I’d been alone with her since that strange night when she had knocked on my door.

“I came to ask you not to leave,” she said. “I know things aren’t going well. I know you must be lonely now that Richard and Daisy are gone. But, Henry, if Jack Stanton is going to be the next President, we need you to help.”

“Does Jack need me or do you need me?”

“I’m sorry about the other night,” she said.

“Why did you do it?” I asked. “Did you want to or was it to hurt Jack?”

“Listen, Henry, Jack and I both need you. Will you promise to stay until the end of the election?”

“Okay,” I said.

* * *

After we lost the election in New York, nobody felt like working. We were all too tired. I was sitting in my office in Mammoth Falls staring at the walls when Libby walked in.

“Hey, kid,” she said. “I got the results of Stanton’s blood tests from Doctor Hastings. Do you want to come with me to tell the Governor?”

It was a perfect spring day. We could smell the flowers as we walked to the Governor's office. We found Stanton sitting behind his desk.

"Well, Jack," Libby said quietly. "Everything's okay. You're not the father of Loretta McCollister's baby."

"That's good," said Stanton.

"Uncle Charlie's not the father either."

He gave her a strange look but didn't say anything.

"The Doctor will tell Fat Willie," said Libby.

"Fat Willie's going to be feeling bad about this," said Stanton. "Maybe we should all go to his restaurant for dinner tonight"

"Jack," said Libby, "you know that I've been sort of investigating Picker?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, I called an old friend of mine in Florida. She owns a small newspaper called the Time and Tides in Fort Lauderdale. Anyway, her husband is a cop and he knows this state senator who..."

"Who what?" asked Stanton.

It was the first time I'd seen Libby look nervous. "Well," she said. "The senator says that Freddy Picker once gave him a bribe."

"You mean when he was Governor of Florida?"

"Yeah," said Libby. "There was a company called the Sunshine Brothers and they wanted to build a new building, but they needed a road."

"What do you mean, they needed a road?"

"There was no road to the building, so they wanted the Florida government to build one."

"So why did Picker bribe the senator?"

"Because Picker and his wife and his wife's brother owned the Sunshine Brothers Company. Picker bribed the senator so that the senator would get the Florida government to build a road to the new building."

"Wow," said Stanton. "Who is the senator? Will he talk?"

Libby didn't say anything.

"Libby!" said Stanton. "What's the matter with you?"

"I'm trying to decide..."

"Decide what?"

"Whether I want to help you with this. I'm not interested in hurting Freddy Picker. He's a nice man. Should we hurt him just because he once bribed a senator a long time ago?"

"I think we should find out what Picker did before the Republicans do," said Stanton. "Do it for the Democratic Party, Libby." He turned to me and smiled. "Henry, would you like to go on a vacation to Florida with Libby?"

* * *

Libby and I flew to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, then drove to the office of the Time and Tides. Libby's friend was sitting at her desk. She looked up when we came and said, "Who's your little friend, Libby?"

"This is Henry Burton."

“Nice to meet you.”

“How’s your husband, the cop?” asked Libby.

“He’s doing fine.”

“So what’s going on here in Fort Lauderdale? Who is the state senator?”

“His name is Rusty Figueroa.”

* * *

Rusty Figueroa lived in a big house near the ocean. His hair and mustache had turned silver long ago, but he was still thin and handsome. He invited us into his living room.

“So,” said Libby. “Freddy Picker offered you a bribe to get the state of Florida to build a road to his new building.”

“It was only a little bribe,” he said. “A thousand dollars. That’s how much I charged in those days.”

“Can you prove that Picker bribed you?”

Figueroa laughed. “Well, I didn’t give him a receipt, but if you investigate, you’ll see that I got some money from the Sunshine Brothers.”

“Did Picker actually bring you the money?”

“Of course not.”

“Who did?”

Figueroa laughed again. “You’ll have to ask Eddie Reyes. He’s the brother of the woman Picker was married to.”

* * *

Eddie Reyes’ office was full of expensive art. He wore an expensive white suit and a lot of gold jewelry. He wanted us to know that he was rich.

“So,” he said, “Rusty Figueroa told you that the Sunshine Brothers bribed him. You think that’s a terrible crime?”

“I just want to find out who gave the bribe and why,” answered Libby.

“I gave it,” said Reyes.

“You owned the Sunshine Brothers with the governor and his wife.”

“Yes,” said Reyes. “My sister was Picker’s wife. Yeah, we bribed Senator Figueroa. And now Picker may become President of this country. It’s terrible.”

“Did Picker know you gave Figueroa the bribe?”

“HA!” he laughed. “He did, but he probably forgot. He couldn’t even remember his telephone number when he was governor.” “Why not?”

“Drugs.”

Libby looked shocked. “Drugs?” she said. “What sort of drugs?” Reyes touched his nose. “Cocaine.”

“Cocaine?” said Libby. “He took cocaine?”

Reyes nodded. “He loved cocaine. We all loved cocaine, but he’s the only one who wants to be President.”

“Cocaine!” I said. “It doesn’t fit.”

Reyes laughed. “No. Now it doesn’t fit, chiquito. But where were you twenty years ago? You were a baby. You,” he said to Libby, “you remember. In the 1970s nobody knew how bad cocaine was. Everybody was taking it. Some people say even

the President was taking it. Freddy Picker took it and couldn't stop taking it. That's why he quit politics in 1978." He smiled. "Look, I'll tell the reporters about the bribe, but not the cocaine. If Jack Stanton's a nice man, he won't tell anybody about the cocaine either. I really don't care what he does because I don't care about Freddy Picker."

"I don't believe it," said Libby as we drove away from Reyes' office. "Picker quit politics because he was afraid the press would find out about the cocaine."

"He said he quit because his wife left him for another man."

"Of course he did!" laughed Libby. "He couldn't very well say, 'I'm sorry people, but I just can't stop taking cocaine,' could he?"

"Yeah, well," I said, "what if nobody can prove he took cocaine?"

"It won't matter. The Sunshine Brothers' bribe is enough."

* * *

We had dinner that night in a restaurant with Libby's friend and her husband. He looked like a typical Florida cop - big with short hair.

"There were rumors about Picker," he said.

"What sort of rumors?" asked Libby.

"Cocaine."

"We know about that," said Libby, "but we can't prove it"

Everybody was quiet for a minute.

"There was a cop I knew who had a problem with cocaine," said the husband slowly. "He used to be Picker's driver when Picker was governor. He and Picker used to take cocaine together."

"So where is this cop now?" asked Libby.

"He helps kids who are in trouble. They call him the Mayor of Liberty City."

We found the Mayor of Liberty City the next morning. He was picking up garbage in a field with about twenty twelve-year-olds.

"Hi," he said when Libby and I drove up. "We're cleaning up this field so that we can play sports on it."

He was a big black man with a gray beard. He wore a T-shirt with a picture of Nelson Mandela on the front.

"We'll help," said Libby, and for several hours we worked with the kids. When we were finished, Libby, Duboise, and I went to a MacDonal'd's for hamburgers.

"So you drove for Picker when he was governor?" asked Libby.

"Yes I did," said Duboise. "And I enjoyed it. Freddy Picker is one of the nicest men on earth."

"Did he take cocaine?"

"Look," said Duboise. "I don't want to hurt Picker. Yes, Picker took cocaine. We took it together. But it's not like you think. We didn't know what cocaine was back then."

"Where did he get the cocaine?" asked Libby.

"From a Cuban lawyer named Lorenzo Delgado."

"What happened to Lorenzo Delgado?"

“He got arrested. Look, I don’t know what you’re going to do with this information. If you’re good people, you won’t use it against Picker. He’s a nice man. He stopped taking cocaine a long time ago.”

* * *

“HA!” said Libby as we drove to the airport. “This is good! We got the information on Picker. Drugs! Bribery! Now, we’ll use it as a test!”

“Who are we going to test?”

“THEM, Henry! THEM!”

“Who?”

“JACK AND SUSAN STANTON, STUPID! We’re going to give them the information about Picker. We’ll tell them that he bribed a senator and had trouble with cocaine. If they use the information - if they tell the press, then we’ll know that they’re bad people!”

“And what if they are bad people?”

“Then we QUIT, Henry! We quit and hope that Jack Stanton never becomes President of the United States.”

We flew back to Mammoth Falls that afternoon.

Chapter 8. Libby’s Test

The next evening the Stantons had a meeting at their house. Howard Ferguson, Susan, and Jack Stanton were in the Stantons’ living room when I arrived. Susan kissed me on the cheek.

“Henry,” she laughed, “you didn’t bring us back any jelly?” She turned to the Governor. “Do you remember, Jack?”

Whenever my parents went to Florida they always brought back three jars of jelly. One was orange, one was...”

“OUT!”

We all turned to see Libby storm into the room. She was pointing her finger at Howard. “GET OUT!”

“But Libby,” said Howard.

“OUT!”

Howard left the room.

“Can I stay?” asked Susan.

“Yes, you can stay,” said Libby.

“Libby,” said Jack. “You’re being silly.”

“OF COURSE I’m being silly! I’m CRAZY! HERE! Read this!”

She gave the Stantons and me some pieces of paper with the information about Freddy Picker. I saw the names EDDIE REYES, RUSTY FIGUEROA and LORENZO DELGADO. I watched the Stantons read. Their eyes were wide.

“I don’t believe it,” said the Governor. “What will we do with this information?”

“Give it to the press,” said Susan. “Let’s give it to the Times or The Wall Street Journal.”

Libby looked at me. The Stantons had failed her test.

“I don’t think you should tell anybody,” said Libby. Her voice sounded sad.

Susan looked shocked. “What do you mean, Libby?”

“I mean that you’re not going to be able to prove anything about the cocaine or the bribe. Nobody is going to talk to the press or to the police about the cocaine. And Picker didn’t actually bribe that senator. Eddie Reyes did.”

“We don’t have to prove anything,” said Stanton. “If the newspapers print the story, nobody will vote for Picker.”

“Freddy Picker is a good man. We shouldn’t do this to him!”

“Libby” said Susan. “If we don’t give this information to the press, Picker may win. If Picker wins, Jack can’t be President.”

“Yeah, maybe,” said Libby. I could see that there were tears in her eyes. She was trying not to cry. “But it’s not the right thing to do.”

“Maybe we could tell the press about the bribe but not about the cocaine,” said Stanton.

“Jack, that’s stupid,” said Susan. “Nobody is really interested in a bribe. The American people don’t care about one little bribe. Cocaine will interest them. Cocaine will get Freddy Picker on the front of the National Flash.”

“Susan!” I said. “I’m surprised at you.”

“Oh, come on, Henry,” said Libby. “You know what Susan’s like. You know how she’s not afraid to hurt people. You know how she needs to be loved when her husband is too busy for her.”

The Governor looked at me with angry eyes. Now he knew that Susan had come to my room that night.

“Enough!” he said. “We have to decide what to do with this information.”

“There is NOTHING to decide,” said Libby. “Henry and I have already made a decision. We have decided that nobody is going to tell the press about the cocaine or the bribe.”

“No,” said Susan. “We’re going to tell the press”

“Wrong,” said Libby. “Here’s why.”

She reached into her big leather bag and pulled out some more papers. “I didn’t want to do this,” she said.

“What do you have there Libby?” asked Stanton.

“Well,” said Libby. “Doctor Hastings doesn’t lock the windows of his office and I thought I’d go in and have a look at a few things.”

Suddenly Stanton looked frightened.

“Doctor Hastings had a lot of information about you, Jack,” Libby continued. “I guess he was very interested in you. Does Susan know?”

The Governor nodded.

“Oh, well,” said Libby. “Then it’s only Henry who doesn’t know.”

“I don’t know what?”

“That Doctor Hastings is Jack’s real father.”

“What? But what about Momma’s husband? The one who was killed in World War Two?”

“Oh, she was married to him,” Libby answered. “But he wasn’t Jack’s father. Doctor Hastings and Momma didn’t tell anybody because Doctor Hastings was already married. Isn’t that right, Jack?”

Jack nodded quietly.

“But Doctor Hastings has been a good father. When Jack needed a blood test to prove that he wasn’t the father of Loretta McCollister’s baby...”

“You mean Fat Willie’s daughter?”

“That’s right, Henry. Well, when Jack and Uncle Charlie went to have Jack’s blood tested, Doctor Hastings tested Uncle Charlie’s blood instead. When the test results proved that Jack wasn’t the father, what they really proved was that Charlie wasn’t the father.”

“Wait a minute,” I said. “You mean Jack Stanton is the father of Loretta McCollister’s baby?”

“Yes,” said Libby.

The Governor looked ashamed.

“So,” Libby said. She was crying now. “If you’re going to tell the press about Picker and his cocaine, I’m going to tell the press that you cheated on the blood test. I’m going to tell them that you’re the father of Loretta McCollister’s baby.”

She ran out of the room. I found her waiting for me in her car.

“You drive,” she said.

I got in her car, drove to my apartment, and parked the car.

“How did I do?” she asked.

“Fine,” I said. “Even better than with Randy Culligan.”

“I didn’t have my gun this time,” she laughed. “Henry, you’re going to quit, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“You saw what they did,” she said. “They didn’t even think about it. When they knew Freddy Picker had taken cocaine, they were ready to tell the press.”

She put her hand out for the car keys. Like a fool, I gave them to her.

“Henry,” she said. There were tears running down her cheeks. “Don’t become like them “

“I won’t,” I said. “Are you going to be okay?”

“Of course,” she said. “I’m always okay.”

She drove away.

Chapter 9. A Bullet in the Heart

What a fool I was.

Somebody found her body the next day on a dirt road in the forest. She had made a fire and burned the papers about Stanton’s blood test. Then she had shot herself in the heart.

The police asked me questions because I was the last person to have seen her alive. “If I knew, I would have tried to stop her,” I told them. “But with Libby, you

never knew and you could never stop her.” Then I started to cry. “She was a very close friend of mine.”

* * *

The funeral was held in a church in North Mammoth Falls. Jack Stanton stood up and made a speech.

“Libby Holden was the older sister that I never had,” he said. “It seemed that whenever I had a problem, she was there to help me. The bullet that went into Libby’s heart broke all of our hearts.”

I walked back to my apartment with Daisy. I told her about Libby, I told her about what we had found in Florida, and I told her about the blood test.

“Do you think Stanton will win?” she asked.

“Maybe,” I said, “but he’ll have to do it without me.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m going to the Governor’s house to quit.”

* * *

I found Jack Stanton in his kitchen eating a sandwich.

“Hi, Henry,” he said. “I’ve called Picker. I’m going to fly to Florida in about fifteen minutes and give him all the information that Libby had. I know you want to quit but, please, will you go to Florida with me?”

* * *

We flew to Florida in a small airplane and landed at an airport just north of Tallahassee. Freddy Picker’s driver was waiting for us.

When we arrived at Picker’s house, one of his sons let us in. Picker served us drinks.

“I’ve decided to quit the election,” said Stanton.

“That’s what I heard on the news.”

“You heard about my friend?” asked Stanton. “The one who died?”

Picker nodded.

“She and Henry found this information.” Stanton handed Picker the papers. “She killed herself because she thought I was

going to give this information to the press. But I’m giving it to you. I want you to have it, so you’ll know what the journalists might find.”

“Did you ever try cocaine, Jack?” asked Picker.

Stanton nodded. “Yeah, I tried it once, but I didn’t like it.”

“I did,” said Picker. “I loved it. That’s why I’m quitting the election.”

Stanton looked surprised. “Nobody needs to know about the cocaine,” he said.

“The press will find out about it, Jack,” said Picker. “If you don’t tell them, somebody else will. And my sons will find out too.”

He started to cry. Stanton got up from his chair and put his arms around him. He held him for a long time. When Picker finally stopped crying, he looked up at Stanton and said, “Jack, I don’t think you should quit the election.”

Chapter 10. A Strange Sort of Luck

The next morning I woke up in my apartment in Mammoth Falls. Daisy was there making coffee in my kitchen. She kissed me and asked, "What happened in Florida yesterday?"

"Picker is quitting," I said. "Stanton is not."

"Stanton seems to have a strange sort of luck. So what are you going to do?"

"I'm quitting, then I'm going with you to Jamaica. Or wherever you want to go."

She smiled. "Really?"

"Yes," I said. "I love you, Daisy. I'll go over and see the Governor now."

* * *

The Stantons were in their living room watching television when I arrived,

"Thanks for going to Florida with me last night," Stanton said as I came in.

I sat down next to Susan on the sofa and said, "I'm quitting."

"You can't quit," said Stanton. "Listen, Richard Jemmons is coming back. We're going to..."

"Governor," I said. "I'm quitting because you failed Libby's test. You were going to tell the press about Picker and his cocaine."

"Henry!" laughed Stanton. "We're politicians! We're not Boy Scouts."

"Quiet!" said Susan. "There's Picker."

We looked at Picker on TV. He looked serious and proud. He took a piece of paper from his pocket and said, "Today I am quitting my campaign to be President."

"Why?" someone shouted. "Why are you quitting?"

"For the same reason that I quit politics in 1978. Now, I know I said that I quit in 1978 because I was having family problems, but that wasn't the real reason. The real reason was that I had a problem with cocaine."

There was a moment of silence before Picker continued.

"There's one more thing I want to say. I want to thank Jack Stanton. He knew about my cocaine problem, but he didn't tell the press. I've gotten to know Jack Stanton very well and I can say that he would make a good President. Thank you and goodbye."

Jack turned off the television and looked at me. "You still want to quit, Henry?"

"Yes," I said.

"Henry," he said. "I'm going to be the next President of the United States. I'm going to the White House! Don't you want to go with me?"

I stood up to leave.

"Come on, Henry," said Stanton. "You can't quit. This is silly! You can't quit!"

- THE END -

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